

Veterans Affairs Caregiver Support Program Expansion Readiness

September 2019

“Caregivers play a critical role in the health and well-being of some of our most vulnerable Veterans. Under the MISSION Act, we are strengthening and expanding our program to positively impact the lives of Veterans and deliver the best customer experience to them and their caregivers.” – Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert Wilkie.

What is changing in the Caregiver Support Program (CSP)?

Under the MISSION Act, Veterans Affairs (VA) is working to give more family caregivers access to the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC), so we can support them as they care for Veterans of all eras. Currently, the PCAFC is only available to eligible Veterans injured in the line of duty on or after September 11, 2001. Prior to expanding eligibility for the PCAFC, VA must upgrade its information technology (IT) system and implement other improvements to strengthen the program.

When will the program expand?

VA is not currently accepting applications for PCAFC from Veterans of other eras. The first phase of the program expansion will occur once the Secretary has certified that VA's new caregiver information technology system is fully implemented, which could be as early as the summer of 2020. VA will expand eligibility and begin accepting applications in 2 phases:

- In the first phase, VA will begin accepting applications of eligible Veterans who incurred or aggravated a serious injury in the line of duty on or before May 7, 1975.
- The final phase, due to begin two years after the first phase, will include eligible Veterans who incurred or aggravated a serious injury in the line of duty between May 7, 1975 and September 10, 2001.

What does VA offer under PCAFC? In addition to services offered under the Program of General Caregiver Support Services (PGCSS), caregivers in the PCAFC may also receive a monthly stipend, beneficiary travel, mental health counseling, enhanced respite services and other benefits.

How is VA strengthening its caregiver program?

In recent months, VA has developed or amended 14 standard operating procedures to clarify program requirements for VA staff, increased oversight in each Veterans Integrated Service Network, provided enhanced training and education to staff and caregivers, and is boosting operational capacity with the hiring of hundreds of new staff across the country.

What services does VA offer for all caregivers?

Caregivers are eligible for a host of VA services including services offered under the PGCSS. These services are available to eligible Veterans of any era. PGCSS includes training, education, respite care, a telephone support line, self-care courses and other services. These services are available to

support caregivers of Veterans enrolled in VA for health care, who require a caregiver for assistance regardless of injury or illness.

What else is VA doing for caregivers?

VA is working across the organization to ensure caregivers have a positive experience through program improvements and initiatives to include:

- Establishing a campaign (VA/Elizabeth Dole Foundation collaboration) that aims to integrate caregivers into the health care team through education modules about topics such as, the role and impact of caregivers.
- Expanding telehealth services to enable Veterans and their caregivers to get care in the comfort of their homes.
- Providing a toolkit for caregivers and family members to support their role in the prevention of suicide.
- Promoting self-care for caregivers through text messaging.
- Increasing self-care courses for caregivers.
- Providing home and community-based care alternatives through the Choose Home Initiative at 21 VA medical centers.

How can I learn more?

For detailed information on the CSP and the full range of services available to caregivers, visit:

<https://www.caregiver.va.gov/> . For information on the MISSION Act, visit: <https://missionact.va.gov/>.

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