

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



Fact Sheet: VA and Spinal Cord Injury

January 2009

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Of the **more than 250,000 Americans with serious spinal cord injuries** and disorders, **about 42,000 are veterans eligible** for medical care and other benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Many veterans with spinal cord injuries qualify for disability compensation because their health problems occurred during military service. Veterans with spinal cord injuries unrelated to their military service may receive VA medical care under rules governing veterans with catastrophic disabilities or low incomes. Among health care workers and veterans' advocates, spinal cord injuries are commonly referred to by the acronym SCI.

What Is SCI?

The spinal cord is the main pathway for transmitting information between the brain and the nerves that lead to muscles, skin, internal organs and glands. Injury to the spinal cord disrupts movement, sensation and function. Paraplegia results from injury to the lower part of the spinal cord, causing paralysis of the lower part of the body, including the bowel and bladder. Tetraplegia (sometimes called quadriplegia) results from injury to the spinal cord in the neck area, causing paralysis to the lower body, upper body and arms. SCI requires ongoing management of impairments and prevention of related problems.

Compensation

Veterans with SCI may receive up to \$2,673 in monthly disability compensation. They may receive additional compensation if the injury resulted in loss of use of hands or feet or in other disabilities. The rating may include other service-connected disabilities not related to their spinal injury. Many veterans with service-connected disabilities are also entitled to vocational counseling, grants for adapted housing and automobiles, a clothing allowance and payment for home and attendant care.

Health Care for Veterans with SCI

VA has the largest single network of SCI care in the nation. It provided a full range of care to **nearly 26,000 veterans with spinal cord injuries and disorders in 2008 and SCI specialty care to about 13,000** of these veterans. A study conducted by a major consulting firm in 2000 comparing VA's SCI services to those funded by several private and public health insurers showed that VA's coverage was more comprehensive. VA integrates vocational, psychological and social services within a continuum of care and addresses changing needs throughout the veteran's life. VA provides supplies, preventive health care and education for veterans with SCI. VA also maintains medical equipment.

The average age of a person at the time of injury is increasing, as the general age of the population of the United States has increased. VA's system of care provides a coordinated lifelong continuum of services for eligible veterans with SCI of all ages, including emergency care, medical and surgical stabilization, rehabilitation, primary care, preventive care, specialty sustaining care, surgical care, outpatient care, home care and long-term care. VA's SCI specialty care focuses on the prevention or early detection of complications of SCI, with multidisciplinary teams providing annual comprehensive evaluations.

VA services are delivered through a "hub and spoke" system of care, extending from **24 regional SCI centers** offering primary and specialty care by multidisciplinary teams to the **134 SCI primary care teams or support clinics at local VA medical centers**. Each primary care team has a physician, nurse and social worker, and those with support clinics may have additional team members. Newly injured veterans and active-duty members are referred to a VA SCI center for rehabilitation after being stabilized at a trauma center. Each year, approximately 450 newly injured veterans and active-duty members receive rehabilitation at VA's SCI centers.

The 24 VA SCI centers are at the following locations: Long Beach, Palo Alto and San Diego, Calif.; Miami and Tampa, Fla.; Augusta, Ga.; Hines, Ill.; West Roxbury, Mass.; Minneapolis; St. Louis; East Orange, N.J.; Albuquerque, N.M.; Bronx and Castle Point, N.Y.; Cleveland; San Juan, P.R.; Memphis, Tenn.; Dallas, Houston and San Antonio, Texas; Hampton and Richmond, Va; Seattle; and Milwaukee.

The SCI center nearest to a veteran can provide the name of the SCI coordinator in the SCI primary care team at the nearest VA facility.

Research

VA leads the health care profession in defining new methods of rehabilitation through research and engineering. In addition to receiving direct funding for spinal-cord research from VA, investigators at VA medical centers are supported by organizations such as the **National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, United Spinal Association** and **Paralyzed Veterans of America**. VA research on SCI focuses on areas such as functional electrical stimulation, wheelchair and other adaptive technology, cell transplantation, treatment of medical complications of SCI, and rehabilitation methods and outcomes.

National Recreational Events

Staying active is as important to the physical and emotional well-being of people with SCI as it is to other people. VA sponsors three annual athletic events that offer camaraderie with other SCI veterans and the opportunity to enjoy and participate in competitive sports. These are the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, which is cosponsored with the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, cosponsored with the Disabled American Veterans, and the National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic.

Bringing Research to Treatment

In the late 1990s, VA began a special effort to identify gaps in knowledge about SCI treatment and to share findings with its clinicians nationwide. The goal is to improve the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of care by translating research findings into improved care.

VA is one of 20 professional organizations in the Consortium for Spinal Cord Medicine, which was founded by PVA to develop guidelines to improve care for all Americans with SCI. The Consortium represents health care providers, consumers and insurers and has disseminated clinical practice guidelines. Among them are guidelines for preventing skin breakdown and blood clots in legs. One result expected from using the guidelines is more consistent treatment and

greater awareness by veterans of how to care for themselves.

VA clinicians nationwide have access to a computer database for sharing treatment and outcome information that enhances the coordination of health care. This registry also helps make referrals to treatment locations.

Continuing Education

In addition to identifying research on the best approaches to treatment, VA continually strives to improve its expertise. The **Rehabilitation Accreditation Commission**, the standard-setting and accrediting authority for organizations providing rehabilitation services, **has accredited 20 VA SCI centers** that provide acute rehabilitation.

Thirteen of these centers are training sites certified by the Accreditation Council on Graduate Medical Education, which accredits post-graduate medical training programs in the United States. All VA physicians can take an independent study course on medical care for people with SCI. Two SCI training programs are held annually for VA health care professionals.

For veterans, VA prepared a guide published by PVA that explains how to handle problems and where to turn for help. It is called **"Yes, You Can!"** and is available at VA's SCI Centers and from PVA.

VA Regional SCI Centers

State	Address	Telephone Number
California	VA Long Beach 5901 E. 7 th St. , CA 90822	(562) 826-5701
California	VA Palo Alto Health Care System 3801 Miranda Ave. Palo Alto, CA 94304	(650) 493-3000 ext.65870
California	VA San Diego Health Care System 3350 La Jolla Village Drive San Diego, CA 92161	(858) 642-3117
Florida	VA Medical Center 1201 NW 16 th St. , FL 33125	(305) 575-3174
Florida	James A. Haley 13000 Bruce B. Downs Blvd. Tampa, FL 33612	(813) 972-7517
Georgia	Augusta VA Medical Center , GA 30904	(706) 823-2216
Illinois	Edward Hines VA Hospital 5 th & Roosevelt Rd. PO Box 5000-5128 Hines, IL 60141	(708) 202-2241
Massachusetts	VA Boston Healthcare System Brockton/West Roxbury Campuses 1400 VFW Parkway West Roxbury, MA 02132	(857) 203-5128
Minnesota	Minneapolis VAMC , MN 55417	(612) 467-3707
Missouri	Jefferson Barracks Division, . St Louis, MO 63125	(314) 894-6677
New Jersey	VA New Jersey Healthcare System 385 Tremont Ave. East Orange, NJ 07018	(973) 676-1000 ext. 11302
New Mexico	VA Medical Center 1501 San Pedro SE Albuquerque, NM 87108	(505) 256-2849
New York	VA Medical Center 130 West Kingsbridge Rd Bronx, NY 10468	(718) 584-9000 ext. 5423
New York	VA Healthcare System Castle Point, NY 12511	(845) 831-2000 ext. 5128
Ohio	VA Medical Center 10701 East Blvd. Cleveland, Ohio 44106	(216) 791-3800 ext. 5219
Tennessee	VA Medical Center 1030 Jefferson Ave. Memphis, TN 38104	(901) 577-7373
Texas	VA Medical Center 4500 South Lancaster Rd Dallas, TX 75216	(214) 857-1757
Texas	VA Medical Center 2002 Holcombe Blvd.	(713) 794-7128

	Houston, TX 77030	
Texas	South Texas Veterans Health Care System Houston, TX 78229	(210) 617-5257
Virginia	VA Medical Center 100 Emancipation Drive Hampton, VA 23667	(757) 722-9961
Virginia	Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center 1201 Broad Rock Blvd. Richmond, VA 23249	(804) 675-5282
Washington	VA Puget Sound Health Care System 1660 South Columbian Way Seattle, WA 98108	(206) 764-2332
Wisconsin	Clement J. Zablocki Medical Center 5000 W. National Ave. Milwaukee, WI 53295	(414) 384-2000 ext. 41288
Puerto Rico	VA Medical Center #10 Casia Street San Juan, PR 00921	(787) 641-7582

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