

ISSUE BRIEF: COMPREHENSIVE CAREGIVER SUPPORT

The Situation

- In recognition of the significant role that family caregivers play in providing personal care services and other supports to veterans severely injured in the line of duty on or after September 11, 2001, the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) has been providing caregiver assistance since May 2010, including health coverage if caregivers have no other health insurance plan, respite care to avoid caregiver burnout, caregiver training, financial stipends to offset the financial impact of caregiving, and other forms of support.
- Enacted in June 2018, the MISSION Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-182), expands access to PFCAC to family caregivers of **all** veterans severely injured in the line of duty in two phases beginning on the date when the VA certifies to Congress that it has fully implemented the information technology system required to assess and comprehensively monitor this program. The law does not include severely ill veterans.
- The MISSION Act of 2018 also makes 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.

The Challenge

- Inconsistent decisions continue to be made across the VA that have resulted in large reductions in the number of veterans and family caregivers participating in PFCAC as well as reductions in tier assignments. The MISSION Act of 2018 necessarily addresses these inconsistencies in light of expanding PCAFC eligibility to nearly 36,000 veterans in phase one and nearly 25,000 in phase two.
- VA missed its October 1, 2018, deadline to implement an IT system capable of assessing, comprehensively monitoring, and fully supporting PCAFC and appears to be behind schedule to certify to Congress by October 1, 2019, the required IT system has been implemented in order to expand access to all severely injured veterans.
- Congress has not provided VA the resources needed for fiscal year 2019 to implement PCAFC under the MISSION Act, which includes hiring 2,700 additional employees, the cost for the required IT system and for new family caregivers and veterans participating in the program.

The Solution

- VA must improve oversight, management and consistent field implementation, including the clinical appeals process, to ensure PCAFC is strongly positioned to well serve the influx of new participants.
- VA must request and Congress provide necessary resources to fully and faithfully implement the improvements and expansion of PCAFC to all severely injured veterans.