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VVA Launches Campaign Addressing Aging Veterans' Healthcare

(Washington, D.C) – “As of 2022, more than 5 million additional veterans may be eligible to enter the Veteran Health Administration healthcare system because of the *PACT Act*, undoubtedly putting intense stress on an already overtaxed system. The 6.4 million Vietnam-era veterans (median age of 71), make up the largest cohort of veterans in the U.S. As they age, their healthcare needs expand and become more complex,” Vietnam Veterans of America National President Jack McManus commented.

“A lack of personal savings for long-term care and a sometimes-fragmented VHA pose significant risk to the health and wellness of these aging veterans. To meet this growing issue for our members, VVA is launching a coordinated campaign addressing aging veterans’ healthcare,” McManus announced.

“VVA remains deeply invested in ensuring the best possible healthcare for our aging veterans, and to that end we will be advocating on a number of fronts,” McManus added. “It is crucial that we not only honor and support our 19 million living veterans, to whom we owe a great debt of gratitude for the freedoms we share as a nation, but also that we care for them as they age, especially those in under-served and rural areas and populations.”

The VA Office of Rural Health supports 2.7 million rural veterans, 55 percent of whom are over 65, and 27 percent of whom lack home internet. Conditions more manageable in urban areas are often highly complicated in rural areas. VVA and other VSOs have worked with VHA on expanding Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs), thus improving access to care via the Veteran Community Care Program. VVA strongly supports the 5-year expansion of several home- and community-based care programs, begun this year and administered by the Office of Geriatric and Extended Care.

McManus continued: “We know that effective care for all these aging veterans requires VHA implementing dependable, evidence-based care today. Evidence-based programs allow veterans to age-in-place, avoid or delay nursing home placement, and choose the care environment that aligns most with their care needs, preferences, and goals. Veterans using these programs have experienced fewer hospitalizations and emergency department visits, reduced hospital and nursing home days, and fewer nursing home readmissions and inpatient complications.”

“Bearing this in mind, VVA will continue zealously advocating for the continuation and expansion of multiple programs geared towards transforming VHA into a comprehensive, age-friendly health system,” McManus emphasized. “These programs include the *Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC)* (eligibility expanded in 2022 to veterans of all service eras); *Redefining Elder Care in America Project (RECAP)*, a two-part pilot currently underway, aimed at identifying veterans close to nursing home placement and pro-actively working to intervene and extend their time at home; Medical Care Foster Homes; *Veterans Directed Care Program*; and the continuance and expansion of local Vet Centers, community-based counseling centers providing a wide range of social and psychological services.”

Read VVA’s White Paper on Aging Veterans here: <https://vva.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Aging-White-Paper.pdf>