IMPROVE TRAVEL BENEFITS FOR SEVERELY DISABLED VETERANS

The Issue
Currently, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) does not provide travel reimbursement for non-service connected catastrophically disabled veterans who are seeking VA medical care services. Expanding VA’s beneficiary travel benefit to this population of severely disabled veterans will lead to an increasing number of catastrophically disabled veterans receiving quality comprehensive care, thus preventing chronic acute conditions requiring inpatient stays and increased health care costs.

Too often, catastrophically disabled veterans choose not to travel to VA medical centers for care due to significant costs associated with their travel. For veterans who have sustained a catastrophic injury like a spinal cord injury or disorder, timely and appropriate medical care is vital to their overall health and well-being. When these veterans do not receive the prescribed care, associated illnesses quickly manifest and create complications that often result in reoccurring hospitalizations and long-term, if not permanent, medical conditions that diminish veterans’ quality of life and independence.

It is for this reason that PVA recommends amending Section 111 of title 38 U.S. Code to extend travel reimbursements for non-service connected catastrophically disabled veterans who have incurred a spinal cord injury or disorder, visual impairment, or multiple amputations. To maintain optimal physical health for this particular population of veterans, routine annual examinations and periodic primary care visits are required as a preventive health precaution, and are often necessary due to the complex nature of catastrophic injuries and illnesses. However, such care is not available at all VA medical centers. Catastrophically disabled veterans must travel to designated VA facilities with specialized systems of care for specific injuries and illnesses. It is common for veterans to incur significant travel costs when traveling to these medical centers.

By eliminating the burden of transportation costs as a barrier to care, severely disabled veterans will have increased access to VA medical services and seek care when it is needed. The VA has testified before Congress that VA supports expanding travel benefits to groups of veterans with specialized needs, such as veterans with the aforementioned disabilities, as well as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury, and other specified medical conditions. Expanding VA’s beneficiary travel benefit to non-service connected catastrophically disabled veterans will lead to an increasing number of disabled veterans receiving quality comprehensive care, and support veterans’ full rehabilitation.

PVA’s Position
- PVA recommends amending title 38 U.S. Code, Section 111, to require that VA provide travel reimbursement for VA medical care to non-service connected veterans who have incurred spinal cord injury or disorder, vision impairment, or multiple amputations.
- Expanding VA’s beneficiary travel benefit to non-service connected catastrophically disabled veterans will lead to an increasing number of disabled veterans receiving quality comprehensive care, and support veterans’ full rehabilitation.