

**STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON
PUSHING VA FORWARD: REVIEW OF VA'S
ADAPTATIVE PROGRAMS FOR DISABLED VETERANS**

MAY 21, 2025

Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Pappas, and other members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss how VA fulfills the Nation's promise to care for Veterans through the administration of adaptive programs. To maximize Veteran independence when performing daily tasks or participating in therapeutic activities, VA provides Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) assistance, Home Improvements and Structural Alterations (HISA) benefits, Automobile Adaptive Equipment (AAE), and the Adaptive Sports Grant Program (ASGP). Joining me today is Dr. Joel Scholten, Executive Director, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Service, and Jason Latona, Assistant Director, Loan Guaranty Service, Veterans Benefits Administration.

SAH Grant Program

The SAH grant program administers several types of grants for eligible Veterans and Service members under 38 U.S.C. Ch. 21. The program assists eligible individuals in acquiring adapted housing made necessary by their service-connected disability. VA also provides SAH assistance if an adapted home has been destroyed or significantly damaged by a natural disaster.

VA's approach to the SAH grant program is individualized. Congress set the maximum aggregate amount of assistance for each grant type and directed VA to adjust

these amounts annually in accordance with increases in the residential home cost-of-construction index. An assigned VA SAH agent guides the eligible individual and their family through the home adaptation process to meet the individual's unique needs. The individual ultimately contracts with the builders of their choice, and SAH grant program staff use their expertise in home adaptations to ensure the-project is completed and is consistent with applicable statutes and the individual's adaptive housing needs.

The SAH grant program has approved more than 2,000 grant awards annually for 6 of the last 7 fiscal years (FY). VA anticipates similar or higher usage levels in the future. As of the end of March, 1,643 SAH grants have been approved \$ 85 million in FY 2025.

Improving Benefits Delivery through Modernization

To continue delivering world-class customer service to Veterans and Service members, VA has initiated a multi-year project to modernize the SAH case management system. The modernized system will use automation to streamline the delivery of benefits to eligible individuals. The upgraded tool will also improve VA oversight by allowing for enhanced monitoring of the grant process from initial application to compliance inspection upon completion of work. The implementation of the modernized SAHSHA system will be conducted in phases; the first phase is expected to begin in July 2025.

Eliminating Fraud, Waste, and Abuse

The individualized attention given to each SAH grantee ensures there is a high degree of oversight on each award. In FY 2020, VA implemented a new financial process to manage SAH grant program disbursements using centralized VA financial staff, rather than third-party escrow agents. This change strengthened VA's internal controls and improved overall project management capabilities for SAH grant program staff. These oversight measures resulted in improved home adaptation delivery and payment timelines, reducing overall project timelines by days or weeks, and eased

Veteran financial burdens by eliminating a third-party escrow fee of approximately \$500 per project.

Home Improvements and Structural Alterations

The VA HISA benefit, under 38 U.S.C. § 1717, provides financial assistance to disabled Veterans eligible for medical services under 38 U.S.C. § 1710(a) who require modifications to their primary residence. Service members undergoing medical discharge from the Armed Forces for a permanent disability that was incurred or aggravated in the line of duty in the active military, naval, air, or space service are also eligible for the HISA benefit. HISA projects are prescribed by a VHA clinician and medically justified based on the Veteran or Service member's clinical needs that support the type of home improvement or structural alterations being prescribed. These medically necessary improvements or structural alterations allow for continued home health treatment of the Veteran or Service member's disability and maximize the Veteran's or Service member's access to the home and independence while performing daily tasks within their homes. HISA benefits and lifetime payments are approved and processed in accordance with 38 C.F.R. §§ 17.3100 through 17.3130.

Automobile Adaptive Equipment Benefit

The VA AAE program, under the authority of 38 U.S.C. §§ 3901-3903 and 38 C.F.R. §§ 17.155-17.159, reimburses or pays for adaptive equipment for eligible Veterans and active-duty members of the Armed Forces who have certain disabilities. AAE is prescribed by a VHA physician or Certified Drivers Rehabilitation Specialist. VA is authorized to prescribe and reimburse or pay for operational and non-operational equipment, but VA does not modify, install, repair, or replace the AAE. VA works directly with AAE dealers, modifiers, and alterers to ensure all prescribed, necessary adaptive equipment enable the Veteran to safely drive or ride as a passenger in their personal vehicles. Examples of AAE include low-effort or sensitized steering; electronic accelerator and brakes; mechanical hand controls for accelerator and brakes; wheelchair tie downs; vehicle lifts; tilt steering wheels; voice command systems; raised roofs and doors; and tinted windows for burn injury disabilities. In FY 2025 through

March 31, 2025, VA has provided AAE to 1,181 Veterans. The total value of that benefit is \$31,928,405, and the average award is \$27,035

ASGP

VA also manages the ASGP, which provides Veterans and members of the Armed Forces with disabilities access to sports and equine therapy to encourage a healthy and active lifestyle. As provided by 38 C.F.R. Part 77, VA awards grants to non-Federal Government entities with significant experience in managing a large-scale adaptive sport program. In FY 2024, VA's ASGP awarded 91 individual grants, totaling \$15.9 million in awarded funds. Organizations funded through VA's ASGP currently provide resources for more than 15,000 Veterans and members of the Armed Forces.

Conclusion

In conclusion, VA will continue to provide the Nation's Veterans with efficient, effective, and meaningful programs centered on meeting their adaptive needs. Thank you for your continued support of our programs and for this opportunity to speak today. This concludes my testimony, and we welcome any questions that you or other Members of the Subcommittee may have.