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VETERANS' AFFAIRS

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510–4704

November 19, 2026

The Honorable Doug Collins
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Collins:

I am writing to express concern regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Caregiver Support Program (CSP) and its ability to connect eligible caregivers with life-saving mental health resources. As you know, there are over 14 million military and veteran caregivers in the United States. These caregivers perform essential duties every day for their loved ones, but unfortunately, these tasks can be burdensome over time. Multiple studies have shown that caregivers, especially those of post-9/11 veterans, experience tolls on their own well-being while providing for a loved one. In one study, 84 percent of caregivers of post-9/11 veterans experienced high levels of stress, and one-third met the criteria for clinical depression.[1]

In accordance with the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010, CSP must provide various types of support to caregivers of veterans, including the toll-free Caregiver Support Line, mental health treatment, and support groups.[2] In Fiscal Year (FY) 2025, CSP served about 98,000 caregivers, and the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) obligated $2.6 billion to implement the program. In FY 2026, I worked to secure $3.5 billion for VA's Caregiver Program and for FY 2027, the Department is requesting $3.6 billion to support anticipated enrollment growth.

Despite an increase in enrollment and funding requested, CSP is facing challenges in providing mental health resources to caregivers. In FY 2024, VA reduced the number of full-time Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) employees by 6 percent. That

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[1] Ramchand, R., Dalton, S., Dubowitz, T., Hyde, K., Malika, N., Morral, A. R., Ohana, E., Parks, V., Schell, T. L., Swabe, G., Trail, T. E., & Williams, K. M. (2024). *America's military and veteran caregivers: Hidden heroes emerging from the shadows* (RR-A3212-1). RAND Corporation. RAND Report

[2] Jennings, A. M. (2023, May 9). *History of the Veterans Affairs Caregiver Support Program*. Social Welfare History Project, Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries. https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/federal/history-of-the-veterans-administration-caregiver-support-program/ (socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu)

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same year, the Caregiver Support Line (CSL), which provides information to caregivers, veterans, and community partners, experienced an increased wait time from 16 seconds in FY24 to 120 seconds in FY25. Furthermore, CSL staff answered 91 percent of the calls in FY 2025, a 6 percent decrease from FY 2024.

Not only are caregivers experiencing challenges accessing mental health services through CSP, but according to a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report released in April 2026, many caregivers are not aware of the mental health support available through the program and reported challenges accessing both virtual and in-person therapy appointments. GAO found that these challenges are, in part, related to VA's inadequate outreach efforts. Specifically, GAO found that CSP only partially implemented key performance management practices to achieve outreach goals and lacked definitions and clear objectives to increase the utilization of the program. In addition, the goals that VHA did create were based on anecdotal feedback instead of quantitative data.[3]

VA's own reporting to Congress reinforces these concerns. Although the Department's annual report on the PFAFC provides detailed information on application volumes, reassessments, and appeals, it offers little insight into whether caregivers are aware of or successfully accessing the mental health resources available through the broader CSP. Instead, the report focuses primarily on administrative outputs rather than performance measures that would help Congress evaluate caregiver awareness, utilization of mental health services, or the overall effectiveness of the program.

It is imperative that caregivers receive the support they need, and the first step to achieving this is ensuring that VA is implementing the programs with clear, objective goals and is taking steps to educate caregivers on the resources available to them. To address these concerns, please answer the following questions by December 18, 2026:

1. How does VA currently measure caregiver awareness of the CSP and the mental health resources available through the program? Please describe the data collected, performance measures used, and any baseline metrics. In addition, please identify the metrics VA uses to measure progress toward each goal.
2. How does VA evaluate the effectiveness and quality of the mental health services offered through CSP? Please identify the outcome measures VA uses to assess whether these services are improving caregivers' mental health and well-being and how VA uses performance data to evaluate the effectiveness of the program's outreach and service delivery.
3. VA's annual report to Congress on the PCAFC primarily reports application, reassessment, and appeals data. Does VA intend to include additional performance measures in future reports related to caregiver awareness, utilization of mental health resources, and program outcomes? If so, please describe those planned metrics and the anticipated implementation timeline.
4. How does VA distinguish between measures of CSP operational efficiency—such as application processing times, caseloads, and wellness contacts—and measures of

[3] U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2026, April 16). VA health care: Efforts to assess mental health support for veteran caregiver program need strengthening (GAO-26-108070). https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-26-108070

program effectiveness, such as caregiver awareness, utilization, access, and outcomes related to mental health services?

As VA continues to expand the CSP, it is critical that caregivers are not only aware of the resources available to them, but also that these resources are effective in addressing their mental health needs. Thank you for your attention to this important matter, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Patty Murray
United States Senator