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## Caregiver Support Program Update October 25, 2011

### Background:

- VA recognizes the crucial role that Caregivers play in helping Veterans recover from injury and illness and in the daily care of Veterans in the community. VA values the sacrifices Caregivers make to help Veterans remain at home. Caregivers are our partners and we are dedicated to providing them with the support and services that they need.
- The Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010, signed into law by President Obama on May 5, 2010, allows VA to provide unprecedented benefits to Family Caregivers of Veterans. The new Caregiver Law (P.L. 111-163, Title 1) directly benefits Family Caregivers by establishing a comprehensive National Caregiver Support Program with a prevention and wellness focus that includes the use of evidence-based training and support services for Family Caregivers.
- In July, the AARP published a report on caregiving titled "Valuing the Invaluable: 2011 Update, The Growing Contributions and Costs of Family Caregiving." In the report, AARP estimates that in the United States alone, 61.6 million Family Caregivers have provided assistance to family members, neighbors, or friends with one activity of daily living at some point during the past year. The unpaid care they provided had an estimated value of \$450 million in 2009, which is up substantially from AARP's last study, completed in 2007. In the Fall of 2010, the National Alliance of Caregiving published a report on Caregivers of Veterans which allowed insight into the unique challenges of those caring for Veterans. In general, Caregivers of Veterans are more likely to live with the Veteran they care for, provide care for a longer period of time than those caring for non-Veterans, and report higher emotional and physical stress.

### Caregiver Support Coordinators:

- VA has Caregiver Support Coordinators at each VA medical center who serve as the clinical experts on Caregiver issues and are knowledgeable of both VA and non-VA support services and benefits available for Veterans of all eras and their Family Caregivers. Caregiver Support Coordinators can also assist eligible Post 9/11 Veterans and their Caregivers in applying for additional services.

### Caregiver Support Line:

- The VA established a National Caregiver Support Line (855-260-3274) on February 1, 2011 at the Canandaigua Medical Center. This support line is available to respond to



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inquiries about the new Caregiver services associated with Public Law 111-163, Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010, as well as serve as a resource and referral center for Caregivers, Veterans and others seeking Caregiver information; provide referrals to local VA Medical Center Caregiver Support Coordinators and VA/community resources; and provide emotional support.

- As of October 24, 2011, the Caregiver Support Line has received more than 19,000 calls and is averaging 150 calls per day.

#### **Additional Services for Post 9/11 Veterans:**

- The VA began accepting applications for Caregiver stipend and benefits payments by mail, telephone and online May 9. As of October 24, 2011, there have been more than 3,000 applications received. To date, more than 1,300 stipends have been approved with a monthly average payment range of \$1,500- \$1,800, based on the level of the stipend and geographic location of new applicants.
- Family Caregivers who have been approved for the stipend benefit are mostly female (92%). 69% are spouses and 9% are mothers, 28% are 26-40 years old, 34% are 41-64 years old and 34% are 65+ years old.
- VA has partnered with Easter Seals to provide comprehensive Family Caregiver training for eligible Family Caregivers. The first round of training began on June 10. Training is available for Family Caregivers in traditional classroom settings, in a correspondence format, and in an online format. VA is working closely with the Department of Defense and Easter Seals to offer the comprehensive training at Military Treatment Facilities to Family Caregivers of Active Duty Servicemembers.

#### **Caregiver Support Program Website:**

- The VA has created a website dedicated to Family Caregivers, [www.caregiver.va.gov](http://www.caregiver.va.gov). The site provides Caregiver stories, resources, and a zip code look up feature that allows Caregivers to identify their local Caregiver Support Coordinator. The site is averaging over 1,377 visits per day with 3.09 pages viewed per visits, for a total of over 4,250 pages viewed daily.

#### **Peer Support Mentoring Program:**

- The Caregiver Support Program is developing a Peer Support Mentoring Program to decrease the isolation that many Caregivers feel by strengthening interpersonal relationships between Caregivers, providing a more formal support mechanism for social networking, and empowering Caregivers. The Program will provide an opportunity for peer mentors to receive guidance, and to share their experiences, wisdom, skills, and passion with other Caregivers. Caregivers of Veterans of all eras will be eligible to participate in the Program, both as mentors and as mentees. Mentors will receive training before being assigned a mentee and as well as receive ongoing support in this new role.