



Paralyzed Veterans
of America

**Pushing
Access
Forward**

Protect Access to VA's Specialized Services

The Issue

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Spinal Cord Injury and Disorder (SCI/D) System of Care is comprised of 25 SCI Centers and six long-term care facilities, which provides a coordinated life-long continuum of services for SCI/D veterans.

Nearly 49,000 VA staffing positions went unfilled last year. In September 2019, VA's Office of the Inspector General (VAOIG) reported that 131 of 140 VA medical facilities had severe shortages for medical officers and 102 of 140 facilities had severe nurse shortages. Additional shortages in Human Resources Management positions compounded this problem department-wide. However, VA's ability to meet the highest standard of care to our veterans relies on more than just having the right number of physicians and nurses. They also need qualified and well-trained housekeepers. Last year, at some VA medical facilities, staffing levels for environmental (custodial) employees dipped below 50 percent, which heightens the health risks to veteran patients, particularly those with serious illnesses or catastrophic injuries. Low pay, a cumbersome hiring process, and a lack of qualified applicants are often cited as major contributing factors to VA's staffing problem.

Staffing problems tend to have a direct impact on the SCI/D system:

- Lengthy, cumbersome hiring processes make it difficult to hire and retain staff which prohibits SCI/D Centers from meeting adequate staffing levels necessary to care for this specialized veteran population;
- SCI/D Centers with nursing shortages limit bed availability for admission to an SCI/D Center. This limits access to care for specialized care delivery; and
- As SCI/D long-term care facilities are exceptionally limited, veterans with SCI/D who have chronic medical issues are often placed in community institutions, with providers not trained in SCI/D. This results in compromised quality of care and poor outcomes.

PVA Position

- Congress and VA must reform the Department's hiring practices and pay structure to ensure the positions, pay, and other incentives offered are competitive with the private sector.
- Congress must ensure that VA's core services which include the SCI/D System of Care remain fully funded.