

## ISSUE BRIEF: COMPREHENSIVE CAREGIVER SUPPORT

### The Situation

- Access to VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) is being denied to severely disabled veterans injured before September 11, 2001.
- PCAFC provides eligible "post-9/11" family caregivers participating in the program health coverage if caregivers have no other health insurance plan, guaranteed periods of paid respite to avoid caregiver burnout, caregiver training and other forms of support, including stipends to offset the financial impact of caregiving.
- Ill and injured veterans of all war eras have made tremendous sacrifices. A 2017 DAV survey of family caregivers indicates that caregiving duties have impacted most of their careers, financial security, social activities and relationships with other family members and friends, and their own health.
- Preliminary findings from the comprehensive evaluation of PCAFC suggests caregivers in this program are more confident and better prepared in their caregiving role and that the stipend is reducing the financial strain of caregiving.

### The Challenge

- There is a substantial cost to providing expanded access to VA's Caregiver Support Program for all eras of severely injured and ill veterans. However, it costs less to provide comprehensive caregiver support than providing long-term nursing home or other institutional care.
- According to a 2013 VA report to Congress, the average cost per veteran, per year in the comprehensive program is \$36,770—far less than the \$332,756 VA spent on average annually per veteran 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 to State Veterans Homes. DAV's survey results published in its 2017 *Unsung Heroes* report indicate that family caregivers believe that without their assistance 25 percent of the veterans receiving care from them at home would require institutional care now and 50 percent would require such care in the future.
- In addition to preventing unwanted and more costly nursing home admissions, family caregivers reduce overall health care costs to the government by ensuring veterans receive necessary preventative and outpatient care and thus minimizing medical complications and lowering the number of hospital admissions.

### The Solution

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