

CONCERNED VETERANS FOR AMERICA

RESTRUCTURE, MODERNIZE & IMPROVE VA BENEFIT & ELIGIBILITY PROGRAMS & INCENTIVES



OUR VIEW

It has been too long since health care eligibility and the structure of disability benefits at the VA have been examined. Meanwhile, the veteran population has changed dramatically. The President or Congress should establish an expert body or commission to propose reforms to the care and benefits delivered to our veterans.

BACKGROUND

A new generation of veterans is entering the VA system. Nearly two decades of war have led to a significant increase in veterans seeking care and services from the VA. While the average cost of caring for post-9/11 veterans remains relatively low according to CBO, the long-term needs of this, and older, veteran cohorts will test an outdated VA system.

For health care eligibility, the independent Commission on Care recognized that who and what services the Veterans Health Administration provides has not been examined in over 20 years. The report further found the VA's enrollment policy does little to distinguish or prioritize between delivery of care to service-connected and nonservice-connected veterans.

The VA's disability system should be modernized and shift from a compensation-focused benefits design towards a greater emphasis on rehabilitation. Trends in the newest generation of veterans are concerning—this includes low return-to-work ratios¹ for veterans transitioning into civilian life after serving their country, and nearly half of post-9/11 veterans are seeking disability compensation, a rate significantly higher than previous generations of veterans.² Even with major medical advances and new proven rehabilitation treatment options, much of the rating system used today was put in place in the 1940s. The VA's safety net should provide the necessary care and benefits for the seriously injured, while promoting self-sufficiency and avoiding perverse incentives that lead to dependency.

PRINCIPLED SOLUTIONS

The President, Department of Veterans Affairs and Congress should consider the following:

1. Conduct an independent assessment and create a task force or commission to examine the VA's disability compensation practices, measure outcomes and effectiveness, study the long-term impact on veterans, and provide recommendations to Congress and the VA for policy changes.
2. Convene a similar body of experts to examine eligibility and the structure of health care benefits as recommended by the Commission on Care #18³ and determine who and what services the VA is best positioned to provide for veterans with the greatest needs.
3. Act on the Commission on Care's #18 recommendation and give priority health care access to service-connected disabled veterans as determined by VA clinicians.

1. Bertoni, Daniel. "VA Can Better Ensure Unemployment Decisions Are Well Supported." Government Accountability Office, June 2015. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/680/670592.pdf>.
2. Marchione, Marilyn. "45% Of New Veterans File Claims for Disability." Boston Globe, 28 May 2012. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/nation/2012/05/27/almost-half-new-veterans-seek-disability-benefits/sYQAAAY00ddXBRoqfsKMhe//story.html>.
3. Commission on Care: Final Report, June 30, 2016, pg 161, https://www.stripes.com/polopoly_fs/1.417785.1467828140!/menu/standard/file/Commission-on-Care_Final-Report_063016_FOR-WEB.pdf

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