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SDDVA Secretary Whitlock's January Column – Caregiver Support Program Expands

Caregivers play an important role in the health and well-being of veterans, and their undertakings are often a 24/7 job. We want caregivers for our heroes to know there are improved services and programs to assist them.

Caregivers can be spouses, partners, adult children, parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, in-laws, grandchildren, friends, or neighbors. These caregivers are often forced to put their lives on hold to manage their veterans' healthcare needs, and if you asked them, they would tell you that taking care of their hero is one of the greatest honors they have been given.

Recently, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) expanded the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC). While the specifics can be somewhat complicated, more people who provide critical care to veterans can be eligible for financial and other support through the VA.

The expansion of PCAFC includes eligible veterans that have a single or combined VA service-connected disability rating of 70 percent or higher, regardless of whether it resulted from an injury, illness, or disease. This is a notable change to the definition of serious injury from past regulations and addresses the complexity and expense of keeping veterans at home with their families who provide personalized care.

The expansion of PCAFC will occur in two phases. The first phase has begun and will include eligible veterans who incurred or aggravated a serious injury in the line of duty in the active, military, naval, or air service on or before May 7, 1975. Phase two will go into effect in approximately two years and will include eligible veterans of all eras.

Additionally, the new program changes the stipend payment system, defines new procedures for revocation and discharge, and improves communication between the VA and the caregivers.

All veteran caregivers are encouraged to visit with their local county or tribal veterans service officer about these changes afforded by the PCAFC.

Caregivers can also contact their respective VA Medical Center (Sioux Falls 605-336-3230 – ext. 5080), or (Hot Springs – 605-347-7000 – ext. 17071), or visit:

<https://www.va.gov/family-member-benefits/comprehensive-assistance-for-family-caregivers/>.

Greg Whitlock, Secretary
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs