Paralyzed Veterans of America

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Washington Update

Check out the PVAction Force page to view legislative campaigns and a list of key legislation.

PVA National Vice President Speaks at Congressional Briefing on the Importance of Community Integration for People with Disabilities

On July 23, PVA National Vice President Lawrence "Louie" Mullins spoke at a congressional briefing hosted by the Consortium for Constituents with Disabilities and U.S. Senator Susan Collins (R-ME). The briefing titled, "Spurring Economic Growth and Independence Through Community Living," allowed Vice President Mullins and other expert speakers to discuss the importance of community integration as supported by *Olmstead v. Lois Curtis*. In that case, the U.S. Supreme Court held that Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits unjustified institutionalization of people with disabilities. In the nearly 30 years since the *Olmstead* decision, courts have consistently interpreted the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act to require states to provide services to people with disabilities in the most integrated setting appropriate.

Speakers focused on how unnecessary institutionalization can place significant costs on state and federal programs, while strong community-based supports can make better use of public dollars by supporting independence, family stability, individual liberty, and the freedom to age at home. Vice President Mullins, the only veteran speaker, talked about how without access to proper services and supports, veterans who put their lives on the line for this nation could end up institutionalized and lose the ability to make their own choices about where they live, how they spend their money, and other freedoms that they fought to protect for all Americans. He ended his comments by noting that *Olmstead* must be protected to ensure that veterans like him don't end up institutionalized, not because they can't live in their own home, but because they don't have the services and supports they need to do so.

PVA Presents at National ADA Symposium

In late July, Danica Gonzalves, PVA's Senior Advocacy Attorney, and Anthonya Hollins, PVA's Advocacy Attorney, presented at the ADA National Symposium. The Symposium is hosted by the Great Plains ADA Center, a member of the ADA National Network. The Symposium includes experts in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), practitioners, coordinators, and others that share ADA practical guidance and best practices.

Mrs. Gonzalves and Mrs. Hollins gave a presentation on adaptive sports titled, "Beyond the Finish Line: Lessons from Hosting an Adaptable Sports Event." The presentation covered various adaptive sports opportunities; accessibility barriers; best practices learned from the National Veterans Wheelchair Games and other PVA events; the elements involved in hosting

adaptive sports events, including transportation, lodging, venues, and staff training; and the ADA scoping requirements for sporting facilities and gymnasiums. Mrs. Gonzalves and Mrs. Hollins also facilitated a dialogue for participants to discuss their experiences with adaptive sports and how barriers have been remedied.

OMB Proposes Rule on Federal Financial Assistance

In May 2026, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) released a proposed rule that would allow political appointees, rather than subject matter experts, to review federal grants. Such grants include VA's long-term clinical trial research grants. It would also restrict funding for grantees who engage in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), "gender ideology," and disparate-impact analysis.

On July 9, PVA signed onto a letter from the Friends of VA Medical Care and Health Research (FOVA) that addressed the community's concerns with the proposed rule. Specifically, FOVA is concerned that the proposed rule would increase political oversight of research awards, expand authority to terminate active awards, cause restrictions on international collaboration, and create new limitations on research costs. OMB received nearly 500,000 comments on the proposed rule.

Senate VA Committee Holds Hearing on VA Research

On July 22, the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs held a hearing titled, "Advancing the Mission: Evaluating the Future of VA Research," to examine the current state of the VA's research enterprise, specifically around the state of prostate cancer research.

Senators from both parties emphasized that VA research has been responsible for many landmark medical breakthroughs, including advances in prosthetics, precision oncology, mental health, spinal cord injury (SCI) care, and traumatic brain injury (TBI) treatment. They also stressed that maintaining a robust research program is essential to improving veterans' health outcomes.

The discussion expanded beyond the focus of prostate cancer, with some Senators questioning VA officials about the impact of hiring freezes, staffing reductions, and uncertainty surrounding research funding. Witnesses from outside the government warned that disruptions in hiring research personnel and delays in grant awards could undermine ongoing clinical trials, make it more difficult to recruit and retain top researchers, and weaken partnerships with affiliated academic medical centers.

PVA shares some of the concerns raised during the hearing. In a written statement submitted for the record, we highlighted the unprecedented uncertainty VA research currently faces. Specifically, PVA is increasingly concerned that recent federal policy decisions and funding trends, when viewed collectively, threaten to erode the nation's ability to develop new treatments for veterans living with spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D), including ALS and MS, as well as TBI, and other conditions.

In fiscal year (FY) 2025, Congress dramatically reduced funding for the Department of Defenses' (DOD) Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP), eliminating or suspending several disease-specific research programs and significantly reducing investments across DOD's medical research portfolio. The Spinal Cord Injury Research Program (SCIRP), one of the few federal programs dedicated exclusively to improving outcomes for individuals living with SCI, was among the programs eliminated during that funding cycle. While Congress has since taken important steps to restore SCIRP funding and increase appropriations for ALS, MS, and SCI research in subsequent appropriations, the disruption created by the FY 2025 cuts delayed promising research, interrupted scientific careers, and created uncertainty throughout the rehabilitation research community. Stable, predictable funding is essential because medical research operates over years, not annual appropriations cycles.

PVA is also deeply concerned by the Office of Management and Budget's proposed revisions to the Uniform Guidance governing federal financial assistance. Among the most significant proposed changes is the expansion of political review into discretionary research

funding decisions, including provisions that would require senior political appointees to review or approve research awards and provide agencies with broader authority to suspend or terminate awards after they have been made. While the Administration has characterized these changes as strengthening oversight and ensuring consistency with presidential priorities, numerous research organizations, universities, and scientific societies have warned that the proposal risks weakening the long-standing peer-review process that has been the cornerstone of federal scientific integrity for decades.

PVA believes that medical research must remain driven by scientific merit, clinical need, and the health priorities of veterans. Progress in neuroregeneration, functional electrical stimulation, exoskeleton technology, pressure injury prevention, bladder and bowel management, autonomic dysreflexia, respiratory care, and chronic pain management depends upon sustained, long-term research investments. Clinical trials frequently span many years, requiring continuity of funding and scientific leadership. Interruptions caused by funding instability or administrative uncertainty can delay new treatments by years and discourage early-career investigators from entering the field.

PVA believes that VA is uniquely positioned to conduct this research because of its integrated health care system, specialized SCI/D centers, and lifelong relationships with veterans living with catastrophic disabilities. Researchers working within VA have access to patient populations and clinical expertise that cannot easily be replicated elsewhere. Protecting this research capacity is not purely academic. It is part of the obligation to care for those that have borne the battle.

The hearing can be viewed here.

Fight Continues to Include Access to IVF in the NDAA

Negotiations are underway for the Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) with an expected price tag of a whopping $1.15 trillion. Advocates are again battling committees and politics to increase access to in vitro fertilization (IVF) for service members who are struggling with building a family.

Last year, language expanding access to IVF made it through the conference process, which is when the Senate and House Armed Services Committees reconcile the language between their versions of the bill. However, it was pulled at the last minute due to "moral objections" raised by Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA).

This year, expansion language was included in the Senate base text of the bill, but a competing amendment was added which led to intense debate and political fights, ultimately leading to the removal of the IVF provisions. This development was surprising since identical language was supported only a few months ago.

On July 22, the House voted to pass their NDAA on a narrow bipartisan vote of 216 to 212, which included IVF expansion in the language. The Senate has yet to consider its bill on the floor. We will keep you updated on the NDAA as it moves through Congress.

Senate HELP Committee Holds Nomination Hearing for Secretary of Labor

On July 16, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pension (HELP) Committee held a nomination hearing for the Secretary of Labor for the Department of Labor (DOL). Earlier this year, the previous Labor Secretary, Lori Chavez-DeRemer, resigned amid an investigation by DOL's Office of Inspector General.

The current nominee is Acting Secretary Keith Sonderling, who previously held the position of Deputy Secretary of Labor. Mr. Sonderling served as a member and vice chair of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission from 2020 to 2024, as well as the Acting and Deputy Administrator for the Wage and Hour Division at DOL during the first Trump Administration.

You can watch the hearing here.

News of Note

VA Proposes Shortening Benefits Applications

On June 25, VA published a proposal to reduce the paperwork needed to file for disability benefits and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC). According to their press release, VA is "simplifying instructions and reducing redundant elements on these applications." For the application for disability compensation (VA Form 21-526ez), the VA states that they are reducing the form from 15 pages down to five pages and the application for DIC or survivor benefits (VA Form 21-5345ez) from 20 down to seven pages. PVA reached out to VA to review the new versions of the forms and will update when we have further information.

VA Announces Infrastructure Projects for FY 2026 Third Quarter

The VA has announced a fiscal year (FY) 2026 third quarter non-recurring maintenance (NRM) investment of $1.2 billion to fund one-time projects across the country. Several millions of dollars have been allocated to improve the Electronic Health Record Modernization (EHRM) in support of the national rollout along with improvements to medical centers, community-based outpatient clinics, and other support offices. Most important to PVA members are the investments to projects related to VA's spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D) system of care. Two projects directly related to SCI/D have been earmarked to receive third quarter funding. The James J. Peters facility in Bronx, New York, will receive funds to modify the SCI/D negative pressure rooms, as well as several corrections identified by our architects during PVA's site assessments. The Rocky Mountain Regional SCI/D center in Aurora, Colorado, will receive a new SCI/D residential rehab apartment in Building H. The full list of NRM projects receiving third quarter funding is available here.

Surveys and Committee Activities

NEW: Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles Survey

Tesla has released a survey to learn more from individuals who use wheelchair accessible vehicles. The survey seeks to learn from the experiences and perspectives of mobility device users of what works, what does not, and what the future should look like. The survey covers your experiences with wheelchair accessible vehicles; the features and design elements that matter most; and your visions for how the vehicles should evolve. The survey can be accessed online.

Veterans' Committee Activities

Please visit the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee webpages for information on previous and upcoming hearings and markups.