

Joanie Lynch Honored at PVA National Convention

by Mark Murphy, Executive Director NEPVA

From May 15-18th I was honored to attend and participate in the Paralyzed Veterans of America 78th Annual Convention in Minneapolis, Minnesota, along with Chapter President and National Director Brad Carlson and his wife Kathy. We had a wonderful time, and highlights of the week including welcome remarks from Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, reports by PVA Executive Committee members, digital marketing and corporate partner presentations, an in-person address from Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough, discussion and approval of PVA's FY25 budget, and election of National Officers. These gatherings are always an opportunity to meet and learn from other Chapter and PVA leaders as we share best practices in our shared work of serving paralyzed veterans throughout the nation. Next year we look forward to attending the 79th Annual Convention in Austin, Texas.

At the closing PVA Awards Brunch on Saturday I had the opportunity to meet and speak with Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar, who also addressed those in attendance. But the best part of the closing brunch was when our dear

Chapter friend Joanie Lynch received the Harry A. Schweikert, Jr. Disability in Awareness Award. Joanie has been a recreational therapist in the Boston VA Healthcare system for over 30 years, and she was given this award by PVA in recognition of her many successes in promoting a positive awareness of the needs and contributions of disabled individuals. In the letter nominating Joanie for this prestigious award, the following was said about her: "While everything that Joanie has done for paralyzed veterans throughout her professional career is impressive, it is important to note that all this flows from who she is as a person. On the wall in her office Joanie has this quotation displayed: 'A physical therapist

continued on page 3

Countless inpatients at the VA have said that she (Joanie) has improved their quality of life and given them a reason to get out of bed in the morning.



Left to right Mike Lynch, Joanie Lynch, Holly Warshaw, Mark Murphy, Brad Carlson at the PVA Awards brunch.

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National Veterans Wheelchair Games, July 25-30, New Orleans

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August 19, Hingham, MA

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Executive Director's Report

*By Mark Murphy
 Executive Director NEPVA*



pist will give you the strength to get out of bed, an occupational therapist will teach you how to get out of bed, but a recreational therapist will give you a reason to get out of bed.' Joanie is the exact manifestation of the reality of this quotation. She has consistently exemplified the values of selfless service, integrity, dedication, hard-work, and compassion. Countless inpatients at the VA have said that she has improved their quality of life and given them a reason to get out of bed in the morning." We are so proud of Joanie for this well-deserved recognition and award, and we look forward to working with her at the VA for many years to come!

Next month from June 10-14th I will be joining our Chapter delegation at the Annual PVA Advocacy and Legislation Seminar in Washington D.C., where we will meet with members of Congress from various New England districts. These meetings are always fantastic opportunities to share with

our elected officials the current good work of our Chapter while also advocating for important issues and proposed legislation that will impact our members. We look forward to sharing how the week goes in next month's newsletter.

'A physical therapist will give you the strength to get out of bed, an occupational therapist will teach you how to get out of bed, but a recreational therapist will give you a reason to get out of bed.'

Joanie has this quotation displayed on her office wall.



Mark Murphy and Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar.

In closing, Monday, May 27th is of course Memorial Day, which is a solemn occasion to reflect on the sacrifices made by countless men and women who gave their lives in service to our country. Each gravestone in a military cemetery represents a story and a life cut short in the name of freedom, and behind every flag-draped coffin lies a family forever changed by the loss of their loved one. Memorial Day serves as a reminder of the true cost of liberty, and may we never forget the brave men and women who gave everything so that we could live in freedom.

Sincerely,

Mark Murphy
 Executive Director

A few of the Highlights at the PVA 78th Annual Convention in Minneapolis, Minnesota



Mark Murphy and Brad Carlson presenting a check to the PVA President Robert Thomas towards the PVA research funds:



Joanie Lynch from the Boston VA Healthcare System accepting her Disability Awareness Award from PVA National President Robert Thomas.



Joanie Lynch accepting her award and thanking the crowd.

We are all so happy for Joanie as she has done so much for all of us.



Chapter President Brad Carlson and Chapter Volunteers Kathy Carlson and Denise Pease represent NEPVA at the 2024 Women's Veteran Network Conference in Leominster, MA.

The 16th Annual Women Veterans Network Conference honored women veterans' diverse and profound journeys. This year's theme, "Honoring Our Journey," celebrated the resilience, courage, and achievements of women who have served in the military.

The conference featured a series of engaging keynote speeches, panel discussions, workshops, and networking opportunities aimed at empowering and uplifting women veterans. Attendees had the chance to connect with fellow veterans, share stories, and gain insights into navigating post-military life.

NEPVA Members invited to participate in a documentary on the 2024 election

The National Disability Rights Network, a leading national disability rights organization, is working on a documentary short that will tell the stories of voters with disabilities in the lead up to the 2024 presidential election. We will be doing interviews in Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Virginia and the District of Columbia. We want to capture the issues that motivate voters with disabilities and paint a rich picture of their lives, because our community, despite being over 25% of the American population it's often ignored by politicians.

We are seeking to get a look at the home life and day-to-day of voters with disabilities so we can connect the political issues that matter to their daily life. Interviews would take approximately two to three hours. We want to conduct the interview and film footage to complement it. For example: navigating to work, arranging paratransit, going over how much their healthcare costs or showing any durable medical equipment they use, explaining how a home health aide would enable them to experience greater independence.

The goal of this project is to highlight the biggest minority group that often gets ignored by the candidates of all

We want to capture the issues that motivate voters with disabilities and paint a rich picture of their lives...

parties. The project is strictly nonpartisan. We are seeking to ensure we have a diverse range of perspectives included in terms of the issues that matter and the life experience those voters come with.

We are looking to speak to first time and longtime voters, we want to interview those fresh out of school (and even graduating seniors) as well as people who have spent a long time in the workforce or even found themselves excluded from the workforce. We want to speak to voters with disabilities of all stripes and capture the diversity of our community.

If you are interested, please contact us at storytelling@ndrn.org. We look forward to working with you to help politicians understand that our community cannot be ignored any longer. Please note that, following documentary film making best practices, we are unable to pay interview participants.

DOJ Issues Updated ADA and Federal Voting Laws Guides

On April 18, the Department of Justice (DOJ) announced an update to their [Voting and Elections website](#) that provides voting and elections information for voters and state and local elections officials. As part of the update, the Civil Rights Division of the DOJ published two new informational guides on voting rights and updated five other guides. One of the updated guides,

[The Americans with Disabilities Act and Other Federal Laws Protecting the Rights of Voters with Disabilities](#), clarifies the right to voter assistance under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and that state laws restricting people from providing assistance with voting, subject to criminal penalties, interfere with voters' rights to assistance under the ADA. The updated guide also clari-

fies that the ADA prohibits states from categorically disqualifying individuals who have intellectual or mental health disabilities from registering to vote or from voting because of their disability or guardianship status.

Government Relations Report

Kristen McCone Gordon
Director of Government and Community Affairs

Dear NEPVA Members,

As our Advocacy team prepares for our upcoming meetings in Washington, D.C., I want to share two of the leading issues that we will be discussing with members of Congress: [The Justice for ALS Act](#) and [The Autonomy for Disabled Veterans Act](#).

The Justice for ALS Veterans Act and the Autonomy for Disabled Veterans Act directly and significantly impact our members in New England. As you can read below, both bills provide much needed benefits and relief to veterans and their families. It's important to note that both pieces of legislation also have bipartisan support in Congress, which is critical to passage in this political climate, but very few cosponsors from the New England Delegation. Our Advocacy team is focused on educating the New England Delegation on how important these bills are to our members and veterans across the country. I look forward to updating you on their responses.



If you have any thoughts on these pieces of legislation, or have been personally impacted by these issues, please reach out to me (kristen@newenglandpva.org) so that I can share your story.

With Gratitude for your service,

Kristen McCone Gordon
Director of Government and Community Affairs

Autonomy for Disabled Veterans Act

VA's Home Improvements and Structural Alterations (HISA) grants help veterans and service members make medically necessary improvements and structural alterations to their primary residence. Examples of qualifying improvements include adapting the entrance or exit from their homes, restoring accessibility to the kitchen or essential lavatory and sanitary facilities (e.g., lowering counters/sinks), and making necessary repairs or upgrades to plumbing or electrical systems due to the installation of home medical equipment. It does not pay for walkways to exterior buildings; spas, hot tubs, or Jacuzzis; exterior decking; or new construction.

A lifetime HISA benefit is worth up to \$6,800 for veterans who need a housing modification due to a service-connected condition. Veterans who rate 50 percent service-connected may receive the same amount even if a modification is needed due to a non-service-connected disability. Veterans who are not service-connected but are enrolled in the VA healthcare system can receive up to \$2,000. HISA rates have not changed since Congress last adjusted them in 2010. Meanwhile, the cost of home modifications and labor has risen nearly 50 percent during the same timeframe. With older and disabled veterans sheltering in place during and following the resolution of the pandemic, ensuring veterans can

safely remain in their homes is more essential than ever. HISA rates must be raised to reflect current costs and better meet veterans' current housing adaptation needs.

PVA 2024 Policy Priorities PVA POSITION | Congress must pass legislation, such as the Autonomy for Disabled Veterans Act (H.R. 2818/S. 3290) or the Autonomy for All Disabled Veterans Act (H.R. 4047), to raise HISA grant rates and index the grant to account for inflation and increased construction costs.

Justice for ALS Veterans Act

The VA provides Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) to qualified survivors of service members and veterans. Eligible survivors can also receive an additional \$331.84 per month in DIC in cases where a veteran who, at the time of death, was in receipt of or was entitled to receive compensation for a service-connected disability that was rated totally disabling for a continuous period of at least eight years. This extra payment is commonly referred to as the "DIC kicker."

VA regulations recognize amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) as a presumptive service-connected disease. Due to its aggressive nature, veterans diagnosed with ALS are automatically rated at 100 percent once service connected. Unfortunately, many veterans are unable to meet the eight-year DIC kicker requirement because the average life expectancy for a person with ALS is three to five years. Rarely do survivors of deceased veterans with ALS qualify for the additional DIC benefit given the eight year requirement.

This policy fails to recognize the significant sacrifices these veterans and their families have made for this country. ALS is an aggressive disease that leaves many

veterans incapacitated and reliant on family members and caregivers. DIC kicker payments should be provided to survivors of veterans who die from ALS regardless of how long they were service-connected for ALS prior to death.

Action is also needed to raise base DIC rates. Established in 1993, rates for this vital survivor program have only been minimally adjusted in the last 30 years. In contrast, monthly benefits for the survivors of federal civil service retirees are calculated as a percentage of the civil service retiree's Federal Employees Retirement System or Civil PVA 2024 Policy Priorities Service Retirement System benefits, up to 55 percent. Currently, DIC payments are approximately 41 percent of compensation for a 100 percent service-disabled veteran with a spouse. This difference presents an inequity for survivors of our nation's heroes compared with survivors of federal employees.

PVA POSITION | Congress must pass the Justice for ALS Veterans Act (H.R. 3790/S. 1590) to provide eligible survivors of veterans who died of service-connected ALS the DIC kicker. | Congress must pass the Caring for Survivors Act of 2023 (H.R. 1083/S. 414), which would index the rate of compensation for DIC payments to 55 percent of a 100 percent service-disabled veteran with a spouse to achieve parity with similar compensation federal employees' survivors receive.

2024 PVA Priorities

Protect Access to VA's Specialized Health Care Services

Expand Access to VA Long-Term Services and Supports and their Survivors

Improve VA Benefits and Health Care Services for Paralyzed Veterans and their Survivors

Protect the Civil Rights of People with Disabilities

Improve Access to Social Security Benefits

Increase Employment Prospects for Veterans with Disabilities

Reminder: Advocacy Training Webinars Available

PVA's five-part series, "The 5 W's: The who, what, where, why, and when of our government and the art of advocacy," is available on PVA.org. You can learn more about the Fundamentals of Government, the Legislative Process, Stakeholders of Advocacy, Understanding the Issues and Becoming a Change Agent, and Connecting the Dots. If you have any questions about the series, please contact PVA Grassroots Advocacy Manager Lisa Elijah at LisaE@PVA.org.

Sports & Recreation

Field Day & Cookout, June 22nd



Learn to play the adaptive sport of disc golf at the June 22nd field day.

Brockton VA will be doing a field Day & cookout again on Saturday, June 22, with the Pharmacy team from Brockton and West Roxbury, like we had last year.

Plan is to have it from 10-3. We will be serving lunch at 11:30 provided by the pharmacy group.

Field events will be: Bocce , disc golf, corn hole, ladder toss, and maybe even get a cribbage game going if time permits.

Should be fun, let's hope for nice weather.

SSA Publishes Final Rule to Expand Definition of Public Assistance Household

On April 19, the Social Security Administration (SSA) published a final rule, announcing they are finalizing their proposed rule to expand the definition of a public assistance household to include the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) as an additional means-tested public income-maintenance (PIM) program. The SSA is also expanding its definition of a public assistance household from a household in which every member receives some kind of PIM payment to a household that has both an Supplemental Security Income (SSI) applicant or recipient, and at least one other household member who receives one or more of the listed PIM payments. Public assistance households are exempt from in-kind support and maintenance (ISM) development and income deeming, two of the most compli-

cated and burdensome features of the SSI program. If determined to be living in a public assistance household, ISM would no longer need to be developed.

In November 2023, PVA signed on to a comment from the Social Security Task Force of the Consortium for Constituents with Disabilities, supporting expansion of the definition of a public assistance household and encouraging SSA to expand the definition to include households in which any other member received public assistance. We hope the final rule will ease the burden on people with disabilities who receive SSI.

The final rule will be effective September 30, 2024.

NEW ENGLAND PVA CHARITY GOLF CLASSIC

The Event

Serving paralyzed and disabled Veterans for over 75 years, the New England Chapter, Paralyzed Veterans of America is pleased to offer the 4th Annual Golf Classic. We invite all companies, individuals and friends of New England PVA to participate in this grand charity tournament.

Tournament

11:00 a.m. Golfers welcome to pick up box lunch, test their luck at the putting contest or purchase raffle and Mulligan entries

Noon. Shotgun Start, rain or shine. Play will be a scramble format.

4:00 p.m. Putting contest finals

4:30 p.m. "Golf in Italy" buffet served by Raffael's Hingham.

Registration

Golf \$600 – Foursome or \$150 Single
Includes all meals and a swag bag

Who Benefits

We hope to fill the playing field with 120 golfers supporting the free programs and services provided by New England PVA to paralyzed veterans throughout New England.

NON-Profit

New England Chapter, Paralyzed Veterans of America is a Registered 501(c)3 Non-Profit. EIN: 04-6112881

Questions

Contact Holly Warshaw

Phone 508-846-0538

Email holly@pvanewengland.org

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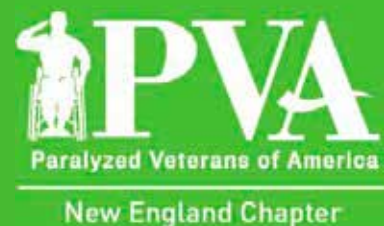


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Service Officers Report

by Michael Snape,
Senior National Service Officer

Recent Changes to VA Auto Grant and Clothing Allowance Processes

2nd Auto Grant

Since the date of enactment of the Veteran's Auto Improvement Act on January 5, 2023, VA can now provide an automobile allowance to eligible persons on a recurring basis. The act authorizes the VA to provide an additional automobile allowance to eligible veterans if 30 years have elapsed since their most recent receipt of an automobile allowance. Additionally, ten years after enactment of the bill, eligible persons become entitled to an additional automobile allowance once every ten years.

The Veteran's Auto Improvement Act made significant changes to the VA auto grant process. Previously, a veteran could only apply for the VA auto grant once in their lifetime. As noted in the above paragraph, a service connected veteran may now apply for a 2nd auto if it had been 30 years since receipt of their last auto grant. If a veteran has used their auto grant more recently (for example May/2018); the 30-year rule would entitle them to a 2nd auto grant in May/2048, however, since the new law would have been in effect for 10 years in January 2033, the law would allow for a 2nd auto grant in January 2033 and every 10 years after that.

Please note that the rule limiting automotive adaptive equipment vehicles to no more than 2 every 4 years has not changed with the adoption of this new rule/act. You may want to consider this limitation when deciding when you want to apply for the 2nd auto grant.

For chapter members, a significant change also resulting from changes in the auto improvement act is that non-articulating trailers solely designed to transport powered wheelchairs, powered scooters, or other similar mobility devices are now defined as adaptive equipment for VA purposes.

Clothing Allowance Changes

For those chapters members rated by the VA for a service-connected disability for which they use a prosthetic or orthopedic appliance, and who have not yet applied, they may be eligible to receive an annual clothing allowance. The allowance is also available to veterans whose service-connected skin condition requires prescribed skin medication that irreparably damages outer garments.

The VHA (Veterans Health Administration) determines whether the veteran is eligible for the benefit as outlined in 38 CFR (Code of Federal Regulations) 3.810, whether the prosthetic/orthopedic appliance impacts the veteran's outer clothing, and whether the skin medication causes irreversible damage to the veteran's outer clothing. This assessment is completed by the local VA prosthetics departments after receipt of the veteran's application.

Due to the passage of the PL 117-328, Section 201, Improvements to the Process of the Department of Veterans Affairs for Clothing Allowance in late 2022/early 2023, the VA has now eased the requirements for the previously required annual reapplication for this allowance.

If a veteran's clothing allowance status is static/recurring (no changes), and they already receive an annual clothing allowance; they will now continue to receive a recurring automatic payment without having to reapply each year.

A veteran who applies for a single clothing allowance for the first time must apply initially; also, if a veteran currently receives one clothing allowance, but meets the criteria for a second, and wants to receive the additional allowance, they must apply for the second and any subsequent allowances. If approved for those applications, their allowance will become continuous payments in subsequent years without the need to reapply. For those individuals who must apply initially or for 2nd and/or sub-

continued from page 10

sequent allowances (a maximum for two allowances for upper extremities, two allowances for lower extremities, and one service connected skin condition is allowed), you have until July 31st of the calendar year to submit your application.

If you have questions regarding the VA auto grant and clothing allowances, and the recent changes to those issues, please reach out and contact your local PVA National Service officer.

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