



March 4, 2024

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Johnson  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Johnson and Minority Leader Jeffries:

On behalf of the undersigned veterans' groups, advocates for older adults, including those living with Alzheimer's and related dementia, and the leading senior living industry organizations, we write to express our support for S. 495 and H.R. 1815, the "Expanding Veterans' Options for Long Term Care Act" and urge you to prioritize its inclusion in the next major legislative vehicle.

The proposed bi-partisan 3-year pilot program to assess the effectiveness of providing eligible veterans the option to live and be cared for in an assisted living community is an economically sound and sensible approach to demonstrate the benefits of this setting to not only the resident veteran, but to their families, friends and fellow veterans.

Assisted living aims to offer the best of personal and supportive care services with a team of professionals in a home environment where individuals can continue to live a meaningful life that provides compassionate care, promotes social engagement, ensures balanced nutrition and overall wellbeing. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has acknowledged the challenges relative to the aging veteran population and the need and value of rebalancing its long-term care programs. This legislation gives the department the authority to do that by offering additional options.

### **Aging Demographics Demand Additional Long-Term Care Options**

The timing is right for such action given what we know about aging and the increasing demand for supportive services.

- As reported by the VA, the fastest growing segment of the Veteran population are those veterans over the age of 85. Further, the number of veterans eligible for nursing home care will increase 535%, from 62,000 to 387,000, over the next 20 years. The current costs to the VA for

nursing home care alone are not sustainable. Assisted living offers significant cost savings for those who don't require a high level of medical care.

- A 65-year-old today has almost a 70% chance of needing some type of long-term care services and supports in their remaining years and will need it for an average of 3 years. Twenty percent are projected to need long-term care for five years or more.
- For those who will need long-term care, they will on average incur \$138,000 for these services. These projections are especially concerning for those seniors who are unprepared financially. Nearly 4 in 10 mistakenly expect to rely on Medicare to pay for their long-term care needs and 1 in 3 have done little to no planning for their own care needs.

Simply put, people are living longer, most of them will need care outside the home, and veterans, much like the rest of the older population, need options.

### **Broad Support for an Assisted Living Pilot Program for Veterans**

As you can see from the many signatories to this letter, there is much support for this legislation, from those who serve our country to those who serve our aging Americans and those who are seeking solutions to the growing need for care in an aging population. The pilot is carefully defined to include communities in VISNs where there are large veteran populations, in rural or highly rural areas, and in state veterans nursing homes. It authorizes the VA to support assisted living programs for aging and disabled veterans who would otherwise require more expensive nursing home care and gives veterans more options for how and where they can get the long-term care they need. It provides VA the critical flexibility to address the needs of a rapidly growing population of aging or disabled veterans who are not able to live at home and future costs savings will help more veterans receive the assistance they need.

As indicated above, the VA acknowledges the need to address the growing long term care needs of our nation's veterans and in congressional testimony on this legislation, has expressed support. America's veterans who defended our country deserve a choice in where they receive their care and the dignity to live as independently as possible, while still having 24/7 access to care.

We thank you for your work in taking bold action to improve the lives of our nation's veterans at a time when they need it the most. We are confident that this pilot will demonstrate, both quantitatively and qualitatively, the benefits of assisted living for veterans and their families and hope this will lead to other innovative approaches to serving older adults in need of supportive services.

We strongly encourage your support to move this important legislation forward.

Sincerely,

AARP  
Alzheimer's Association  
Alzheimer's Impact Movement  
American Seniors Housing Association  
Argentum  
CEAL@UNC  
DAV

Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America  
LeadingAge  
National Association of State Veterans Homes  
National Center for Assisted Living  
National Rural Health Association  
Paralyzed Veterans of America

CC: Sen. Jon Tester, Chair, Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee  
Sen. Jerry Moran, Ranking Member, Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee  
Rep. Mike Bost, Chair, House Veterans' Affairs Committee  
Rep. Mark Takano, Ranking Member, House Veterans' Affairs Committee