VA details caregiver expansion implementation

DAV-supported measure opens program to veterans with serious illnesses

In March, the VA proposed regulations to implement provisions of P.L. 115-182, the VA MISSION Act of 2018. The rule change would expand access to its comprehensive caregiver support program by including all severely disabled service-connected veterans, beyond those severely injured on or after Sept. 11, 2001—a long-standing priority for DAV.

VA’s comprehensive caregiver support program was established in 2011 to provide family caregiver supports and services, such as education and training, health coverage and a monthly stipend to primary family caregivers of eligible veterans who were seriously injured in the line of duty on or after Sept. 11, 2001.

However, due to the VA’s interpretation of the original caregiver law a decade ago, many seriously disabled veterans and their family caregivers have been ineligible for this life-changing program because their disabilities were due to illnesses—not injuries—caused by their military service.

“DAV is very pleased that the VA is removing any uncertainty by making all veterans whose serious disabilities are caused by illnesses eligible for this critical support,” said National Commander Stephen “Butch” Whitehead. “However, there are several other aspects in this proposed rule we believe VA should reconsider to equitably assist veterans and their family caregivers.”

These proposed regulations would change how the caregiver program currently operates and has increased the level of complexity of the Information Technology (IT) software needed
to fully support and manage the program. With this anticipated change in information technology requirements, the VA now expects a delay in the start of the full expansion of the caregiver program as required by the VA MISSION Act of 2018—most likely late summer/early fall of 2020.

Once the information technology solution is certified by VA, the first phase of expansion would begin by accepting applications from veterans who were severely disabled in the Vietnam War and earlier. VA proposes the second expansion phase for veterans severely disabled between May 1975 and September 2001 to begin two years after the IT certification currently estimated to be summer/early fall of 2022.

“We are urging VA to make every effort to meet its intended information technology certification target, as many seriously disabled veterans and their caregivers have gone without the proper support for decades and will likely be in even greater need as the nation continues to battle the COVID-19 outbreak,” said Whitehead.

Changes were also proposed to the application and decision making process, the stipend payment methodology, definitions for financial planning and legal services and procedures for revocation and discharge, to include advance notice requirements aimed at improving communication between VA and program participants.

You can follow along with updates to this and other legislation affecting veterans and their families by joining DAV CAN (Commander’s Action Network) at davcan.org.