ABOUT CAREGIVERS

• Every day, about 62 million Americans provide long-term in-home care to a loved one or friend.

• The demands of caregiving leave many caregivers anxious, depressed, or susceptible to chronic illness themselves.

• In 2010, President Obama signed legislation authorizing VA to establish a wide range of new services to support certain caregivers of eligible Veterans who served after Sept. 11, 2001.

• Caregivers for Veterans can access a toll-free caregiver support line (1-855-260-3274), expanded education and training on caring for Veterans at home, and other support services such as counseling and support groups.

SELECTED MILESTONES AND MAJOR EVENTS

2007 – REACH VA (Resources for Enhancing Alzheimer’s Caregiver Health) program introduced

2009 – VA FACES study begun, to help researchers understand more about the needs of caregivers for Veterans with traumatic brain injuries and polytrauma

2009 – Development of VA Family Care Map, to ensure family members are fully involved in the care of veterans with polytrauma

2010 – Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act becomes law

2011 – VA’s National Caregiver Support Line established

RECENT STUDIES: SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS

• To educate and support caregivers of Veterans with Alzheimer’s disease and help them develop better caregiving skills, VA researchers worked with the National Institutes of Health and several universities to develop and test a six-month training program called REACH VA. Investigators with the Memphis VA Medical Center found caregivers completing the program reported a significantly decreased burden, less depression, and fewer frustrations. The number of troubling dementia-related behaviors of their loved ones also decreased. (Archives of Internal Medicine, Feb. 28, 2011)

• Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is strongly linked to problems with intimate relationships. Researchers at the Boston VA Healthcare System and a university research center in Toronto found a 15-session therapy program for couples in which one partner had PTSD not only improved outcomes for those with PTSD, but also helped their partners, who often experience caregiver burden and emotional distress. (Journal of the American Medical Association, Aug. 15, 2012)

• Veterans with mild traumatic brain injury (TBI) have difficulty adjusting to life back home—and their families have difficulties as well. A study by researchers in the Durham, N.C., and Bronx VA medical centers found that group therapy for Veterans and their family members together makes it easier for Veterans to share their experiences, and to integrate the family into patient care. (Psychiatric Services, June 2013)

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VA researchers are developing resources caregivers need to improve Veterans' health, and also helping caregivers look after their own health and well-being.