

## **Comprehensive Support for Caregivers of Veterans of All Eras**

Caregivers are one of the most valuable resources for our nation's wounded, ill and injured veterans. However, only veterans severely injured on or after September 11, 2001, have full access to VA's Comprehensive Caregiver Support Program that provides caregivers such things as a modest stipend, health care, training, and respite care.

The limitation for this benefit to post-9/11 veterans is unacceptable to DAV and we have focused on bringing substantive change to ensure all family caregivers receive comprehensive support to address fully the burdens and strains of caregiving.

**VA's Comprehensive Caregiver Support Program:** DAV National Commander Ron Hope testified on February 24, 2014, before a joint hearing of the House and Senate Veteran's Affairs Committees urging Congress to enact legislation that would give all severely ill and injured veterans equal access to VA's Comprehensive Caregiver Support Program.

After our Mid-Winter conference, Senators Durbin (IL) and Baldwin (WI) introduced S. 657, the Caregivers Expansion and Improvement Act of 2015. This bill would extend the eligibility for the VA Comprehensive Caregiver Support Program to severely injured veterans of all eras.

On April 23, 2015, Senators Murray (WA) and Susan Collins (MA) introduced S. 1085, the Military and Veteran Caregiver Services Improvement Act of 2015. A similar bill, H.R. 1969 was introduced by Representative James Langevin (RI) in the House. These bills would expand comprehensive caregiver benefits to veterans of all eras and expand services to caregivers of veterans to include child care services, financial planning services, and legal services.

DAV testified before the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee on June 24, 2015, urging the Committee to swiftly pass S. 1085. The following day, Representatives Esty (CT) and Costello (PA) introduced H.R. 2894, the Caregivers Access and Responsible Expansion (CARE) for All Veterans Act, which would expand comprehensive caregiver benefits to veterans of all eras, by phasing in veterans based on need and place a greater emphasis on mental health injuries and traumatic brain injury, and remove certain restrictions in current law on those eligible to become caregivers.

While our legislative efforts on this front continue, an immediate opportunity exists with another VA program that provides caregiver support and is accessible to veterans of all eras.

**VA's Veteran-Directed Home & Community Based Services (VD-HCBS) program:** authorizes a monthly flexible spending budget to buy goods and services based on a needs assessment for a severely disabled veteran to live safely at home. Veterans participating in this program are able to hire family and friends to provide for their personal care needs—or to provide support to their family caregivers.

However, VD-HCBS is currently only operational at 50 VA Medical Centers in 28 states, DC, and Puerto Rico. It is DAV's goal to have VD-HCBS available nationwide at all VA Medical Centers. With your help, we can make this goal a reality. To find out more about the program and whether its available at your local VAMC, please visit: [www.dav.org/caregiver/VDHCBS](http://www.dav.org/caregiver/VDHCBS)