

**VA**U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs**News Release**Office of Public Affairs  
Media RelationsWashington, DC 20420  
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www.va.gov**For Immediate Release**

Sept. 25, 2019

**VA strengthens Caregiver Support Program and expands timeline of the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers**

WASHINGTON – Today the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced actions to strengthen the Caregiver Support Program and establish a timeline for expanding the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) in accordance with section 161 of the VA MISSION Act of 2018 ([MISSION Act](#)).

Under the MISSION Act, VA will expand the PCAFC to eligible Veterans from all eras using a phased approach. Currently, the program is only available to eligible Veterans seriously injured in the line of duty on or after September 11, 2001. Prior to expanding, VA must upgrade its information technology (IT) system and implement other improvements to strengthen the program.

“Caregivers play a critical role in the health and well-being of some of our most vulnerable Veterans,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Under the MISSION Act, we are strengthening and expanding our program to positively impact the lives of Veterans and deliver the best customer experience to them and their caregivers.”

In December 2018, VA suspended certain discharges from the program due to ongoing concerns about inconsistent application of eligibility requirements at VA medical centers. Since then, VA has held listening sessions with caregivers and other stakeholders, developed or amended 14 standard operating procedures to clarify program requirements for VA staff, increased oversight in each Veterans Integrated Service Network, provided training and education to staff and caregivers and is boosting operational capacity with the hiring of more than 680 staff.

To modernize its caregiver IT system, VA is adopting a three-phased approach and will deploy a new system based on a commercial off the shelf product called Caregiver Record Management Application (CARMA) beginning in October 2019. VA will deploy phase two in January 2020 to centralize and automate stipend payment calculations and expects to deploy phase three in the summer of 2020, which will enable caregivers to apply for benefits online. VA will then perform testing and verify that the system has full functionality before expanding the program as required under the MISSION Act.

The expansion will occur in two phases, beginning in the summer of 2020 or once

the Secretary has certified that the new IT system is fully implemented. In the first phase, PCAFC will be expanded to eligible Veterans who incurred or aggravated a serious injury in the line of duty on or before May 7, 1975. The final phase of the expansion will begin two years later. It will expand PCAFC to eligible Veterans who incurred or aggravated a serious injury in the line of duty after May 7, 1975 through September 10, 2001.

Additionally, VA has gathered input and is developing regulatory changes to streamline the program and provide more clarity for Veterans and their family caregivers. VA will publish a proposed rule for public comment prior to issuing final regulations.

VA is also working across the department to ensure caregivers have a positive experience through program improvements and initiatives to include:

- Providing home and community-based care alternatives through the Choose Home Initiative at 21 VA medical centers.
- Establishing the Center for Excellence for Veteran and Caregiver Research named after Senator Elizabeth Dole.
- Expanding telehealth services to enable Veterans and their caregivers to get care in the comfort of their homes.
- Delivering valuable programs for caregivers such as peer support mentoring, a Caregiver Support Line, self-care courses and educational programs to help caregivers succeed.

Caregivers play a critical role in enabling Veterans to maintain their highest level of independence and remain in their homes and communities for as long as possible. VA leads the nation in providing unprecedented benefits and services to caregivers. The MISSION Act strengthens VA's ability to serve as a trusted partner in the care of our nation's most vulnerable Veterans.

To learn more about the many support services available for caregivers of Veterans, visit [www.caregiver.va.gov](http://www.caregiver.va.gov) or call the Caregiver Support Line at 1-855-260-3274.

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