

New Year, New Opportunities

By Mark Murphy, Executive Director NEPVA

Dear Friends,

As we step further into 2025, I am filled with optimism and gratitude for all the incredible work we accomplished together in 2024. The New Year brings new opportunities for us to continue our mission of empowering veterans with disabilities, and I am excited to share some of our goals and initiatives for the year ahead.

Reflecting on 2024

In 2024, we made great strides in advocating for veterans with disabilities, providing essential services and strengthening our community. Our programs and services supported hundreds of veterans across the New England region, ensuring they had access to critical healthcare, resources, and support. We also expanded our outreach efforts to increase awareness about the challenges facing veterans with disabilities and worked closely with local and national policymakers to push for positive changes.

One of the most rewarding aspects of last year was witnessing the resilience of our members. Whether it was through physical rehabilitation, participating in adaptive sports, or engaging in new educational opportunities, our

members showed incredible strength and determination. Their stories inspire us to continue the important work of our Chapter. One of my highlights of 2024 was attending the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in New Orleans for the very first time.

To learn more about our 2024 Annual Chapter Christmas party as we closed out the year, please see my reflection on page 6 of this *CordWord* edition.

Looking Ahead

As we are now moving along in this the new year, we are more committed than ever to making a lasting impact. Here are a few key initiatives we as a leadership team are focusing on in 2025:

1. Expanding Access to Care

We will continue advocating for veterans' access to quality healthcare, particularly for those with spinal cord injuries and related conditions. Our team will work with our partners at the VA and our NSO's to ensure that our members receive timely, specialized care.

2. Growing our Emerging and Strong Fundraising Program

We will grow our fundraising program by cultivating new and current donors, applying for grant funding, and engaging new and returning corporate partners. Our success as a Chapter can only happen with and through our ability to raise funds to support our programs, so we will continue to focus on this critical area.

3. Advocacy & Legislative Action

As we begin this year (and a brand-new Congressional session) we will be engaging with lawmakers to push for legislation that improves the quality of life for veterans with disabilities. This will include working on policies that

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Accessible Air Travel: Survey

The Human Engineering Research Laboratories in Pittsburgh is conducting a national survey about accessible air travel. The study aims to estimate the pent-up demand for air travel among mobility device users and identify the specific needs and pain points experienced during their travel. Your participation will provide valuable insights that can help improve the accessibility and overall travel experience for mobility device users. The survey should take no more than 20 minutes to complete.

To take the survey, please [click here](https://www.herl.pitt.edu/node/1151)
<https://www.herl.pitt.edu/node/1151>



Check out the February issue of the CordWord for a full report on the 2025 Winter Sports Clinic.

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Executive Director's Report

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By Mark Murphy

Executive Director NEPVA



Gratitude and Thanks

None of these goals would be possible without the unwavering support of our dedicated members, volunteers, donors, and partners. Your commitment to the New England PVA is what makes our work possible, and for that, we are incredibly grateful. Together, we will continue to make a difference in the lives of our members and their families.

As we move forward in 2025, let us embrace the opportunities ahead and remain united in our mission to support and empower our members. I am excited for all that we will accomplish in the year to come. Wishing you all a healthy, happy, and successful New Year!

Sincerely,

Mark Murphy
 Executive Director

address accessibility, healthcare, and disability benefits. Your voice matters, and we encourage you to participate in our advocacy efforts to ensure that our members' rights remain a top priority. We have several volunteers that are stepping up to assist me and our Chapter President in our shared goal of making the PVA Advocacy and Legislation Seminar (Ad/Leg) in Washington D.C. in June the best visit we have ever had.

4. Building Community Connections

Our Chapter remains committed to fostering a strong and supportive community for our members and their families. This year, we will host more social events, support groups, and family-oriented activities, ensuring that veterans have a network of peers who understand their unique experiences and challenges. More to come on that!

5. Adaptive Sports and Recreation

We are thrilled to announce the continuation and expansion of our adaptive sports programs, offering members the chance to engage in physical activities that promote health, wellness, and camaraderie. These programs are not just about fitness - they are about building confidence, creating lasting friendships, and proving that physical limitations do not define a person's potential. We will be embarking on a new partnership with MoveUnited, which will be very exciting. In the more immediate, Brad Carlson and I will be attending the Winter Sports Clinic in New Hampshire this month, where we will interact with attendees and offer a check to the VA in support of their work to make the Clinic such a success once again.



Brad and Mark, looking forward to serving our Members in 2025!

PVA Releases 2025 Policy Priorities

With a new Congress and a new Administration in Washington, D.C., PVA's priorities for 2025 are focused on ensuring access to the care and benefits PVA members have earned and the civil rights protections they deserve. We look forward to working with our champions to move these priorities forward throughout the year.

PVA priorities for 2025 are as follows:

- **Protect VA's Specialized Health Care Services**
- **Increase Access to Long-Term Services and Supports for Veterans with SCI/D**
- **Improve Veterans' Financial Security**
- **Enhance Access to Health Care Services for Veterans with SCI/D**
- **Defend the Freedoms of Veterans with Disabilities**

The Elizabeth Dole Act is Now Law!

On January 2, President Biden signed S. 141, the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act into law, bringing an end to PVA's long effort to pass this legislation. Now, our focus will shift toward implementing its many provisions which include eliminating the cap on how much VA can pay for home care. The law also expands services to better support caregivers, such as providing them with respite and mental health care to ensure their well-being and that of their families. Other provisions require the VA to develop a plan that allows for same-day appointment scheduling and create a pilot program that enables veterans with chronic health conditions to access dental care. It also enhances stipends for some of VA's education programs and tightens oversight of educational providers serving veterans. Additionally, it broadens eligibility for burial allowances and revises definitions for certain surviving spouses.

PVA is extremely grateful to Congress for passing this important legislation supporting the families and caregivers of our nation's veterans, especially those with catastrophic injuries and diseases, like MS and ALS. Their bipartisan effort reflects a shared commitment to honoring the sacrifices of those who have served by ensuring they and their caregivers receive the vital supports they desperately need.

New Congress—"Full Restart"

The 119th Congress is officially underway. All unpassed bills from the previous Congress must be reintroduced. We are working with the authors of bills addressing PVA's legislative priorities to make that happen. It's important to remember that bill numbers and titles may change as part of the process.

The House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC) leadership remains the same, but some of its members have changed. For example, the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee's former Ranking Member, Rep. Mike Levin (D-CA), moved to the House Appropriations Committee and will be working on its MILCON/VA Subcommittee. This is the subcommittee that allocates funding for the VA. Another HVAC member, Rep. Frank Mrvan (D-IN) who served as the Ranking Member of the HVAC's Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee, will be joining him. A third Democratic member, Rep. Greg Landsman (D-OH), left the HVAC to serve on the House Energy and Commerce Committee. Three new members, all doctors—Rep. Maxine Dexter (D-OR), Rep. Herb Conaway (D-NJ) and Rep. Kelly Morrison (D-MN), were chosen to replace them. Conaway is a veteran. Reps. Abe Hamadeh (R-AZ), Kimberlyn King-Hinds (R-Northern Mariana Islands), and Tom Barrett (R-MI) are joining the HVAC as new Republican members. Rep. Hamadeh and Rep. Barrett are veterans.

Sen. Jerry Moran (R-KS) is now the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman and Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) has been selected as the new Ranking Member. Joining the committee as members of the majority are Sens. Jim Banks (R-IN) and Tim Sheehy (R-MT). Sen. Banks is currently serving in the U.S. Navy Reserve and Sen. Sheehy is a veteran. On the minority side, Senators Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Ruben Gallego (D-AZ), and Elissa Slotkin (D-MI) are now members of the committee. Sen. Duckworth and Sen. Gallego are veterans who served in Iraq.

From the President's Desk

by Brad Carlson
NEPVA President

Dear Friends,

2024 was a long and great year for our New England Chapter. With that, I want to reflect a bit about where we have been, where we are now, and where we look forward to going this New Year.

Looking back, I'd like to highlight several areas of success (among many). We held 2 National Boccia Tournaments in partnership with our friends at PVA. Our most recent one was held at the Brockton VA, and it was a smashing success. Having held this tournament previously at the Boston Marriott in Quincy, it was nice to hold it this year with the incredible team, volunteers, and staff at the Brockton VA. We are planning for 2 more tournaments this year. Our Annual Golf Tournament at South Shore Country Club in Hingham, MA was a huge success in that we sold out the entire course and everyone had a fantastic time. For government relations and advocacy work we went on 2 trips to Washington D.C. to advocate for crucial legislative issues that directly affect our members. In part because of our strong Chapter advocacy, the Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improve-

ment Act recently passed. We also held and sponsored Christmas parties at both the West Roxbury and Brockton VA facilities. Carolers at the Brocton VA party were a special treat this year!



I am so happy that we currently have a full Board of Directors who are all talented, supportive, motivated, and are involved for all the right reasons.

In the present, I am so happy that we currently have a full Board of Directors who are all talented, supportive, motivated, and are involved for all the right reasons. Our Board is responsible for the direction and focus of the Chapter in making us a

premier local Veterans Service Organization, and I am so proud of my 8 colleagues on the Board for their self-sacrifice and dedication to growing and expanding our Chapter to make it as strong as possible.

This month Mark Murphy and I travelled up to Vermont and New Hampshire for the Annual Winter Sports Clinic, presented in collaboration with NEHSA and the VA. We presented a check to the VA Healthcare Boston, who help coordinated, run, and financially support this annual event. They were so grateful for our support. The focus of our February CordWord newsletter will showcase more information about the Clinic, including additional pictures. I also would like to share that I recently assigned Chapter Vice-President Mike Moran to serve as our Chapter Sports Director. Mike is excited to take on this new responsibility, and I know he will do a great job.

We have many things on the horizon throughout 2025, too many to mention in this single article. We are currently



Brad presented a check to the VA Healthcare Boston in support of the Winter Sports Clinic.
www.pvanewengland.org

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Reflecting on the 2024 Annual Chapter Christmas Party

By: Mark Murphy, Executive Director

As we wrapped up another year of service and community for the Chapter in December, I want to take a moment to reflect on the warmth, joy, and camaraderie that filled our 2024 annual Christmas party. We did something new and fun this year by hosting the party at a high-end hibachi restaurant. The hibachi feast included an amazing spread of grilled meats, seafood, and fresh vegetables prepared right in front of us by some really talented chefs. Everyone was treated to a feast of savory flavors and sizzling dishes. The chefs also showed some impressive tricks as they wowed the group with their amazing skills, flipping spatulas, tossing shrimp into the air (and into people's mouths!), and creating fire eruptions that had everyone in awe. It was quite an exciting and

entertaining dining experience. The fun atmosphere of the hibachi grill brought everyone together with plenty of laughs, friendly banter, and good-natured teasing between us. It was a perfect way to strengthen team bonds while

One of the most meaningful aspects of the event was seeing so many of our Chapter leaders come together, sharing stories and enjoying each other's company.

enjoying a festive meal.

Our annual Chapter Christmas party is always a special event that brings together our Board of Directors, staff, high-level volunteers, family, and friends for an evening of celebration and gratitude. It is a sterling reminder of the strong and caring community we have built together over the last several years. This year's holiday gathering was

a beautiful testament to the spirit of our Chapter. It was more than just a party; it was an opportunity for all of us to come together and share in the joy of the season. For many of us, the annual Christmas party is one of the highlights of the

entire year - a time to reconnect with friends, make new memories, and simply enjoy a night of relaxation and fun. Attendees were gifted with lovely new Winter

vests, which included the Chapter logo branded on each vest. Chapter President and National Director Brad Carlson did a really great job working to get these lovely vests designed and produced.

The evening was filled with laughter, music, and heartfelt moments. The festive atmosphere was only enhanced by the delicious hibachi food. One of the most meaning-



The Chapter Celebrated the Holidays with patients, volunteers and staff at West Roxbury and Brockton VAs.



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ful aspects of the event was seeing so many of our Chapter leaders come together, sharing stories and enjoying each other's company. It was a reminder that the strength of our chapter lies not just in the programs and services we offer, but in the relationships we build and the support we provide for one another. This sense of community and the feeling of belonging is at the heart of everything we do as a Chapter, especially amongst the joy of the holiday season.



Treasurer, Chuck Houle and wife Eilene.

Board Members, Volunteers and Friends of the Chapter, Gathered to Celebrate the Holidays.



Board Member Dustin Soroka and partner Jessica



Christopher and Board Member Erica Haddad

Sports & Recreation

PVA

Sports and Recreation programs offers over 60 free year-round adaptive sporting and recreational opportunities, benefiting thousands of Veterans and athletes with disabilities nationwide. From bass fishing to wheelchair rugby, our diverse activities promote a healthy and active lifestyle, fostering community and independence.

Join Our PVA Online Fitness Classes: Fitness for Everyone, Anywhere!

Experience the benefits of online fitness from the comfort of your home. Maximize your time and effort to achieve the best results from your workouts. Workouts are adapted to your ability. All experience levels are welcome and can benefit.

Adaptive Strength Training with Jerod Warf

Join instructor Jerod Warf on Mondays at 12:30 PM EST for strength training. This program will focus on developing strong and healthy shoulders to benefit your daily life and longevity.

Adaptive Boxing with Pierre Fallot

Join Pierre Fallot on Thursdays at 1:30 PM EST throughout 2024 for a fun and effective workout that combines strength and cardio training.



Scan the QR code to register for online fitness classes

Benefits of Online Fitness:

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- Increased Strength and Endurance
- Greater Range of Motion, Stress Relief

Following registration and on the morning of class, you will receive a confirmation email with a link to class. Join with a smart phone, tablet or computer that is connected to the internet.

If you do not have a Fitness Waiver and Release signed in the past 12 months, you will receive a release to sign digitally.

We look forward to seeing you in class! If you have any questions or issues with registration or log-on, please contact:

Vickie Lincks
Program Manager, Sports and Recreation
Paralyzed Veterans of America
 202-416-7654
 VickieL@pva.org

Northeast Passage Veteran Recreation

We strive to create an open and welcoming environment for Veterans in all of our programs. Veterans and Active Duty Service Members from all eras and of all ability levels are encouraged to participate in this program. Most options are provided at no cost to Veterans & Members of the Armed Forces through funding from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, a partnership with Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing, Operation Hat Trick and local organizations.

Join Northeast Passage for any of our regularly scheduled Adaptive Sports & Recreation events or check out one of our competitive teams in sled hockey, wheelchair rugby, wheelchair lacrosse or power soccer.

We also have a consistent offering of Veteran specific recreation events throughout the year. Join us, and other local Veterans, for group outings that shift with the seasons.

INDOOR ARCHERY

Rochester, NH

Come join us indoors for some archery range shooting. All levels of experience and ability are welcomed! Shooting distances vary from 9-26 yards. There is also the opportunity to shoot on the range's TechnoHunt center--a virtual shooting range, with games and over 700 hunting scenarios, using your own bow and arrows.

USA Archery certified staff from Northeast Passage will provide instructions and tips to participants as well as equipment needs.

If you have your own equipment, you are welcome to bring it.

Due to high demand and limited space, interested participants can register for three dates and waitlist the remaining dates.

DATES: January 31 (currently full), February 14, February 28, March 14, March 28 from 1:00-3:00PM.



northeastpassage.org

COURT SPORTS

Durham, NH

Come join Northeast Passage at UNH's Hamel Recreation Center for a night of Court Sports. We will provide court wheelchairs, people to fill out teams, and all the equipment needed for the specific games. We usually play wheelchair handball or ultimate frisbee. This program is appropriate for participants of all abilities, ages, and levels of experience.

Wednesdays, February 19, February 26, March 5, March 12, March 26, April 2, April 9, April 16 5:30-7:30PM. There is no fee for these events.

A sampling of the programs Northeast Passage offers to Veterans:

Cycling

Saltwater and freshwater fishing

Fly Fishing/Tying

Indoor rock climbing

Wood carving and art

Water skiing

Kayaking & Paddleboarding

Archery

Bowling

Air Riflery

INDOOR CYCLING

Durham, NH

Come and ride! We will be riding on an indoor track, allowing plenty of space for riders who have ridden with NEP or those who are just getting started. If you don't have a cycle, NEP can provide one--just reach out to discuss what will work best for you.

DATES: Saturday, January 25, Saturday, February 22, and Sunday, March 30 from 10am—12pm. Fees: \$30.00, \$5.00 w/own cycle, \$0.00 for Veterans

Service Officers Report

by Zachary T. Nuetzel
National Service Officer

Hello NEPVA. I hope everyone is having a great New Year. I wanted to follow up on the article from November as part of our ongoing series on the new rule for automobile adaptive equipment(AAE). As previously discussed, the VA has a new interpretation for AAE. The VA is no longer using the VHA Handbook 1173.4. Now, they have implemented 38 CFR 17.156-158. In November I discussed the changes found in 38 CFR 17.158 “ Limitations of Assistance”. This article will focus on another portion of the limitations of assistance, the new “Schedule”.

The VA has now implemented an adaptive equipment schedule. 38 CFR 17.158(b) provides information for the basis for payment or reimbursement. The CFR states “VA will reimburse or pay for adaptive equipment that VA determines is needed in accordance with this section based on the information submitted and the VA Adaptive Equipment Schedule for Automobiles and Other Conveyances (Schedule)”.

What is the Adaptive Equipment Schedule?

The schedule is a list of adaptive equipment and the maximum amount that the VA will reimburse for the listed equipment. The schedule also includes the maximum amount that the VA will pay for hourly labor rates for the installation, repair or replacement of adaptive equipment.

The Schedule can be found at https://www.prosthetics.va.gov/psas/AAE_Schedule.asp. The schedule lists the name of the adaptive equipment and the amount that they will reimburse for the item. For example, if a veteran requires a turn signal extender, the maximum amount that VA will reimburse for the item \$272.00. The max they will reimburse for an in-vehicle platform lift is \$4,746.00. It is important that when veterans are going through the adaptive equipment process that they are aware of these limitations in case the adaptive equipment costs more than the amount that the VA will reimburse. For example, if a veteran requires a Left Foot Accelerator – Electronic, that costs \$2,876.00, the VA will review the schedule and see that the maximum reimbursable rate is \$1,876.00, this would mean that the VA will adjust the \$1,000 difference and the veteran would have to cover the difference.

When the VA receives the itemized invoice, they will review all of the items to ensure that it is both prescribed and meets the maximum allowable rates for reimbursement. If the item exceeds the maximum rate, the prosthetics representative will adjust the amount that will be reimbursed to conform with their schedule. Since the schedule is now in effect, it is important that veterans discuss with their providers and the driving rehab specialists to ensure that they are adhering to new AAE rule and prevent unnecessary delays or fees. If you or a veteran that you know are interested in the automobile grant or adapting the vehicle, or if you have any questions, please feel free to contact your local national service officer.

Happy New Year.

Kindly,

Zachary T. Nuetzel
National Service Officer

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www.pvanewengland.org

...get to know your PVA service officer as they can help you navigate through the questions you may have on disability ratings and navigating the VA system.

Veterans Benefits Improvement Act Signed Into Law

On December 23, 2024, President Biden signed the Veterans Benefits Improvement Act into law. This legislation was originally introduced in the Senate on July 26, 2023, as S. 2513 by Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT). The Veterans Benefits Improvement Act intends to improve the VA's claims and appeals process by temporarily adding three judges to the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, establishing an internship program at the Board of Veterans' Appeals to recruit law school students, improve and modernize the VA's Disability Benefits Questionnaires, and allow VA examination contractors to contact the veteran's accredited representative (in addition to the veteran) when scheduling appointments amongst other issues.

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FY25 EVENT SCHEDULE

Note: ** means this is not a PVA-sponsored event.



February 2025

Bayou Gulf States Bocchia Tournament	February 1-2, 2025	Gulfport, MS
Central Florida Air Gun Tournament	February 8-9, 2025	Orlando, FL
PVA Rugby Invitational	Feb 14-16, 2025	Louisville, KY
Florida Gulf Coast Bowling Tournament	February 16-19, 2025	Tampa, FL

March 2025

Mid-Atlantic Billiards Tournament	March 14-16, 2025	Midlothian, VA
Wisconsin Air Gun Tournament	March 21-22, 2025	Racine, WI
Long Beach Bocchia Tournament	March 29-30, 2025	Long Beach, CA

April 2025

Wheelchair Football Camp	April 3-6, 2025	Birmingham, AL
Citrus Slam Bass Fishing Tournament	April 4-6, 2025	Kissimmee, FL
Pocahontas Off-Road Spring Camp	April 9-13, 2025	Chesterfield, VA
PVA Off-Road Classic Paracycling Race	April 12, 2025	Chesterfield, VA
Mid-America Billiards Tournament	April 10-12, 2025	Oklahoma City, OK
Bluegrass Bash Bass Tournament	April 11-13, 2025	Kuttawa, KY
Texas Bowling Tournament	April 30-May 2, 2025	San Antonio, TX

May 2025

Puerto Rico Year-end Bocchia Tournament	May 3-4, 2025	San Juan, PR
Vaughan Trapshoot Tournament	May 23-25, 2025	Elburn, IL
Texas Air Gun Tournament	May 31-Jun 1, 2025	San Antonio, TX

June 2025

Capital Clash Bass Tournament (Year-end event)	June 13-15, 2025	La Plata, MD
PVA Colonial Pickleball Tournament	June 14-15, 2025	Perry Point, MD
Iowa Trapshoot Tournament	June 20-22, 2025	Cedar Rapids, IA
Teton Outdoor Adventure	June 23-27, 2025	Jackson Hole, WY
PVA Bowling National Championships	June 26-29, 2025	Omaha, NE
Wisconsin Trapshoot Tournament (Year-end Event)	June 27-29, 2025	Green Bay, WI

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President's Report

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rebuilding our newly branded Bass Trail program and are looking to start and launch a brand new Membership Outreach and Support Program. Overall, our Chapter is stronger than ever with room to keep growing. We will keep you updated on the many other plans we are looking forward to this year.

Sincerely,

Brad Carlson
Chapter President and National
Director

VA Publishes Proposed Caregiver Rule

On December 6, 2024, the VA published its much-anticipated proposed rulemaking which would improve the department's Caregiver Programs. The overwhelming majority of their proposed changes would affect the department's current Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC), such as eliminating the onerous requirement that a veteran require assistance with an activity of daily living each time it is performed in order to qualify for the program. Another proposed change expands PCAFC eligibility criteria to include more veterans who have a serious injury or who meet the standards of individual unemployability (IU). Additionally, eligibility for the program would be reassessed every two years, rather than every year, allowing participants to continue receiving services for a longer period of time. Another proposed change would allow VA to conduct home visits via telehealth during any emergency declared by a federal, state, or local authority involving certain safety or public health risk.

VA welcomes your feedback to help them shape the final version of these changes. The public has until February 4 to submit their comments to the proposed rule, which you can find here. PVA has worked with VA over the past few years to develop some of these proposed changes and will submit comments to the department.

Indego® Gets Paralyzed Veterans Walking Again

NEW VA Program offers eligible veterans an Indego® exoskeleton at NO COST!



What's the Indego exoskeleton?

It's an FDA-approved robotic device that enables spinal cord injury patients (level T3-L5) to walk again.

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- ✓ Enjoy eye-level conversations
- ✓ Improve your cardio & bone density



Scan with your mobile phone to receive information or schedule a demonstration.

Contact us today to find out if you are eligible to receive an Indego exoskeleton at no cost.

Phone: 844-846-3346
Email: support.indego@parker.com



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Paralyzed Veterans of America

New England Chapter

The New England Chapter, Paralyzed Veterans of America (New England PVA) is a congressionally chartered veterans service organization founded in 1947 that has developed a unique expertise on a wide variety of issues involving the special needs of our members – veterans of the armed forces who have experienced spinal cord injury or dysfunction.

The New England PVA uses that expertise to be the leading advocate for:

- **Quality health care for our members**
- **Research and education addressing spinal cord injury and dysfunction**
- **Benefits available because of our members' military service**
- **Civil rights and opportunities that maximize the independence of our members**

To enable paralyzed veterans to continue to honor this commitment, we recruit and retain members who have the experience, energy, dedication, and passion necessary to manage the organization and ensure adequate resources to sustain the programs essential for the Chapter to achieve its mission.