

ISSUE BRIEF: COMPREHENSIVE CAREGIVER SUPPORT

The Situation

- To recognize and assist family caregivers who play a critical role in caring and supporting veterans severely injured in the line of duty, the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) provides caregiver assistance including access to health coverage, respite care to avoid caregiver burnout, caregiver training, modest stipends to offset the financial impact of caregiving, and other forms of support.
- The MISSION Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-182) expanded access to PCAFC to family caregivers of veterans severely injured before September 11, 2001, and was to be carried out in two phases starting on October 1, 2019, when a new information technology system to support the program was in place. Specifically, the MISSION Act required VA to deploy the IT system on October 2018 and certify its capabilities to Congress by October 1, 2019. The certification would allow VA to begin accepting first-phase applications for PCAFC from family caregivers of veterans severely injured before September 11, 2001.
- The MISSION Act of 2018 also required improvements to PCAFC including: expanding the eligibility criteria and modifying stipend calculation to address program inconsistencies; expansion of the types of assistance to include financial planning services and legal services, and periodic contact with family caregivers for additional support they may require.
- VA announced a second moratorium in December 2018 on discharges and decreases from PFCAC due to inconsistent decisions across the VA that resulted in large numbers of veterans and family caregivers participating in PFCAC being discharged as well as reductions in tier assignments.

The Challenge

- VA has missed both the October 1, 2018, milestone to begin implementing the required IT system and the October 1, 2019, deadline to certify to Congress the required IT system is in place to begin expanding access to PCAFC to all severely injured veterans and their family caregivers.
- VA has not provided satisfactory information to ensure the issues resulting in the second moratorium have been addressed prior to the expansion of PCAFC.

The Solution

- VA must improve oversight, management and consistent field implementation, including the clinical appeals process, to ensure PCAFC is strongly positioned to better serve the influx of new participants.
- Congress must hold VA accountable to fully and faithfully implement the improvements and expansion of PCAFC mandated by the MISSION Act to all severely injured veterans.