

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me the opportunity to testify today.

Parkinson's Disease is a progressive neurological disease that can rapidly affect quality of life.

It currently affects almost one million Americans.

The Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that 110,000 veterans have been diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. While the precise causes of Parkinson's are unknown, many veterans developed the disease after exposure to Agent Orange and other chemicals while serving our country.

There is no cure for Parkinson's. While medications can help slow the disease's progress, treatment options are limited.

But we do know that one of the most effective tools against Parkinson's isn't a medication at all – it's exercise.

And while there are many different types of exercise that have been shown to be effective against Parkinson's, patients in Western New York in my district are finding that boxing has been particularly helpful in slowing – or even reversing – the effects of their illness.

Unfortunately, boxing training and classes remain inaccessible for many Parkinson's patients, including many veterans.

For example, my constituent, Dr. Pat Welch, a retired Marine Corps veteran, was recently diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease as a result of his exposure to Agent Orange during his service in Vietnam.

Dr. Welch's physician recommended that he seek therapy at Parkinson's Boxing, a boxing gym in Buffalo, New York. This gym is dedicated to offering boxing therapy to people with Parkinson's.

Their training protocol has been developed for those with Parkinson's, and they have seen remarkable results with patients of all ages and at all stages of the disease.

Parkinson's Boxing's program has even been endorsed by the Director of the Movement Disorders Clinic at the VA Western New York Healthcare System.

My predecessor, former Congressman Jack Quinn and his brother, have spoken publicly of the benefits of boxing to alleviate symptoms associated with Parkinson's.

Yet, even amidst all of this evidence, the VA would not cover the cost of Dr. Welch's therapy because "Parkinson's boxing is not recognizable as a billable service."

Mr. Chair, I strongly believe veterans should be able to seek care at facilities like Parkinson's Boxing as a covered VA benefit.

The VA acknowledges the benefits of exercise on Parkinson's Disease, we must not allow red tape to get in the way of veterans' ability to access the therapy they need.

I urge this committee to consider this matter further, and I look forward to working with you on ways we can make innovative treatments for diseases like Parkinson's accessible for all veterans.

Thank you, and I yield back.