



Paralyzed Veterans
of America



 continuing to
SERVE

★ FY20 ANNUAL REPORT ★

★ DEAR friends,

What a year it has been. When I reflect on this past year, two words come to mind—strength and perseverance. These words are quite fitting as they describe not only what it has taken for us to navigate this new post COVID-19 world, but they are also two of the defining qualities in our members. Regardless of circumstance, illness or catastrophic injury, our members most always find the strength to adapt, persevere and improvise.

Despite the challenges we have faced over the past year, PVA continues to find new ways to serve our members and advocate for veterans and all people with disabilities. If anything, the pandemic and loss of life from it, has only brought us a renewed focus on “service.”

When the pandemic hit, and the stay-at-home orders and social distancing guidelines went into place, we immediately thought of our members—many of whom are already isolated because of their disability. Immediately, many of our PVA Chapters stepped up, redirecting funds from canceled events to assist members with things like grocery delivery and medical supplies. Our medical services staff and national service officers worked with VA Spinal Cord Injury Centers to ensure our members still had access to vital healthcare services and medical supplies, while our government relations staff ensured veterans and their needs were not forgotten as COVID-19 stimulus funding was passed.

In other areas, we continue our fight to improve the air travel experience for all people with disabilities. Last fall, we launched a holiday travel campaign to bring awareness to the challenges individuals with disabilities face when flying—from navigating TSA security checks, to the boarding process, to lack of accessible restrooms on aircrafts. PVA will continue this fight until improvements are made.

With a renewed focus on serving our women veterans, addressing specific issues they face, we hosted our first-ever Women Veterans

Empowerment Retreat in October 2019. Forty women veterans came together in Crested Butte, CO for three days of learning, networking, and some relaxation and fun. Little did we know this would be one of our last in-person events before the novel coronavirus would make its appearance in the U.S., shutting down much of the country to prevent the spread of the virus.

The CDC guidelines for large gatherings forced us to cancel the rest of our in-person events for the year but we adapted, as we have learned to do. We found new ways to serve our members through unique virtual events held online, from adaptive yoga, to cycling/spin classes, to educational webinars. This allowed us to still connect and engage with our members and more importantly to connect our members with one another—something that is so important especially now.

I couldn't be prouder than I am today to not only be the leader of this great organization but a very proud member. PVA continues to be inspired by our members every day and motivated now more than ever to serve them. We couldn't do this work without your support and we hope you will be just as inspired as you read their stories in the pages that follow. Thank you for supporting our mission to improve the lives of veterans with spinal cord injury and disorders (SCI/D), and diseases like MS and ALS. For nearly 75 years we have served this unique veteran population and will continue to serve them for as long as needed.



David Zurfluh
National President,
Paralyzed Veterans of America

"As we navigate our way through and eventually past this pandemic, we as an organization continue to be inspired by our members and motivated now more than ever to serve them."

— **David Zurfluh**
PVA National President

★ EXECUTIVE Committee



Charles Brown
National Senior
Vice President



Hack Albertson
National
Vice President



Tammy Jones
National
Vice President



Ken Ness
National
Vice President



Robert Thomas, Jr.
National
Vice President



Marcus Murray
National
Secretary



Tom Wheaton, Jr.
National
Treasurer



Al Kovach, Jr.
Immediate
Past President



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ENSURING Quality Health Care



TO LEARN MORE visit PVA.org/medicalservices

HOW WE SERVE

Paralyzed Veterans of America’s medical services team strives to ensure that the VA implements best practices so that the highest quality of care is delivered in VA’s Spinal Cord Injuries and Disorders (SCI/D) Centers across the country.

25* site visits conducted annually to each of the 25 SCI/D Hubs



WHO WE ARE

- › PVA staff nurses
- › Physicians
- › Architects
- › PVA members (Field Advisory Committee)



WHAT WE DO

- › Inspect facilities
- › Confer with staff
- › Ensure prior problems have been corrected
- › Speak directly with veterans and their families to identify gaps in needs



WHERE WE LOOK

- › Number of specialty long-term-care beds
- › Equipment maintenance and accessibility
- › Staffing levels & morale
- › Layout of rooms, hallways, therapy areas, handicap parking considerations

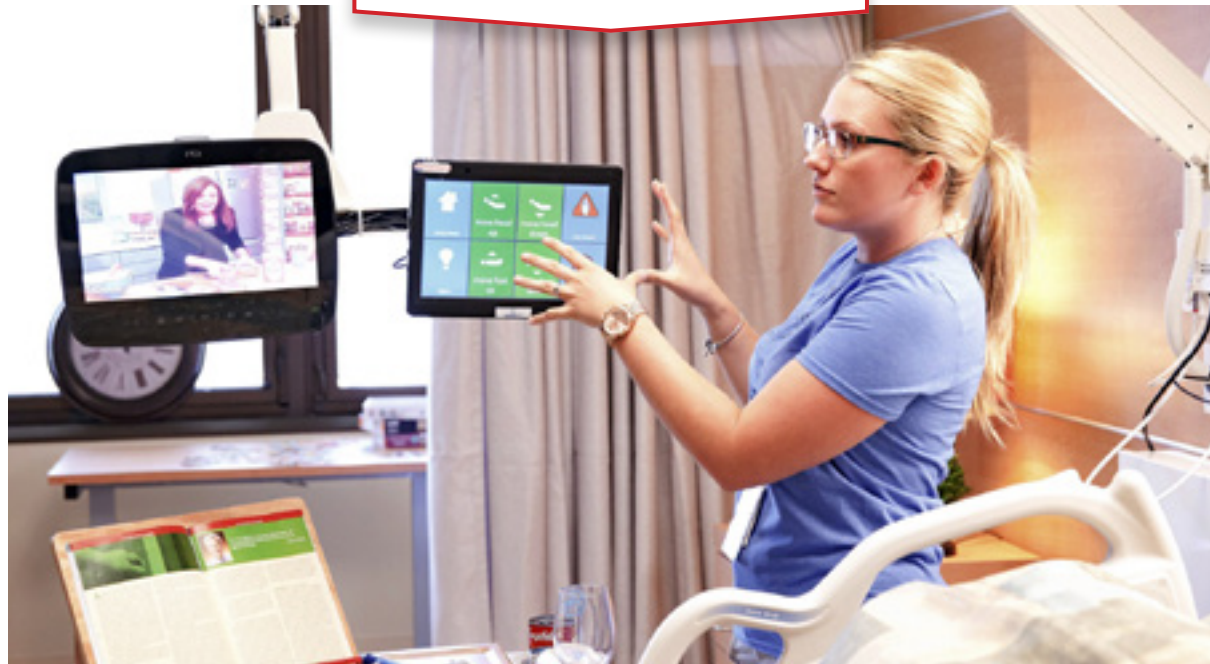
*In fiscal year 2020, only 14 site visits were conducted due to the current COVID-19 pandemic and national travel and visitor restrictions in VA facilities. The medical services team adapted to virtual observation to continue its mission of monitoring availability of inpatient beds and emergency access to SCI/D specialty care, staffing and supply levels. The medical services team also developed educational blogs, videos, and webinars to translate the latest scientific findings on COVID into information that PVA members could use.

"We're one of the few organizations that has a first row seat with the VA health care system. That's helped to improve the assistance that we get from them from the medical side."

— Mike Partridge
PVA Member,
U.S. Marine Corps Veteran



MAKING AN IMPACT



★ ADVOCATING for Vital Nurse Educator Position

Nurse educators are expert clinicians who provide training and ensure unit staff consistently deliver high-quality nursing care. Nursing care on SCI/D wards is directly responsible for keeping inpatients free of pressure ulcers and certain infections, and promoting a better understanding of their illnesses and medications. In 2018, PVA medical services team recommended that this critical position be increased from a part-time position to a full-time position. In 2019, the nurse educator position was vacant. The medical services team recommended the position be filled expediently and reiterated that the nature of this position warranted a full-time candidate. Through persistent advocacy and in collaboration with the Minneapolis National Service Officer, a full-time nurse educator was brought on board in October 2019, just in time to help the unit navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic.

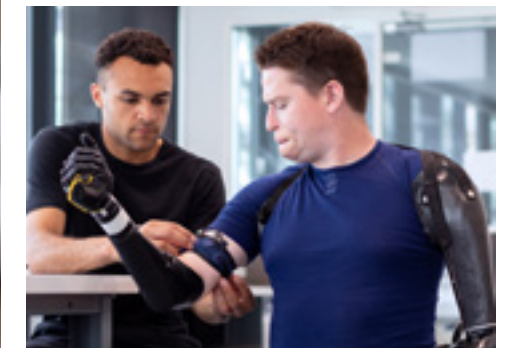
★ ENSURING Telehealth Training

Paralyzed Veterans of America's medical services team has been a strong advocate for the expanded use of telehealth over the last several years. During their annual site visit to the Seattle SCI/D Center in September 2019, the medical services team discovered that not all SCI/D providers had completed telehealth training. The team prioritized this recommendation, and all SCI/D staff completed training by January 2020. The identification and resolution of this very important issue proved invaluable, as the Seattle area witnessed its first COVID-19 cases and deaths only a few weeks later. Shortly thereafter, all VA SCI/D outpatient medical visits were provided via telehealth.



★ CORRECTING Prosthetics Staffing Shortages

PVA members rely on prosthetics to achieve independence. Veterans with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) experience rapid changes in health and abilities, and require a responsive prosthetics unit. In 2018 and 2019, PVA's medical services team identified that the prosthetics team in Tampa, FL experienced difficulties in completing prosthetics orders, mostly due to staffing shortages. PVA's persistent advocacy efforts resulted in the hiring of additional prosthetics staffing. The medical services team was satisfied with the demonstrated improvements within the prosthetics department during the January 2020 site visit and considered this issue resolved.



SECURING Benefits for Veterans & Their Families



TO LEARN MORE visit PVA.org/benefits

HOW WE SERVE

\$268 M+
secured in new
annual & retroactive
monetary awards

\$59 M+
in specially
adapted housing
grant payments

\$19 M+
in automobile
grant payments

11 M+
client interviews
conducted

25 M+
new claims/
issues filed

\$1 B+
paid to date to the
veterans & families
PVA represents

★ SECURING Benefits for a Terminally Ill Veteran

Last year, our national service officer in Sioux Falls, SD, Brad, assisted a veteran from Nebraska. The veteran had been diagnosed with cancer which had spread throughout his body. Working with a County Service Officer from Cherry County, Nebraska we filed claims for various conditions in November of 2019, and identified this veteran as a Blue Water Navy veteran. We requested these claims to be expedited as he was terminal ill. Months went by and the claims seemed to go nowhere in spite of the request to have them expedited. Our service officer also went back and checked the veteran’s file in VBMS and it appeared as though there had been plenty of mistakes. The service officer decided to take it upon himself to email the local Service Center Manager of the Sioux Falls, SD VA Regional Office on May 20, 2020 about the veteran’s claims. After taking jurisdiction of the claims, a Rating Decision was done the very next day on May 21, 2020. When everything is settled the veteran will received well over \$500,000.

What started off as a fight over payment of an ambulance bill ended up being the largest retro the Sioux Falls, SD Service Office has been a part of and it took place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“PVA isn’t just about the numbers—it’s about caring and the quality of service we provide... I don’t think any other organization follows their members as close as we do.”

— **Raul Acosta**
PVA National Service Officer
and U.S. Marine Corps Veteran



★ ABOVE & BEYOND for Veteran’s Widow

On June 22, 2020 our St. Louis service officer, Jeremy, heard that a veteran client had passed away and reached out to his wife to offer his condolences. At that time, she told our service officer that the veteran was going to be buried at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery on Thursday morning of June 25, 2020. She explained that cemetery staff informed her that they were only allowing 10 people at the graveside due to COVID-19 restrictions. She then stated that the veteran has six children, all of whom are married. In addition to the children’s spouses, there are also three grandchildren. The family was devastated to think that some of the family members would have to be excluded. After hearing this, our service officer sent an email to the Executive Cemetery Director to see what could be done to accommodate the family’s needs.

On the day before the funeral, the service officer had not heard back yet from the Cemetery Director. Feeling it was imperative to get a resolution for the veteran’s wife and family, he reached out directly to the Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs and explained the situation. Thankfully, the issue was resolved within an hour of sending the email. When the veteran’s wife heard the news she was so relieved that her entire family would be allowed to pay their respects and say their final goodbyes at the graveside.

The widow later sent a very special email to our service officer. It read:

“Jeremy, words cannot begin to express my deepest appreciation for making it possible for our whole immediate family to attend Phil’s grave side burial at Jefferson Barracks Cemetery. It was beautiful, very moving, and very emotional. And I know all the kids so wanted and needed to be there. Phil was a wonderful husband, father, grandfather, brother, uncle and friend. His granddaughters were the sunshine in his life and truly made his final days on earth special. You have helped us through this whole process since the beginning and I could have never maneuvered through all the paperwork etc. without your assistance. Thanks to you and the VA ALS Clinic, Phil had the best care possible, and I am truly thankful for that also. Thank you again for all you’ve done.”

The widow is now receiving all her DIC/Widow’s benefits. Likewise, she is thankful that the PVA was there to help the veteran and her family through their journey.



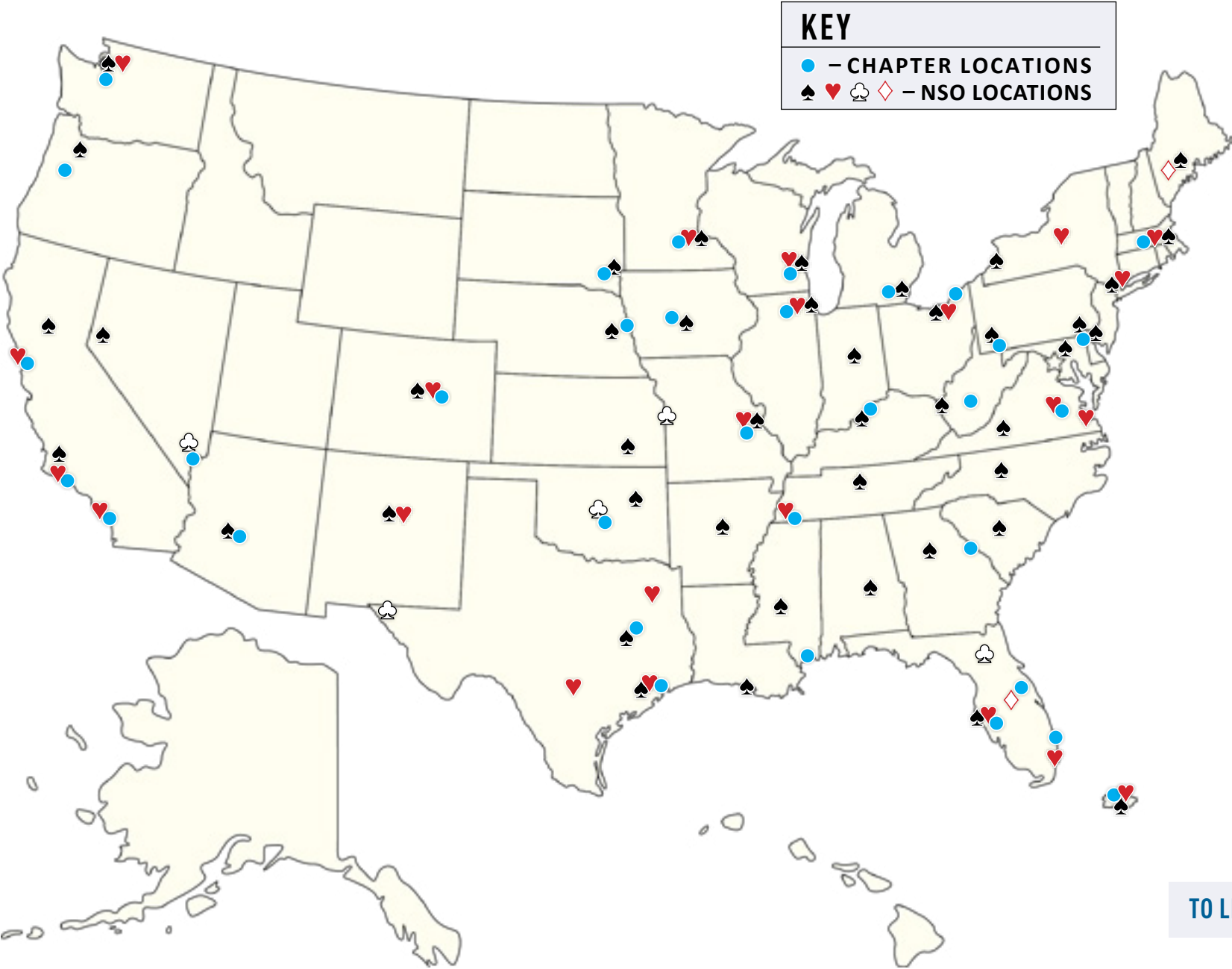
American flags adorn the headstones at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery, St. Louis, Missouri.

“We’re people that you can depend on. We just don’t help veterans fill out applications... I go to funerals, I go to hospitals, at PVA we go further.”

— **Stephanie Strickland**
PVA National Service Officer
and U.S. Navy Veteran

NATIONAL SERVICE OFFICE (NSO) LOCATIONS

♠ VA Regional Office	♥ SCI Center	♣ VA Medical Center	♦ SCI Outpatient Clinic
♠ Montgomery, AL	♠ Decatur, GA	♣ Kansas City, MO	♠ Guaynabo, PR
♠ N. Little Rock, AR	♠ Chicago, IL	♠♥ St. Louis, MO	♥ San Juan, PR
♠ Phoenix, AZ	♥ Hines, IL	♠ Lincoln, NE	♠ Columbia, SC
♥ Long Beach, CA	♠ Indianapolis, IN	♠♥ Albuquerque, NM	♠ Sioux Falls, SD
♠ Los Angeles, CA	♠ Des Moines, IA	♥ Bronx, NY	♥ Memphis, TN
♥ Palo Alto, CA	♠ Wichita, KS	♠ Buffalo, NY	♠ Nashville, TN
♠ Sacramento, CA	♠ Louisville, KY	♠ New York, NY	♥ Dallas, TX
♥ San Diego, CA	♠ New Orleans, LA	♥ Syracuse, NY	♣ El Paso, TX
♥ Aurora, CO	♠♦ Augusta, ME	♣ N. Las Vegas, NV	♠♥ Houston, TX
♠ Lakewood, CO	♠ Baltimore, MD	♠ Reno, NV	♥ San Antonio, TX
♠ Wilmington, DE	♠ Boston, MA	♠ Winston Salem, NC	♠ Waco, TX
♠ Bay Pines, FL	♥ West Roxbury, MA	♠♥ Cleveland, OH	♥ Hampton, VA
♣ Lake City, FL	♠ Detroit, MI	♠ Muskogee, OK	♥ Richmond, VA
♥ Miami, FL	♥ Minneapolis, MN	♣ Oklahoma City, OK	♠ Roanoke, VA
♦ Orlando, FL	♠ Saint Paul, MN	♠ Portland, OR	♠♥ Seattle, WA
♥ Tampa, FL	♠ Jackson, MS	♠ Philadelphia, PA	♠ Huntington, WV
♥ Augusta, GA		♠ Pittsburgh, PA	♠♥ Milwaukee, WI



CHAPTER LOCATIONS

Phoenix, AZ	St. Louis, MO
Palo Alto, CA	Omaha, NE
Long Beach, CA	Las Vegas, NV
San Diego, CA	Euclid, OH
Aurora, CO	Oklahoma City, OK
Newark, DE	Salem, OR
Sanford, FL	Pittsburgh, PA
Ft. Lauderdale, FL	San Juan, PR
Tampa, FL	Sioux Falls, SD
Hephzibah, GA	Memphis, TN
Westchester, IL	Garland, TX
Urbandale, IA	Crosby, TX
Jeffersonville, IN	Richmond, VA
West Roxbury, MA	Burien, WA
Plymouth, MI	Charleston, WV
Minneapolis, MN	Milwaukee, WI
Gulfport, MS	

TO LEARN MORE visit PVA.org/nso

HELPING Veterans find Meaningful Employment



TO LEARN MORE visit PVA.org/PAVE

HOW WE SERVE



315
placements in
fiscal year 2020



800
clients in
current caseload



8
locations
nationwide*

Through our employment program, PAVE (Paving Access for Veterans Employment), we provide free career assistance and vocational counseling to transitioning service members, veterans, military spouses and caregivers across the country.

Working closely with one of our certified vocational counselors, clients receive high-touch, one-on-one engagement on their path toward meaningful employment, education, or volunteer opportunities. Support is focused on the unique needs of clients, ranging from in-depth vocational rehabilitation to developing a resume or practicing interview skills. Our staff work with any veteran who needs our help focusing on those with barriers to employment, such as catastrophic injury or illness.

In January, Paralyzed Veterans of America launched PAVE Connect, our virtual career program. PAVE Connect bridges the gap between career resources and veterans with disabilities who are not willing or able to attend traditional hiring events. Through a series of informal virtual sessions, veterans with disabilities, their family members, and their caregivers are able to learn from career experts and network with employers and industry experts. PAVE Connect has proven to be an invaluable resource, during Covid-19, to interact with veterans and provide pandemic specific engagement.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has directly impacted millions of Americans. We have seen an increased demand for employment support and are assisting members of the veteran community in new and unique ways. The new support has taken on many forms including mental health check-ins, filing unemployment applications, and interpreting and advising on government legislation and benefits.

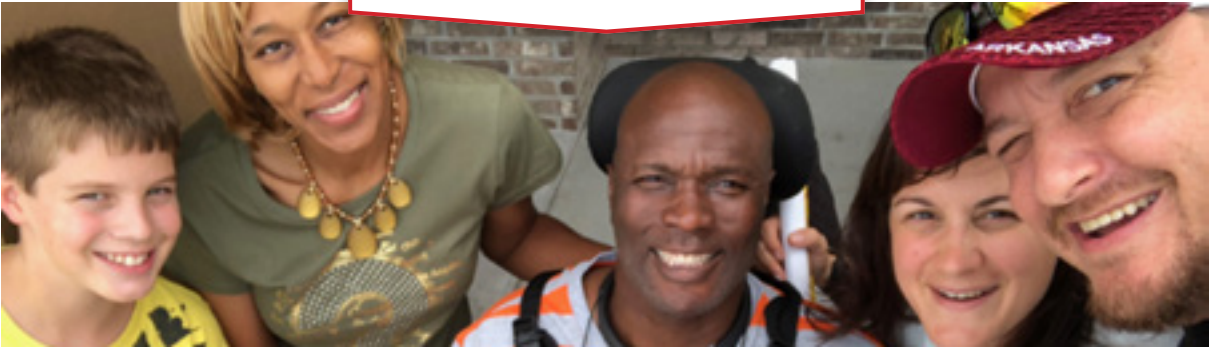
"PAVE
Connect helps
level that
playing field
and maintains
our proven
one-on-one,
high-touch
approach."

— **Lauren Lobrano**,
Director,
PVA Employment Program

*Atlanta, Long Beach,
Minneapolis, Philadelphia,
Richmond, San Antonio, San
Diego & Washington, D.C.



MAKING AN IMPACT



★ BENEFITS from PAVE Connect

Navy veteran Charlie Thompson spent time as a police officer, a physical trainer, and a gym owner. In 2008, a car accident left him paralyzed and searching for a new career path. Fast forward to 2014 when Charlie was introduced to PVA’s employment program, PAVE. Together, they discussed Charlie’s interests and passions, setting a plan with milestones for Charlie to pursue his Theology degree. Charlie completed a Certificate in Theology in 2014 and a Bachelor’s degree in Theology in 2017.

After graduation, Charlie pursued paid work from home positions at local churches or in customer service. He started working with PAVE Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Jim Arndt, M.S., CRC, to modify his resume for positions he was interested in, develop his interview skills and prepare him to land a new job. To practice these skills, Charlie participated in PAVE Connect. Charlie was able to interact with other PAVE staff and gain new insights on how to be more prepared for interviews. Regarding his experience with PAVE Connect, Charlies says:

“You know, it gives me opportunities. I’m in a wheelchair so it gives me the opportunity to branch out and meet new people. Oh my God, I am a people person. So, I love meeting people. I don’t get opportunities to go to job fairs, so you all provide that for us over the computer.”

In early 2020 Jim let Charlie know about a work from home position in customer service. Charlie applied, aced the interview and has been working from home on short term contracts as a customer service representative.

“A bachelor’s degree will help me pursue the goals that I have for my future. I probably would not have started if it weren’t for the little push from PAVE staff.”

— Seth Thomas
PVA Member,
U.S. Navy Veteran



★ BUSINESS to Pursue

Seth was injured in 2015 in a diving accident in a swimming pool. He first learned of PVA through his recovery at the Minneapolis VA Spinal Cord Center and became more and more involved in the programs and services we offer. In 2016, Seth assumed a leadership role as the Board of Directors’ Secretary for the Minnesota PVA Chapter.

In March 2019, Seth had the opportunity to travel to Washington, D.C., to participate in PVA’s 2019 Advocacy and Legislation Week, an intensive five-day event that includes educational seminars and culminates with visits to Capitol Hill for advocacy meetings with Members of Congress.

Upon returning to Minnesota, Seth met with his VRC to review options for Seth to pursue his new goal of working with elected officials to advocate on behalf of veterans.

In August of 2019, Seth began his studies at St. Cloud State University, pursuing a business degree. Seth will continue his work with Minnesota PVA to help disabled veterans.

EMPOWERING Veterans through Sports & Recreation



TO LEARN MORE visit PVA.org/sports

HOW WE SERVE

670* individuals served through PVA Sports Programs & Events in FY20

1,973 individuals served through PVA virtual events in FY20

Ask any veteran who plays adaptive sports and many will tell you that participating in adaptive sports was the turning point for them in their rehabilitation, getting them back to something resembling their life before injury. For some it’s that feeling of competing again, and the camaraderie that comes with being part of a team, for others it’s about staying active and healthy, and for most, adaptive sports has helped them regain the confidence to know they can still do most everything they once enjoyed, as well as try new sports and activities.

★ PROVIDING Opportunities

PVA currently offers eight regular programs and events annually:



PVA Wheelchair Rugby Tournament



Bass Tour



National Veterans Wheelchair Games



Boccia



Shooting Sports



Bowling Tournament



Billiards



Handcycling & Off-Road Cycling

*events held prior to COVID-19

“PVA got me involved in the Wheelchair Games, and fishing and hunting and other sports that I wouldn’t have known about if it hadn’t been for PVA.”

— Ritchie Cross

PVA Member, U.S. Navy Veteran



“Paralyzed Veterans of America gave me my opportunity to start in adaptive sports; handcycling is my primary sport. I spent the first 15+ years of my paralysis putting on my braces, covering them up, trying to pretend that I wasn’t paralyzed—embarrassed to sit in a wheelchair. After I was introduced to Paralyzed Veterans of America, after I began to participate with Paralyzed Veterans of America Racing I not only stopped being embarrassed I actually became proud of who I am as a paralyzed veteran.”

— PVA Member, Leigh Sumner
U.S. Marine Corps Veteran

MAKING AN IMPACT



★ SERVING Women Veterans

In October 2019, Paralyzed Veterans of America hosted its first-ever Women Veterans Empowerment Retreat in Crested Butte, CO. Thirty-nine female veterans with a physical or invisible disability attended the retreat that allowed attendees to connect in a safe environment. Educational sessions were held on stress management, nutrition and wellness, education, financial planning and more.

We also continued our outreach to our female veteran members virtually this summer through webinars which covered present-day topics relative to our women veterans and PVA programs, including webinars on COVID-19 myths and facts; PVA's employment program; health and wellness and a Q & A with PVA leadership.

“Thank you for bringing this group of women and their caregivers together to network, lean on and learn from one another. It was a great experience.”

— **Sandy Valdez**
PVA Member,
U.S. Army Veteran



★ HIGHLIGHT: PVA Publications

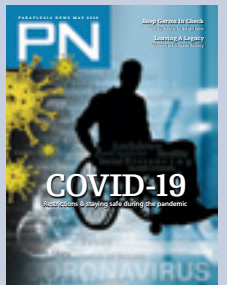
Sports 'N Spokes

With its exclusive focus on adaptive sports, Sports 'N Spokes (S'NS) now in its 44TH year, is the nation's premier magazine for wheelchair sports and recreation primarily for those with spinal cord injury, spina bifida, amputation and some congenital defects. For 38 years, S'NS has sponsored the Junior Athlete of the Year award, an award which honors the best young wheelchair athlete in the country. S'NS is enjoyed by over 14,300 readers worldwide.



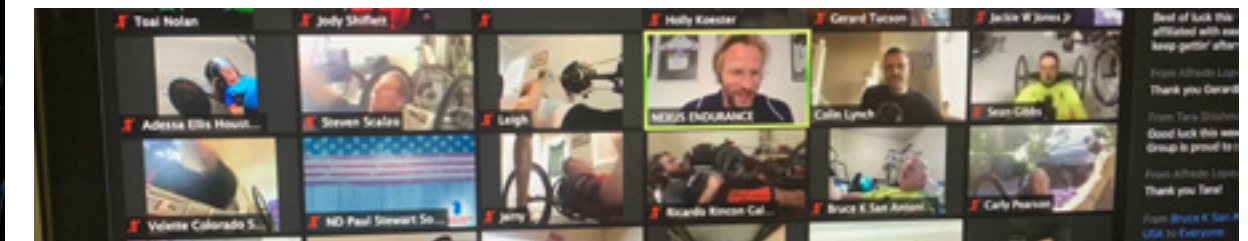
PN magazine

PN (Paraplegia News) is the official monthly magazine of Paralyzed Veterans of America and is provided free to all PVA members. Now in its 74TH year, PN covers news, health, research, lifestyle and issues of interest and concern to veterans and others with spinal cord injury and disease. PN magazine currently is humbled to have a worldwide readership of 90,000.



★ PVA SPORTS Goes Virtual

Since March 2020, when COVID-19 restrictions began, it presented a unique opportunity for PVA to host several virtual events to keep our members active and engaged from the comfort of their homes. These events included online chess instruction, adaptive yoga, air rifle instruction, nutrition classes, SITSTRONG workout program, cycling/spin classes, and a book club.





39TH NATIONAL VETERANS WHEELCHAIR GAMES

held in Louisville, KY • July 11–16, 2019



573
participants
(95 first-timers)



20
competitive
events



20
local youth at
Kids Day Event

Each year, Paralyzed Veterans of America partners with the Department of Veterans Affairs to co-present the largest annual wheelchair sports and rehabilitation event for military veterans—the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. The 2019 Wheelchair Games were held in the downtown Louisville, KY area which presented us with an opportunity to hold some competitive events outdoors for the first time and showcase to the local community the unique abilities of our inspirational athletes.

★ NVWG Kids Day

At our annual Kids Day event, local kids with disabilities are paired with veteran athletes who serve as mentors. This year, 20 local children were introduced to the sports of slalom (a wheelchair obstacle course) and softball. PVA also provided each child with a local resources booklet with information on different local organizations that would allow them to continue learning about and participating in adaptive sports in their community.



“I was an athlete before injury—that’s something I wanted to keep in my life. I got introduced to rugby at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. That’s where I fell in love with it.”

— **Howell 'Scrappy' Smith**
PVA Member,
U.S. Navy Veteran



“I attended my first Wheelchair Games in 2002 in Cleveland, and at that time I was just learning to live freely with my disability and I never considered me being an athlete or participating in sports. These games changed my life – never been an athlete, not even in high school, but now I’m an athlete because of the National Veterans Wheelchair Games.”

— **Twila Adams**,
2019 Spirit of the Games Winner
PVA Member, U.S. Army Veteran

FIGHTING for the Rights of Veterans



TO LEARN MORE visit PVA.org/advocacy

HOW WE SERVE

Policy Priorities for the Second Session of the 116th Congress

Protect Access to VA's Specialized Services

Benefits for the Surviving Spouses of Catastrophically Disabled Veterans

Protect and Increase Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act

Improve Access to VA's Long-Term Services and Supports

Access to IVF
Improve Access to Air Travel for People with Disabilities

Improve Benefits for Catastrophically Disabled Veterans

Care for Women Veterans with SCI/D

Preserve and Strengthen Financial & Health Security for People with Disabilities

Disaster Response and Recovery that Meets the Needs of People with Disabilities

Paralyzed Veterans of America's legislative program staff focuses on policy priorities under the purview of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees. Over the past year, we focused on VA's response to COVID-19, expansion of VA's Comprehensive Family Caregiver Program, improvements to VA's adaptive housing programs and VA's auto allowance grant, and efforts to address staffing issues at VA medical centers.

PVA's national advocacy staff focuses their efforts on issues that will improve the lives of our members as people with disabilities. This past fiscal year, those efforts included: improving access to air travel for people with disabilities, addressing the needs of veterans with disabilities in disasters, and promoting legislation that will provide reforms to the Social Security program. Staff have also worked on disability concerns arising due to the coronavirus.

"If they are unable to work, Social Security disability insurance may be the only source of financial assistance for some PVA members."

— **Shaun Castle**
PVA Deputy Executive Director



Shaun Castle testifies before the House Ways & Means Committee in support of the Social Security 2100 Act (H.R. 860).

★ PRESERVING & Strengthening Social Security



Social Security is the nation's preeminent wage insurance system that protects American workers and their families in retirement or in the event of disability or death of the wage earner. Based on contributions made by workers and their employers, Social Security reaches across all generations and all parts of society to provide a measure of economic security to millions of Americans, including more than nine million veterans and their families.

PVA is Working to ensure Congress pass the Social Security 2100 Act (H.R. 860), which will preserve & strengthen Social Security by:

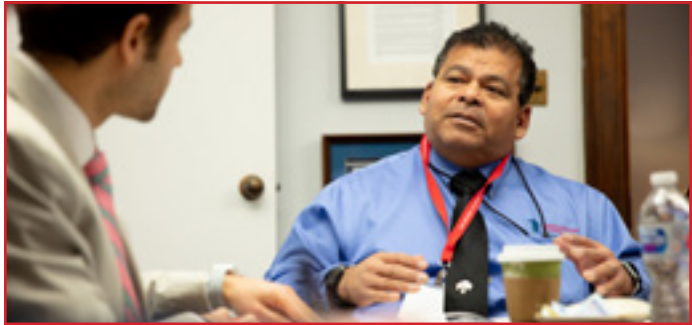
- ★ Setting a more realistic cost-of-living-adjustment reflecting expenses frequently incurred by retirees and people with disabilities
- ★ Ensuring no one retires into poverty by setting the minimum benefit at 25% above the poverty line and indexing that benefit to growth in wages to ensure that the minimum benefit does not fall behind
- ★ Cutting taxes on benefits for almost twelve million beneficiaries
- ★ Making long overdue adjustments in financing mechanisms by requiring those with wages \$400,000+ to pay Social Security taxes and by asking workers to contribute over time the equivalent of an additional 50¢ per week each year
- ★ Keeping the system solvent for the next 75 years, according to an independent analysis by the Social Security Administration's Chief Actuary

Pushing Access Forward

PVA's Members and Leadership Take Their Message to the Hill



PVA National President David Zurfluh Testifies Before Congress



MAKING AN IMPACT



★ IMPROVING Access to Adapted Automobiles and Housing

Currently, veterans and service members with certain service-connected disabilities are eligible for a one-time only payment of no more than \$21,488.29 towards the purchase of a specially equipped vehicle. In direct response to PVA’s advocacy, on February 6, 2020, Representatives Dan Meuser (R-PA) and Anthony Brindisi (D-NY) introduced H.R. 5761, the “Advancing Uniform Transportation Opportunities (AUTO) for Veterans Act.” This legislation would allow eligible veterans to receive more than one automobile grant to purchase a replacement vehicle. As written, H.R. 5761 would authorize an eligible veteran to receive a new grant every 10 years, if needed.

Similarly, the Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) grant allows modifications to be made to a residence to give a veteran or service member greater independence. One example of a modification is making a home wheelchair accessible to include: wider doorways, a ramp to the front door, and an accessible bathroom. PVA helped develop the Ryan Kules Specially Adaptive Housing Improvement Act (H.R. 3504), which passed the House in July 2019, and the Paul Benne Specially Adaptive Housing Improvement Act (S. 2022) which would improve the program by allowing the VA to prioritize a veteran’s SAH grant if he or she has been diagnosed with a terminal illness to include, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). This legislation would also increase the amount of times that the veteran could use the grant and the current amount of the SAH grant to better match the cost of construction.

★ ENDURING Covid

With underlying health issues, paralyzed veterans, and all people with serious disabilities, are at the greatest risk should they contract COVID-19. Many in this population use wheelchairs and rely on others for daily care and vital supplies. They remain trapped in their homes with growing concerns about exposure, limited supplies, increased anxiety, or depression. A trend that will continue for their foreseeable futures.

On May 15, 2020, the House passed a \$3 trillion package to further address the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. The “Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions Act” or “HEROES Act,” H.R. 6800, included a PVA proposal to temporarily raise rates of VA Special Monthly Compensation (SMC)/Aid and Attendance (A&A) benefits to offset higher home care costs due to the pandemic.



★ VETERANS GROUPS Release Independent Budget

In advance of the President’s budget, DAV, PVA, and Veterans of Foreign Wars released *The Independent Budget (IB) Recommendations for Fiscal Years (FY) 2021 & 2022 Advance Appropriations*. The IB provides a roadmap to ensure that VA is fully-funded and capable of carrying out its mission to serve veterans and their families now and in the future.

\$98.4 B
total medical care funding:

\$328 M
increase for prosthetics
and sensory aids


\$590 M
to improve gender-specific
health care and services
for women veterans

\$20 M
in reproductive services
for catastrophically
disabled veterans

\$776 M
to fill vacancies
in Veterans Health
Administration

*recommended for FY2021 & 2022

**Independent Budget
recommendations for the Veterans
Benefits Administration (VBA):**



\$3.23B
for FY 2021 and \$218 million for
the Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA)

\$36M
increase (approximately)
above the current fiscal year

The IB recommendations include additional information technology (IT) funding for both VBA and BVA to modernize their IT infrastructure and streamline the delivery of benefits to more than 4 million disabled veterans and their survivors.

THE INDEPENDENT BUDGET
Veterans Agenda
for the 116th Congress

Critical Issue Update



★ CRITICAL Issues

The IB groups also issued *The Independent Budget Veterans Agenda for the 116th Congress: Critical Issue Update*. The report evaluates progress on 26 key recommendations concerning access to veterans health care, benefits, and transitional services, to help ensure the VA MISSION Act will be wholly and effectively implemented.

★ LEADING the Fight for Air Travel Accessibility

Over 30 years ago, President Ronald Reagan signed the Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA) into law. The ACAA prohibits discrimination based on disability in air travel. Despite progress, too many travelers with disabilities still encounter significant barriers, such as damaged assistive devices, delayed assistance, and lack of seating accommodations. Access for people with disabilities must move into the 21st century to ensure that all are able to compete in today's job market and enjoy opportunities available to other Americans.

PVA has long been at the forefront of air travel accessibility and continues to work to get legislation passed requiring accessible design standards that would include a path of travel for people with disabilities onto airplanes and improve enforcement of passenger rights for travelers under the Air Carrier Access Act with a private right of action. In addition, we are working to ensure increased training of airline and airport personnel and contractors to assist passengers with disabilities during the boarding and deplaning processes.



★ FIGHTING for Women

As a result of PVA's advocacy, the Deborah Sampson Act, H.R. 3224—a bill focused on improving the experiences and services for women veterans in the VA includes a requirement for VA to report on an annual basis an assessment of wheelchair accessibility of VA women's health centers. This assessment will include the accessibility of each kind of treatment provided at the center, including mammography. It will also address other relevant factors, including door sizes, hoists, and equipment. PVA made this recommendation in response to concerns raised by PVA's women veterans committee regarding accessibility barriers at these clinics.

PVA was also singled out by Chairman Mark Takano (D-CA) for its testimony that resulted in the introduction of the Gold Star Spouses and Spouses of Injured Servicemembers Leasing Relief Expansion Act of 2019, H.R. 2227. In a legislative hearing, PVA suggested that the spouses of catastrophically injured and ill servicemembers be allowed to terminate leases of homes and automobiles during a one-year period beginning the date the servicemember incurs the injury or illness.

"More than 2 million women have worn the uniform in service to this nation, and they face unique obstacles to care when they return home."

— Elizabeth Esty
Former U.S. Representative's statement in support of the Deborah Sampson Act



MAKING America Accessible



TO LEARN MORE visit PVA.org/accessibledesign

HOW WE SERVE

350+
people reached during presentations around the country

1700
people reached during Virtual Abilities Expo in June 2020

40+
individuals* assisted on accessibility construction projects

At Paralyzed Veterans of America we believe that equal access is a fundamental right. PVA’s architecture team proactively advocates for veterans with SCI/D, and accessibility in the built environment. PVA architects are primary members of PVA’s annual Site Survey teams, along with PVA medical services staff. PVA architects evaluate the condition of buildings, spaces, and equipment in order to advocate for medical centers that can provide the very best care for veterans with SCI/D. Our architects work closely with numerous VA Hospitals with SCI/D Hubs and Spokes on design and construction projects that impact PVA Members and all veterans, VA staff and the public. We also help advance accessible design through teaching, presentations and seminars, and written contributions in publications dealing with accessibility and architectural design.

PVA architects also serve on the VA’s team tasked with researching and creating their new and improved VA SCI/D Design Guide which includes space criteria and equipment requirements. PVA architects brought our unique technical expertise and SCI/D veteran advocacy for Veterans with SCI/D to the process. The new SCI/D Design Guide will directly improve the healthcare environment at VA medical centers for catastrophically disabled veterans and VA staff including larger patient bedrooms, patient bathrooms, and rehabilitative and therapeutic areas while increasing patient privacy and the residential character of these environments.

*individuals include homeowners, building owners, developers, architects and contractors

"Veterans should not have to limit themselves from moving into a different residence due to not being able to afford to make the necessary modifications."

— **Carl Blake**
PVA Executive Director

MAKING AN IMPACT



★ PVA PROVIDES Expertise on Three New SCI/D Projects

PVA architects are currently serving as primary advisors to the VA Construction and Facilities Management, U.S. Corps of Engineers and Design Team throughout development of the replacement SCI/D Center at the San Diego VAMC, and new 30-bed SCI/D Long-Term Care Center at the Dallas VAMC. Construction of the facility in San Diego, which includes both a replacement 30-bed Acute Care SCI/D Center and new 20-bed SCI/D Long Term Care Center, was bid and awarded in FY 2020 and is scheduled to be completed by summer of 2023. In Dallas, construction is scheduled to begin in the fall of 2021 and be completed in 2023. The facility which includes improvements to the existing Acute Care SCI/D Center outpatient clinic, pharmacy and administrative offices is also designed to expand by 30 additional Long-Term Care beds in a future construction phase.

PVA architects are also primary advisors to the VA Construction and Design Team working on the development of the new Bed Tower and SCI/D Center in St. Louis at the John Cochran VAMC. The new SCI/D Center will include a new 30-bed SCI/D Acute Care Center and be designed in alignment with the new VA SCI/D Design Guide and include all functional amenities required by the VA.

★ ACCESSIBLE Cycle Center

PVA Architecture is currently providing accessible design expertise and technical assistance in coordination with PVA Sports and Recreation and the Virginia State Parks to support the project to construct a Hand Cycling Training Center in Pocahontas State Park near Richmond, VA. The project includes vehicle parking, public restrooms, hand cycle repair shop, cycle storage and sheltered training areas. The facility will be adjacent to accessible parking and connected to trails which traverse the 8,000-acre park.



SEARCHING for a Cure



TO LEARN MORE visit PVA.org/research

HOW WE SERVE

79
grant applications
reviewed

6
research projects
selected for funding*

\$796k
total in research
projects funded

★ **PVA RESEARCH Foundation**

Through the PVA Research Foundation, PVA Education Foundation, multiple partnerships, and the Consortium for Spinal Cord Medicine, Paralyzed Veterans of America’s focuses on exploring treatments and finding a cure for SCI/D. After incurring a spinal cord injury or disability, many people accommodate to the changes in their ability to walk. What is often the greatest concern for people living with tetraplegia is the inability to grasp or use their hands. For most, it is those secondary health effects (complications that are caused by SCI/D) such as lack of bowel, bladder and sexual function, compromised respiratory and skin function, sleep disorders and pain that decrease quality of life. These require additional prevention efforts every day. Projects and fellowships being funded include:

- *Spinal Cord Stimulation for Restoration Bladder* – Warren Grill, PhD, Duke University;
- *Translating Neurochemical Biomarkers from Traumatic Brain Injury to Acute Spinal Cord* Brian Kwon, MD, PhD, University of British Columbia;
- *Serotonin Agonist to Improve Exercise and Sleep in High Level Spinal Cord Injury* J. Andrew Taylor, PhD, Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital/Harvard Medical School;
- *Development of the Caregiver Assisted Transfer Technique (CATT) Instrument* Alicia Koontz, PhD, University of Pittsburgh;
- *Extended Local Release of Interleukin -4 to Alleviate Astroglisis following SCI* Manoi K. Gottipati, PhD, Renssler Polytechnic Institute;
- *Live-Imaging of Nav1.7 as a Discovery Platform for Novel Treatment for Chronic Pain* Elizabeth Akin, PhD, Yale University.

*Projects selected are all related to those secondary health conditions. The results of these projects may have significant impact on the lives of veterans and others living with SCI/D.

"PVA has supported a body of valuable research that's made tremendous impact for Veterans care. It may provide a basis for a new approach to treatment of chronic pain."

— **Elizabeth Akin**
PhD, Yale University
2020 Fellowship Recipient



MAKING AN IMPACT

21
grant applications
received

6
education grants
awarded

\$203k
awarded in
education grants

★ **PVA EDUCATION Foundation**

Funding innovations to impact the lives of veterans and others who live with spinal cord injuries and diseases (SCI/D) is the mission of the PVA Education Foundation. The grants approved by the Foundation’s Board of Directors for fiscal year 2020 all have innovative concepts that will have impact, on those living with SCI/D their healthcare providers, their families and caregivers. Education projects being funded include:

- *Feasibility of an Online Program to Manage Falls Among Wheelchair and Scooter Users* Laura Rice, PhD, PT, University of Illinois;
- *Eye Gaze Controlled Wheelchair Drive System for Veterans with ALS* Ezgi Tiryaki, MD, Minneapolis VA Healthcare System;
- *Healthcare Provider Education in Preventing Community-Acquired Pressure Injury in SCI* Elizabeth Burkhart, PhD, RN, Edward J. Hines, VA Medical Center;
- *Concussion Management Program For the Wheelchair Athlete* Kenneth Lee, MD, Zablocki VA Medical Center;
- *10th International Symposium on Gait and Balance in MS* Mark Manago, PhD, DPT, University of Colorado;
- *Mobile Assistive Technology Lab* Corinne Piren, MS, OTR/L, James J. Peters VA Medical Center

★ **PARTNERSHIP for SCI Research**

PVA provides financial support for research initiatives that support our mission and address the needs and interests of PVA members living with spinal cord injuries, multiple sclerosis and Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis. In FY20, we continued our support of three excellent research partners:

Neuroscience & Regeneration Center, Yale University, Dr. Stephen Waxman, PI

PVA’s support for the Center has been integral to the scientific successes of the Center since its founding more than three decades ago. With the support of PVA, the Center has been able to:

- Develop a stem cell-based “pain-in-a-dish” platform that recapitulates inter-individual differences in clinical pain phenotype to enable research into why some people are more resilient to pain than others.
- Identify a molecular basis for pain after nerve injury, and opening the possibility of targeting specific molecules toward more effective non- opioid treatments for pain.
- Demonstrate the molecular basis for phantom pain after SCI and nerve injury. We are building on this, to develop therapies for patients with pain after SCI and limb amputation.



Human Engineering Research Laboratories (HERL), University of Pittsburgh, Dr. Rory Cooper, PI

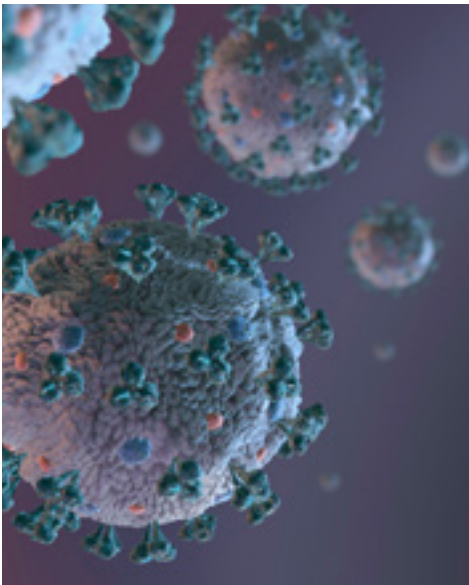
The financial support of PVA has provided the resources for groundbreaking research and product development in rehabilitation engineering and assistive technology. The funding this year was applied to several initiatives in technology, which have resulted in high profile media coverage, publications in academic journals, presentations at national conferences and events and tremendous exposure throughout the disability community. Among the many projects receiving PVA funding are:

- Identifying Challenges for Women Who Use Wheelchairs
- Air-Powered Shopping Carts in Grocery Stores: A Pilot Study
- Examining Pain and Mobility in Individuals with Spinal Cord Injury



RESNA and ISO Wheelchair Standards Leadership, Beneficial Designs, Peter Axelson, PI

With support from the PVA Research and Education Program, Peter Axelson, with the assistance of his research and administrative staff at Beneficial Designs (BD), continue to make major contributions to the development of Assistive Technology Standards that affect the membership of PVA.



★ **GRANT Support Continues**

When COVID-19 hit in March 2020, PVA Research and Education Foundations had nearly \$3 million in funded grants in place. All were making great progress – until the pandemic. While every project felt some impact from the closures, PVA Research and Education Foundations’ leadership acted immediately to reassure our grantees that we would stand behind our commitments and be flexible in helping them reallocate resources and timelines to protect their projects.

★ **CLINICAL Practice Guidelines**

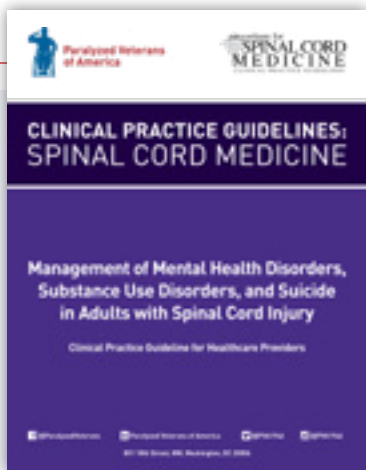
Our Clinical Practice Guidelines provide recommendations for healthcare specialists based on evidence-based research developed by the Consortium for Spinal Cord Medicine. Paralyzed Veterans of America administers and provides financial support for the Consortium. Our Clinical Practice Guidelines and companion Consumer Guides are available in print, as interactive eBooks, or as free downloaded PDFs. Thousands of copies of the CPGs and Consumer Guides are disseminated each year throughout the world.

In FY20, Paralyzed Veterans of America, in collaboration with the Consortium of SCI Medicine, has published a new Clinical Practice Guideline (CPG) to guide health care providers in treating mental health disorders in adults with spinal cord injury:

Management of Mental Health Disorders, Substance Use Disorders, and Suicide in Adults with Spinal Cord Injury: Clinical Practice Guideline for Health Care Providers
Suicide, depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and substance use are all significantly more prevalent in individuals with spinal cord injury (SCI) than in individuals without SCI. However, these mental health disorders are often not recognized and addressed as they should be, perhaps because of the other more obvious physical health impairments caused by SCI and the stigma that surrounds mental health disorders. The panel of authors includes national experts from the fields of nursing, physiatry, psychiatry, and psychology. It is the hope of PVA and its authors that this wide-ranging representation will translate into uniform quality practice and help rehabilitation professionals accurately diagnose and treat these disorders.

“Mental health and substance use disorders affect a significant fraction of people with SCI. We hope that this CPG will be used to elevate the effectiveness and integration of mental health and substance abuse services within comprehensive SCI rehabilitation and treatment throughout the world.”

— Charles Bombardier Ph.D., ABPP
Department of Rehabilitation Medicine,
University of Washington, Panel Chair



“Delayed identification or inadequate management of mental health and substance use disorders can cause additional disability or suffering to people with spinal cord injury,” said “All members of the spinal cord injury care team, regardless of profession or discipline, will find the expert recommendations and concise, practical information in this CPG useful for incorporating in their own practice to enhance the mental health and well-being of individuals with spinal cord injury.”

— Sunil Sabharwal, MD
SCI Chief, VA Boston
Health Care System

"We were able
to connect
with over
100 wound
care nurses
and clinicians
with the
VA Medical
Centers across
the nation."

— **BIOGEN**
Healthcare Summit
Expo presenter

2019 PVA HEALTHCARE SUMMIT & EXPO

held in Orlando, FL • August 13–15, 2019



900+
participants
(500 direct care providers)

4
pre-conference
institutes

26
poster
presentations

64
platform
sessions

40
exhibitors
interacted with

Improving access to quality healthcare and promoting research and education are two of the tenets of the PVA mission. Assurance that VA healthcare providers have access to quality continuing education, best practices and assistive and medical technology lead PVA to initiate the healthcare Summit. Thousands of rehabilitation professionals have attended the conference over the past 9 years. This year’s Summit carried on the tradition of excellence.

The Summit could not achieve these goals and meet this mission without the strong support of our sponsors and exhibitors.



FY20 Financial Highlights



TO LEARN MORE visit PVA.org/financials

★ STATEMENT of Financial Position as of 6/30/20* (\$ in thousands)

Assets		Liabilities	
Cash & cash equivalents	\$15,658	Accounts payable and accrued expenses	\$9,545
Contributions and accounts receivable	\$12,341		
Prepaid expenses	\$377	Net Assets	
Investments	\$44,686	Without donor restriction	\$66,119
Property and equipment	\$5,969	With donor restriction	\$3,367
Total Assests	\$79,031	Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$79,031

★ STATEMENT of Activities of the Year as of 6/30/20* (\$ in thousands)

Revenue		Expenses	
Public contributions	\$72,899	Program services	\$100,767
Legacies and bequests	\$14,914	Management and general	\$9,372
Contributed services	\$53,990	Fundraising	\$33,556
Investment income	\$4,058		
Other income	\$2,838	Total Expenses	\$143,695
Total Revenue	\$148,699		

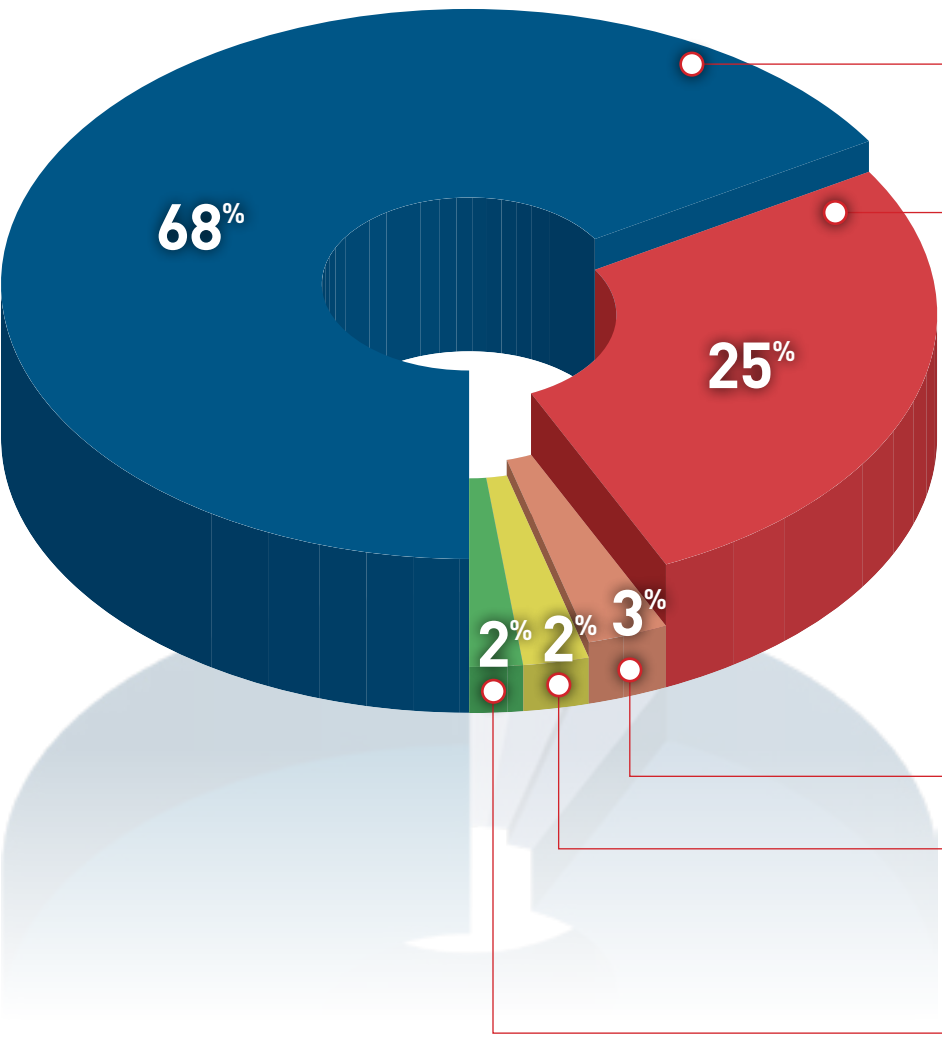
★ AFFILIATED Entities as of 6/30/20 (\$ in thousands)

PVA Research Foundation		PVA Education and Training Foundation	
Total assets	\$3,559	Total assets	\$312
Total liabilities	\$568	Total liabilities	\$204
Contributions from PVA	\$92	Contributions from PVA	\$167
Contributions - Other	\$209	Contributions - Other	\$122
Expenses	\$997	Expenses	\$320



*Includes the consolidated financial information of Paralyzed Veterans of America, PVA Spinal Cord Research Foundation, Total Revenue \$135,940 and PVA Spinal Cord Injury Education and Training Foundation.

★ PROGRAM Expense Details (\$ in thousands)



PUBLIC EDUCATION & AWARENESS	
TV campaigns	\$52,881
Printed campaigns	\$15,498
	\$68,379
MEMBERSHIP & BENEFIT SERVICES	
Veteran service offices	\$10,423
Grants to local chapters	\$4,673
Publications	\$1,484
National veteran benefits department	\$1,546
Medical services	\$867
Veteran employment & training services	\$1,272
Technology services	\$634
VA benefit appeals assistance	\$660
Other member services	\$4,120
	\$25,680
RESEARCH & PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION	
PVA Spinal Cord Research Foundation	\$997
PVA SCI Education & Training Foundation	\$320
PVA Healthcare Summit	\$834
Grants to research entities & other support	\$602
	\$2,753
SPORTS AND RECREATION	
National Veterans Wheelchair Games	\$917
Other adaptive sports events	\$1,241
	\$2,158
LEGISLATION AND ADVOCACY	
Government relations	\$701
Advocacy	\$503
Architecture services	\$595
	\$1,797

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"With PVA there is so much love and support. If you want to try something new, they've got your back."

— **LaQuantis Morton**
PVA Member,
U.S. Army Veteran

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PVA AWARDS

PVA GALA AWARDS

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CONGRESSIONAL
LEADERSHIP AWARD**
The Honorable
U.S. Senator
Tammy Duckworth (IL)

SOCIAL PROGRESS AWARD
Harris Rosen,
President and COO
Rosen Hotels & Resorts

EMPLOYMENT AWARD
Agility

**PVA DISABILITY
CIVIL RIGHTS AWARD**
The Walt Disney Company

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Betty Cory

"PVA is the first call I make – because I know if I need help with something, they will be right on it. It's been proven time & time again."

— **Sheldon Layne**
PVA Member,
U.S. Navy Veteran





Paralyzed Veterans of America

PVA.org

PVA.org/COVID-19

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801 18th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20006