

**STATEMENT OF  
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BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES SENATE  
ON  
"STRENGTHENING SERVICES FOR VETERANS WITH  
SPINAL CORD INJURY AND DISORDER"**

**SEPTEMBER 17, 2025**

Good afternoon, Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Blumenthal, and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. Joining me is Dr. Manosha Wickremasinghe, Executive Director of VA's Spinal Cord Injuries and Disorders (SCI/D) System of Care. Together, our mission is to address not just the immediate needs, but also the long-term challenges and opportunities facing the Veteran community affected by SCI/D.

**Overview of Comprehensive Care**

As we recognize the unique and evolving needs of Veterans living with SCI/D, our response continues to center on specialized, comprehensive care. These complex conditions require individualized approaches, and our commitment is to leverage the full depth of VA resources and compassionate expertise to optimize the quality of life for all Veterans.

VA's SCI/D System of Care is the Nation's largest, most comprehensive integrated health care system dedicated to treating individuals with SCI/D. VA has 25 SCI/D Centers (also known as Hubs), which offer primary and specialty care provided by specialized interdisciplinary teams. These SCI/D Centers work closely with other designated VA medical facilities that do not have SCI/D Centers (called Spoke

facilities). Our Hub and Spoke system enhance the health, well-being, functionality, and quality of life for over 24,000 Veterans. Spoke facilities, aligned with specific Hubs, expand access to SCI/D-informed care Nationwide.

The Veteran is central to all that we do, and we strive to provide care that considers the whole person. We work as interdisciplinary teams to provide acute rehabilitation, specialized medical management, primary and preventive care, respite care, and long-term support. Annual comprehensive evaluations focus on health promotion, complication prevention, and early intervention--addressing the evolving needs related to SCI/D at any age.

### **Supporting Community Independence**

To support Veterans in their communities, our SCI/D System of Care includes the SCI/D Home Care Program. Members of interdisciplinary teams are available to support the transition and health care needs of Veterans with SCI/D in the home or community setting. In addition to the SCI/D Home Care Program, the VA SCI/D System of Care leverages home- and community-based services such as Skilled Home Health Care, Homemaker/Home Health Aide, and/or Veteran-Directed Care to ensure eligible Veterans receive care comfortably within their home and/or community.

Recent legislative progress, including the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act (P.L. 118-210), has enabled VA to expand support for Veterans facing complex medical conditions. For example, section 120 of P.L. 118-210 raises the maximum per-Veteran expenditure for home- and community-based services from 65% to 100% of Community Living Center costs, which can now be applied to diagnoses such as SCI/D. These changes directly translate into expanded options for home-based care and greater financial flexibility.

### **Addressing Challenges for Aging Veterans**

As the Vietnam-era Veteran cohort continues to age, the complexity of their care needs increase. In response, VA is working to expand SCI/D long-term care capacity with two funded construction projects at VA North Texas Health Care System (HCS) and VA San Diego Healthcare System, both of which have existing SCI/D acute and

sustaining centers. Once completed, this will bring the total number of VA SCI/D long-term care centers to eight. Notably, these dedicated SCI/D long-term care facilities are unique to VA. Ensuring the availability of high-quality, long-term care for Veterans with SCI/D is a prominent challenge—one which remains central in our resource allocation and planning.

With treatment advances extending life expectancy, many Veterans live decades with SCI/D, encountering age-related challenges layered on to their original disabilities. VA leads the Nation in adopting the Age-Friendly Health Systems model, which promotes evidence-based practices aligned with what matters most to Veterans and their caregivers.

### **Advancing Accessibility and Technology**

Removing barriers for Veterans with SCI/D requires ongoing investments in adaptive equipment and technology. In fiscal year 2024, VA processed more than 5,000 claims for vehicle conversions, hand controls, and entry/exit ramps, empowering safe and independent mobility for eligible Veterans with service-connected disabilities.

Additionally, VA's SCI/D System of Care and Office of Advanced Manufacturing have partnered to ensure Veterans have access to cutting-edge manufacturing technologies, such as 3D printing, in health care. These technologies allow for faster innovation and improved access to personalized health care solutions for Veterans.

### **Continuous Quality Improvement**

VA's SCI/D System of Care maintains a strong tradition of continuous quality improvement and performance measurement. Recent initiatives have modernized outcome measurement and reporting by adopting Section GG from the Inpatient Rehabilitation Facilities Patient Assessment Instrument, a nationally recognized tool that tracks changes in mobility and self-care independence.

Additionally, VA has developed standardized documentation for the Functional Mobility Assessment (FMA), in collaboration with the original creators of FMA from the University of Pittsburgh. This measure allows VA to evaluate Veteran satisfaction with wheeled mobility devices.

Standardized clinical documentation and data reporting tools provide actionable insights to clinicians and leaders, supporting transparent communication and ongoing care improvements. These efforts also facilitate the transition to VA's new Oracle Health electronic health record system.

## **Conclusion**

Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Blumenthal, this concludes my testimony. VA's SCI/D System of Care is committed to continuing to deliver high-quality, evidence-based care, ensuring Veterans receive the care and support they deserve. My colleagues and I are prepared to answer any questions you may have.