

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 17, 2021

The Honorable Denis McDonough
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough:

We are requesting you provide a path forward for caregivers of disabled veterans to receive a COVID-19 vaccine, regardless of the veteran's service-connected disability rating. Caregivers to our veterans likely pose the highest risk of being a COVID-19 carrier that could expose veterans to this pandemic. Unfortunately, vaccines for caregivers of veterans is limited in scope.

We are grateful for the efforts that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has already taken in combatting the spread of COVID-19, including the VA January 15th, 2021 decision to provide vaccines to caregivers of veterans in the Comprehensive Caregiver Program.ⁱ Caregivers play a critical role in caring for some of our most vulnerable veterans. However, the current policy limits vaccine distribution to only the caregivers who care for a veteran with a VA disability rating (individual or combined) of 70% or higher.ⁱⁱ

Currently, the Comprehensive Caregiver Program is open to those providing long-term care to a veteran with a 70% or higher service-connected disability rating. In 2019, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics released a report that found that 4.7 million veterans, or 25% of the veteran population, had a service-connected disability; and, surveys show over half of these veterans require some amount of help from a caregiver regardless of their service-connected disability.ⁱⁱⁱ Fewer than 40,000 caregivers are enrolled in the Comprehensive Caregiver Program, meaning the majority of veterans caregivers are not eligible to receive a vaccine through this program.^{iv}

With COVID-19 continuing to spread rapidly across the country, many veterans remain at high risk of infection. While these veterans will likely qualify for early vaccination at the VA, their caregivers will not. This is why we are requesting the VA expand vaccine distribution to all family caregivers of disabled veterans - regardless of the veteran's services connected disability.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.



Cindy Axne
Member of Congress



Jeff Fortenberry
Member of Congress

ⁱ <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2021/01/14/tens-of-thousands-of-veteran-caregivers-now-eligible-for-the-coronavirus-vaccine-through-va/>

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

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/vet.pdf>

^{iv} <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2019/04/11/here-are-12-big-changes-veterans-caregivers-will-see-in-the-next-year/>