

ISSUE BRIEF: COMPREHENSIVE CAREGIVER SUPPORT

The Situation

- In 2010, Congress enacted Public Law 111-163, requiring the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide comprehensive caregiver support to family caregivers of veterans severely injured on or after September 11, 2001.
- Access to VA's comprehensive caregiver support program is being denied to severely disabled veterans injured before September 11, 2001, irrespective of when their illnesses occurred.
- Without comprehensive caregiver support, many family caregivers of severely disabled veterans are unable to continue in their role. Although most family caregivers continue to willingly dedicate themselves to this role, to sustain their efforts they need the comprehensive support provided in VA's comprehensive program.
- Wounded, ill and injured veterans of all eras of service have made incredible sacrifices, and all family members who care for them are equally deserving of our recognition and support.

The Challenge

- There is a cost to providing access to VA's Caregiver Support Program. However, it costs less to provide comprehensive caregiver support than it does to provide nursing home or other institutional care.
- According a VA report to Congress, the average cost per veteran per year in the comprehensive program is \$36,770. However, this costs far less than the \$332,756 VA spent on average per veteran per year in a VA nursing home; the \$88,571 spent on average in a community nursing home, or the \$45,085 in VA per diem payments in a State Veterans Home.
- In addition to preventing unwanted and more costly nursing home admissions, caregivers reduce overall health care costs by minimizing medical complications and lowering the number of hospital admissions.
- Fixing the access problem would give severely ill and injured veterans a choice they earned and deserve to remain in their own homes, rather than in institutions, and preserve their quality of life at lower cost to taxpayers.

The Solution

- Congress must enact legislation to provide all severely ill and injured veterans access to comprehensive VA caregiver support services.