

GUARANTEE THE CARE AND SERVICES PROMISED TO OUR VETERANS

Modernize VA Services to Promote Veteran Independence



The DoD and VA devote substantial resources to empowering veterans as they transition to civilian life, but too often, these efforts are ineffective and poorly designed. The bureaucracy of the transition and benefits process is mystifying, and the system is insufficiently attentive to veterans' long-term rehabilitation. Congress should begin a reform conversation by creating an independent assessment and expert commission to provide recommendations, so that the VA can effectively serve injured veterans while helping them achieve their full potential.

THE ISSUE

Our veterans' benefits system is obsolete. Many of the features of our disability rating system date to the 1940s or earlier and do not reflect modern advances in medicine and treatment.

DIVERGENT TRAJECTORIES Despite a steadily shrinking pool of veterans, VA disability compensation spending has rapidly increased for decades. In 2023, the VA paid [\\$143 billion](#) in disability compensation, more than four times the amount it [issued](#) twenty years earlier, adjusting for inflation. Simultaneously during this period, the number of veterans in the U.S. shrank over [30 percent](#). As disability compensation continues to rise, policymakers should ensure that these resources are truly serving our veterans by more thoroughly evaluating outcomes.

IMPACTS OF SERVICE-CONNECTED DISABILITIES After over two decades of war, post-9/11 veterans are seeking care and services at the VA at significantly higher rates than those of previous conflicts. Over [41 percent](#) of post-9/11 veterans have been diagnosed with service-connected disabilities, compared to 27% of veterans more broadly. Of post-9/11 veterans, [58 percent](#) report a disability rating of 60 percent or higher—these individuals have a workforce participation rate of 66 percent, nearly [a third less](#) than counterparts rated at 30 percent or lower. The VA's safety net should care for those disabled in service of our country, while balancing compensation with a greater emphasis on rehabilitation, reintegration, and economic independence.

POLICY SOLUTIONS

CONDUCT AN INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT AND FORM A COMMISSION ON DISABILITY COMPENSATION In 2014, the VA Choice law created the independent assessment and the [Commission on Care](#) to provide analysis and reform proposals to the VA health care system. Congress should apply the same model to examine the VA's disability compensation practices, services, measure outcomes and effectiveness, study the long-term impact on veterans, and provide recommendations for innovative reform options.

PROMOTE ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE Congress, the VA, and other agencies can do more to help more veterans reach their full potential through greater economic independence after exiting service. Policymakers should work with the VA and other agencies to alleviate burdensome transition processes by simplifying the benefits claims process, reducing service record backlogs, connecting veterans to job opportunities, and removing licensing barriers.

Contacts:

Dominic Nordel DNordel@cv4a.org
Federal Legislative Liaison

Lauren Stewart LStewart@cv4a.org
Senior Federal Affairs Liaison

Tyler Koteskey TKoteskey@cv4a.org
Policy Director