



FRIENDS OF VA MEDICAL CARE
AND HEALTH RESEARCH

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Washington, D.C

September 3, 2024

The Honorable Kyrsten Sinema
Chairwoman
Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and
Related Agencies Subcommittee

The Honorable John Carter
Chairman
Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and
Related Agencies Subcommittee

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and
Related Agencies Subcommittee

The Honorable Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Ranking Member
Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and
Related Agencies Subcommittee

Dear Senator Sinema, Senator Boozman, Representative Carter, and Representative Wasserman-Schultz,

As members of the Friends of VA Medical Care and Health Research (FOVA) Executive Committee, we are writing to express our growing concern over the impending budget shortfalls within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). These shortfalls pose a significant risk to the critical services and benefits provided to our nation's veterans, particularly those related to the Veterans Health Administration (VHA).

FOVA is a diverse coalition representing nearly 80 national academic, medical, and scientific societies, voluntary health and patient advocacy groups; and veteran-focused associations. FOVA organizations work in concert with the Independent Budget veterans service organizations to advocate for continued, necessary funding for the research and health programs that serve the nation's veterans.

Since the PACT Act was signed into law in August 2022, the VA has made remarkable strides in delivering benefits to more veterans and survivors than ever before. This has included the approval of over one million PACT Act-related claims, a record outreach campaign in FY 2023, and the disbursement of more than \$112 billion in earned benefits to veterans and survivors in 2024 alone. These achievements underscore the VA's commitment to meeting the needs of our veterans; however, they also highlight the increasing demand and pressure on VA resources. The VHA has been at the forefront of these efforts, providing over 120 million healthcare appointments in FY 2023 and anticipating an even higher number by the end of FY 2024. The number of veterans enrolling in VA healthcare has surged, with over 710,000 new enrollees since the PACT Act was enacted. Despite these successes, the VHA is facing a projected shortfall of nearly **\$12 billion** in 2025 due to factors such as increased staff levels, rising costs of pharmaceuticals and prosthetic devices, and the growing utilization of community care.

The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) also faces significant challenges. With the unprecedented volume of claims and the impact of recent court decisions expanding benefits eligibility, the VBA projects substantial funding gaps that threaten timely compensation and pension payments to over 7 million veterans and survivors, as well as readjustment benefit payments to over 500,000 individuals.

The potential consequences of these budget shortfalls are dire. Without sufficient funding, the VA may be unable to meet its obligations, resulting in delayed payments and services that our veterans rely on. This not only undermines the VA's mission but also jeopardizes the well-being of those who have served our country.

We urge Congress to prioritize a robust allocation of resources to the VA, ensuring that the VHA and VBA have the necessary funding to continue delivering essential services and benefits to our veterans. It is imperative that Congress ensures predictable and sustainable funding for veteran research, medical care, and benefits programs to honor the sacrifices of our nation's heroes.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. We look forward to working with you all.

Sincerely,

The FOVA Executive Committee

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Paralyzed Veterans of America

Gary Ewart

American Thoracic Society

Andrew Herrin

Association of American Medical Colleges

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