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OCTOBER 2025 VOL. 79 NO. 10

ON THE COVER

Jesse Lind, right, with his son, Julian, accepts the Spirit of the Games award at July's National Veterans Wheelchair Games.

Photo by Christopher Di Virgilio

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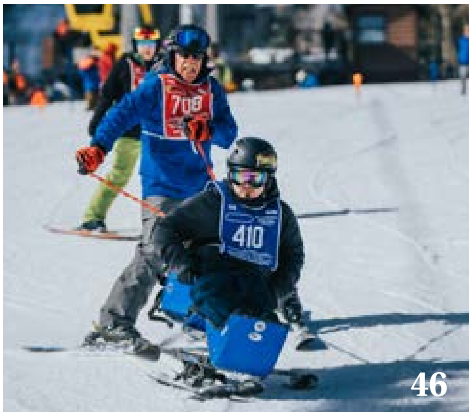

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Now in its 79th year and the official publication of Paralyzed Veterans of America, *PN* is a national, monthly magazine that covers news, health, research, lifestyle and issues of interest and concern to veterans and others with spinal-cord injury and disease. Anyone interested in submitting an article to *PN* should consult the Contributors Guidelines found on our website at pnonline.com. *PN* neither endorses nor guarantees any of the products or services advertised in the magazine. Readers should thoroughly investigate any product or service before making a purchase.

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OCTOBER

Editor's DESK

We travel quite a bit to cover the various stories that show up each month in the pages of *PN*. Sometimes, stories take us across the country, some are right in our own backyard and others get covered by freelancers who've done the traveling. This month, we have feature articles that fit all three descriptions.

Our main feature this month, *Motivation In Minneapolis* (p. 26), took us to Minnesota in July for the 44th National Veterans Wheelchair Games. Several members of the editorial staff joined hundreds of veterans, their family and friends, who also traveled from near and far, for an event that's an amazing combination of competition, participation and camaraderie.

Another of this month's features allowed us to stay home in Phoenix, while thousands of others came to the Valley of the Sun for a key conference on multiple sclerosis (MS). *Improving MS Care* (p. 34) gives the latest from May's 39th meeting of the Consortium of Multiple Sclerosis Centers.

Meanwhile, a pair of our longtime travel freelance writers did some traveling of their own for our third feature article. *Time In Nature* (p. 20) provides you with plenty of great information about all the fun and accessible things you can find at multiple state parks across the country.

Whether you're traveling or staying home, we hope you enjoy those features and all the other good content in this month's issue. Have a fun and safe Halloween.

Andy Nemann

Andy Nemann, Managing Editor

DIGITAL HIGHLIGHTS

THERE'S MORE ONLINE

Make sure to visit pnonline.com for even more interesting and informative articles on spinal cord injury and disease (SCI/D) and Paralyzed Veterans of America. The official *PN* website offers original stories, videos, photos and up-to-date news of interest to veterans and others with SCI/D.

FOR BETTER WHEELCHAIR LIVING

SCAN THIS!

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PN you said it

Good Luck Charm

In the July 2025 issue of (*PN*’s sister publication) *SPORTS ’N SPOKES* (*S’NS* Replay, p. 33) I read, with deep sorrow, of the passage of Curt Beamer.

I had the pleasure and honor of knowing Curt for many, many years, as well as being the subject of his photographs. Our first meeting was at a track and field competition held at the Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center in Fishersville, Va., where a long-term friendship developed and grew stronger throughout the years.


COURTESY OF LARRY DODSON

Past Paralyzed Veterans of America National Secretary Larry Dodson, left, the late Curt Beamer, center, and Chris Dodson, right.

As my participation in events expanded from track and field to shooting and fishing on the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) Bass Tour, Curt was always there to not only shoot pictures, but to extend encouragement, congratulations and conversation during pauses in the action.

During our time together on the PVA Bass Tour, he would often remind me that he “was my good luck charm” and that “every time I come around, you catch fish.” That was the truth!

Larry Dodson
Past PVA national secretary
North Augusta, S.C.

ROBERT L. THOMAS JR.
NATIONAL PRESIDENT

PVA from the TOP

Change

As I sat at my desk thinking about what I wanted this month's column to focus on, I was torn between subjects.

One was the National Veterans Wheelchair Games (NVWG) that was a big success this summer, along with Paralyzed Veterans of America's (PVA) first Partner Summit in July. The other was three years ago this month when I lost my mom while I was attending the PVA Fall Board of Directors Meeting in Orlando, Fla.

Each time I attempt to write about my mom, I always inadvertently drift off into my feelings of pain and grief. As you know, losing someone is never easy, and with this loss being my mother, it really cuts to the core.

> When I think of October, what immediately comes to mind is change.

As the years go by, you would think it would become easier when a birthday passes by, when Mother's Day arrives and even during the Christmas holiday season, but it never gets easier.

You only succumb to the deep feeling of loss when you think about it. It's true that you never really get over the loss of loved ones; you just learn to live with their absence.

So, with that, I decided to focus on the 44th NVWG in Minneapolis.

The Games were action-packed and funfilled as they historically have been. We had the pleasure of having several members of Team USA wheelchair rugby there. You could tell that the word about the Games is continuously getting out, as we had more novices than ever before. One of them was our very own PVA CEO, Carl Blake. As I watched him compete in several events, I could tell he had also been bitten by the Games bug and will more than likely become a repeat competitor.

While rolling around the Minneapolis Convention Center, I had the opportunity to talk to several other novice competitors who

COURTESY OF PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

Paralyzed Veterans of American National President Robert L. Thomas Jr., second from right, shared camaraderie with other veterans at the 44th National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Minneapolis.

told me they would be coming back each and every year. The excitement and smiles on their faces could only be accomplished through the collective efforts of event co-sponsors PVA and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

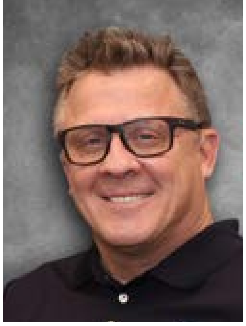
It's events like these where we can really get the public's attention about what we can do in the disability community. Our dedicated sponsors have consistently shown up and shown out to help us co-host this event, and we surely couldn't accomplish it without them.

While in Minneapolis, PVA hosted its inaugural Partner Summit at U.S. Bank Stadium, home of the NFL's Minnesota Vikings. This gave new and potential corporate partners the opportunity to hear all about what the organization does for its members, as well as hear from other companies about the importance of being connected with an organization that has a relatable cause. We hope this draws some positive attention and interest to PVA for some game-changing collaboration.

So, when I think of October, what immediately comes to mind is change. Change in seasons, change in successful events such as the NVWG and the Partner Summit, and the reminiscence of old memories that are forever held with me, like I have with my mom.

For seasoned members like me, it reminds us of all of our own experiences. Most members have a story concerning the Games, how PVA changed their life, how the organization helped with benefits or how they met other individuals living with spinal cord injury and disease.

Change is the force for growth and adaptation, and that's what the disability community is all about. ■



reasons & remarks

AL KOVACH JR.
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Rallying For Vets

I got a call from my friend, Brad, asking me to speak at a local rally to support veterans. I have to admit I was a little apprehensive because, despite my propensity to advocate for veterans, I had never participated in a rally for any reason.

Brad said he expected hundreds of our neighbors to gather in a local park where we live in Coronado, Calif., for a few speeches and to pay tribute to our veterans. We'd then march to the busiest intersection on the island, where we could show our support for the nearly 50,000 service members leaving the local naval bases during rush hour.

Considering the circumstances, I wanted to help my friend, and I couldn't think of any downside to supporting my fellow veterans and those who are currently serving in the military. For me, this was a different kind of call to action — but Brad was a different kind of friend.

> Brad is uniquely positioned to champion veterans' needs, and it's for this reason I wanted to help him with this rally.

In 1998, another friend insisted I meet Brad due to our mutual interests in supporting veterans and the fact we're neighbors. I had heard rumors of Brad's storied past, and I knew he had been in poor health for a few years, so I didn't know what to expect.

I have to admit our introduction was "unique." When we arrived at his house, Brad was watching the news on television while reclining in what looked like a Barcalounger, and he was sipping on a bottle of Guinness beer. It quickly became apparent Brad was in great discomfort, and the combination of pain medication and stout beer was having an effect, albeit not the desired effect. Without getting out of his chair, he greeted me with a weak handshake and whispered in a hoarse voice, "Nice to meet you, Al."

He looked somewhat defeated but was eager to share his story with me. After all, he was a professional storyteller, and he had a helluva story to tell.

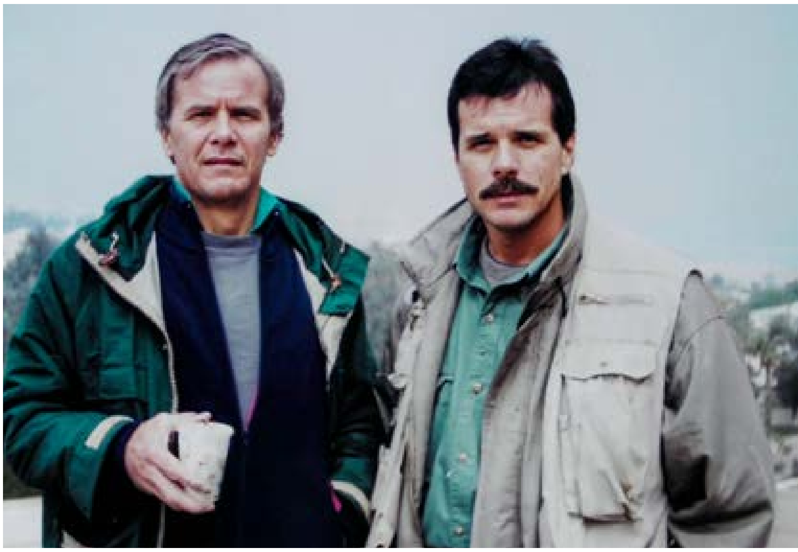
As an NBC News foreign correspondent, Brad reported from war zones and refugee camps around the world, including the Middle East, Africa, South America and Asia.

Brad covered conflicts such as the former Soviet Union's war in Afghanistan, where he embedded with the armed resistance known as the Mujahideen as they fought the occupying regime. He lived among the refugees in massive camps along the Afghan/Pakistani border, where he helped facilitate the airlift of war-wounded children to the United States for crucial medical treatment.

Brad reported from Botswana, Zambia and Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo) to cover the struggle against apartheid, and he was in Colombia, Bolivia and Peru to cover the drug wars.

He was on the front lines during the Persion Gulf War, as he reported on Operation

COURTESY OF BRAD WILLIS



Journalist Brad Willis, right, with then-NBC News anchor Tom Brokaw in Kuwait City during the Gulf War and Operation Desert Storm.

Desert Storm. Brad embedded with the 1st U.S. Marine Division to cover the Battle of Khafji and the liberation of Kuwait, reporting live from Kuwait City with NBC News anchor Tom Brokaw. Soon after, he moved into northern Iraq to cover Saddam Hussein's forces' brutal suppression of a Kurdish uprising that led to yet another refugee crisis.

Unfortunately, that's about the time when Brad's career as an award-winning journalist came to an end. A debilitating injury to his spine was the direct result of the demanding nature of his work, and Brad's doctors believed his exposure to depleted uranium used in the U.S. military's armor-piercing artillery had caused his Stage IV throat cancer.

Unfortunately, surgery to fix Brad's back failed, and treatments for his cancer were ineffective. By the time I met Brad, his only source of comfort, aside from narcotics, was his recliner chair to alleviate the pain in his back, stout beer to soothe the pain in his throat and the hope he'd live long enough to see his newborn son, Morgan, grow up and start his own family.

At that time, Brad described himself as "crippled, almost mute, depressed, strung out on narcotic medications and dying." However, while celebrating Brad's 50th birthday, Morgan shouted, "Get up, Daddy!" Hearing his young son's plea ignited a fierce determination to fight for his life and explore alternative healing paths. He committed to a strict regimen of yoga, fasting, a plant-based diet and other holistic components of a traditional Indian system of medicine called Ayurveda.

I never would have believed it had I not seen it for myself. Not only was Brad liberated from the recliner, but he ditched his pain meds, shed more than 50 pounds and his cancer went into remission.

I witnessed Brad go through a full transformation, from being a tragic hero at the end of a rope to a resilient advocate and force for change. Despite finding his new identity, Brad has never turned his back on those from his past. Matter of fact, he has developed a deep empathy for those affected by war, particularly veterans, and he has taken action to support them.

COURTESY OF BRAD WILLIS

PVA Publications Editor-In-Chief Al Kovach Jr., with bullhorn, speaks at June's Coronado Rallies for Veterans event in California.

Recently, Brad and his now-grown son collaborated as media partners with Honor Flight San Diego. They flew 175 Vietnam War veterans to Washington, D.C., to visit memorials dedicated to them and their fellow veterans. The flights provided the veterans with a deeply impactful experience, with many describing it as life-changing. Upon their return to San Diego's airport, I remember several of the veterans saying the homecoming provided the long-overdue welcome they never received.

In regard to Brad's latest project, Coronado Rallies for Veterans, it went exactly as he planned, except for the moment a young woman dressed like a fairy danced in front of me while I was speaking on the bullhorn and showered me with flower petals. Yet, with my ego still intact, hundreds of locals marched to the intersection carrying homemade signs, while thousands of service members drove by and honked their horns in support.

Brad's transformation is a powerful testament to finding new purpose and meaning after facing adversity, demonstrating that even after a career of reporting on conflicts, the commitment to those who served continues. This shift highlights the ongoing need for advocacy and support for veterans, ensuring those who have sacrificed so much receive the care, resources and recognition they deserve.

Having navigated his own recovery journey, Brad is uniquely positioned to champion veterans' needs, and it's for this reason I wanted to help him with this rally — it was the least I could do.

As always, please share your thoughts by emailing me at al@pvamag.com. ■

Michael Delaney

Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) is remembering a past national president who was instrumental in creating a national headquarters for PVA and helping to fund some of its most popular sports programs.

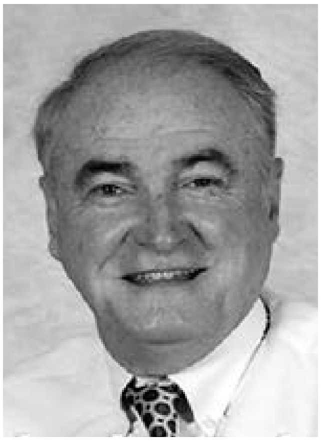
Michael “Mike” Delaney passed away Aug. 8, surrounded by loved ones. He was 78.

An Air Force veteran, Delaney sustained a spinal cord injury (SCI) in a 1971 automobile accident after returning from service in Vietnam. It was during rehabilitation at a Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) SCI center in Cleveland that he began to think about the lack of wheelchair accessibility and started working to change that.

Delaney returned home to Detroit in 1972 and joined the PVA Michigan Chapter to begin his long and impactful service to veterans with spinal cord injury and disease.

He served on the PVA Executive Committee from 1977 to 1982 as a vice president, senior vice president and national president.

Delaney was crucial in spearheading the campaign to buy PVA’s former national headquarters building at 801 18th Street NW, in Washington, D.C., which broke ground in 1981.


PVA PUBLICATIONS FILE PHOTO

Michael “Mike” Delaney

He was also passionate about sports and recreation. In 1986, Delaney wrote and sold the first corporate partner benefits package for the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. As an extension of the Games, he sold the idea of the Disabled Sports, Recreation and Fitness EXPO to the PVA Sports Department and the VA in 1988.

Delaney also worked aggressively to solicit and maintain sponsorships that funded the PVA Bass Tour and trapshooting programs.

He was awarded the 2011 Speedy Award, PVA’s highest honor, in the member category.

Delaney is survived by his wife, Kathy, six children and many grandchildren.

He was laid to rest Aug. 14 at Gate of Heaven Cemetery in Silver Spring, Md.

More Work To Do

Calling it a “monumental step forward,” but noting there’s more work to do, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) is commemorating this year’s 35th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

PVA played a critical role in the passage of the landmark civil rights law designed to break down barriers to employment, transportation, public accommodations and more. PVA CEO Carl Blake says enforcement and expansion of the ADA must continue.

“The ADA was a monumental step forward for our country and for our nation’s paralyzed veterans,” says Blake in a July 24 press release. “It affirmed the fundamental rights of people with disabilities and created a framework for a more welcoming society. As we recognize this milestone, we must all recommit ourselves to the unfinished work of full accessibility in our communities.”

A PVA survey this past spring found 80% of members and 40% of others with disabilities encountered accessibility barriers in the previous six months. Nearly 80% of PVA members said they feel frustrated and demeaned when they encounter a barrier.

“Millions of Americans with disabilities continue to face daily barriers that not only deny them basic opportunities and independence but also strip away their dignity and leave them feeling alone,” Blake continues in the press release. “That is why PVA is committed to the fight for an accessible future — one where every person can be fully present with their loved ones and participate in their communities.”

Earlier this year, PVA launched “Barriers Still Exist,” a multi-part public awareness campaign. The campaign includes a website, an #AccessibilityForAll pledge for improved ADA compliance, a social media activation featuring 10-plus influencers and two public service announcements featuring real-life barriers.

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Paralyzed Veterans of America’s “Barriers Still Exist” public awarness campaign includes advocates such as Jessie Owen.

For more information, visit pva.org/get-involved/barriers-still-exist.

pva service office roster

For assistance, please refer to the directory below to identify the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) Service Office nearest you. Also, you may contact the PVA Veterans Benefits Department located at our headquarters in Washington, D.C., at 866-734-0857.

ALABAMA
VARO, Montgomery
334-213-3433

ARIZONA
VARO, Phoenix
602-627-3311

ARKANSAS
VARO, North Little Rock
501-370-3757

CALIFORNIA (Hawaii, Manila)
VAMC, Long Beach
562-826-8000, ext. 23774

VARO, Los Angeles
310-235-7796

VAMC, Mather
916-843-2602

VAMC, Palo Alto
650-493-5000, ext. 65046

VARO, Rancho Cordova
916-364-6791

VAMC, San Diego
858-552-7519

VARO, San Diego
619-400-5320

Veterans Career Program
San Diego
202-416-6477*
(covering AK, AZ, CA, HI, ID, NV, OR, WA)

COLORADO (Wyoming)
VARO, Denver
303-914-5590

DELAWARE
VARO, Wilmington
302-993-7252

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
PVA National Office
202-872-1300

FLORIDA
VAMC, Lake City
386-755-3016, ext. 2236

VAMC, Miami
305-575-7180

VAMC, Orlando
407-631-1000, ext. 11835

VARO, St. Petersburg
727-319-7470

VAMC, Tampa
813-978-5841

Veterans Career Program
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202-416-7688

GEORGIA
VARO, Atlanta
404-929-5333

VAMC, Augusta
706-823-2219

Veterans Career Program
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202-416-6475*
(covering AL, AR, FL, GA, LA, MS, NC, PR, SC)

ILLINOIS
VARO, Chicago
312-980-4278

VAMC, Hines
708-202-5623

INDIANA
VARO, Indianapolis
317-916-3626

IOWA
VARO, Des Moines
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KANSAS
Wichita
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KENTUCKY
VARO, Louisville
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VARO, New Orleans
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VAMROC, Augusta
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VARO, St. Paul
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(covering IA, IL, MI, MN, ND, NE, SD, MT, WI, WY)

MISSISSIPPI (Louisiana)
VARO, Jackson
601-364-7188

MISSOURI
VAMC, Kansas City
816-922-2882

VAMC, St. Louis
866-328-2670 / 314-894-6467

VARO, St. Louis
314-253-4480

NEBRASKA
VARO, Lincoln
402-420-4017

NEVADA (Utah)
VARO, Las Vegas
702-791-9000, ext. 14458

VAMC, Reno
775-321-4789

NEW JERSEY
VARO, Newark
973-297-3228

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VAMC, Albuquerque
505-265-1711, ext. 5046

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505-346-4896

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216-791-3800, ext. 4159

VARO, Cleveland
216-522-3214

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VARO, Muskogee
918-781-7768

VAMC, Oklahoma City
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OREGON (Idaho)
VARO, Portland
503-412-4762

PENNSYLVANIA
VARO, Philadelphia
215-381-3057

VARO, Pittsburgh
412-395-6255

PUERTO RICO
VACHS, San Juan
787-641-7582 ext. 11566

VARO, San Juan
888-795-6550 / 787-772-7384

SOUTH CAROLINA
VARO, Columbia
803-647-2432

SOUTH DAKOTA (North Dakota)
VAMROC, Sioux Falls
605-333-6801

TENNESSEE
VAMC, Memphis
901-523-8990, ext. 7795

VARO, Nashville
615-695-6383

TEXAS
VAMC, Dallas
214-857-0105

VAMC, Houston
713-794-7993

VARO, Houston
713-383-2727

VAMC, San Antonio
210-617-5300, ext. 16819

VARO, Waco
254-299-9944

Veterans Career Program
San Antonio
202-416-6479*
(covering CO, KS, NM, MO, OK, TX, UT)

VIRGINIA
VAMC, Hampton
757-722-9961, ext. 2943

VAMC, Richmond
804-675-5316

VARO, Roanoke
540-597-1707

Veterans Career Program
Richmond
202-416-6481*
(covering DC, IN, KY, MD, OH, TN, VA, WV)

WASHINGTON (Alaska, Montana)
VAMC, Seattle
206-768-5415

VARO, Seattle
206-220-6149

Veterans Career Program
Seattle
202-416-7621*

WEST VIRGINIA
VARO, Huntington
304-399-9393

WISCONSIN
VARO, Milwaukee
414-902-5655

*Recently updated

on the hill

ANTHONYA JAMES, ESQ.

ABA Webinars

COURTESY OF PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

The Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 mandates that facilities designed, built, altered or leased with federal dollars must be accessible to people with disabilities.

This past July, we celebrated the 35th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

The ADA was signed into law on July 26, 1990, by then-U.S. President George H.W. Bush. The ADA is rightfully celebrated as a historic civil rights law that protects the rights of people with disabilities, but there's another important law that came before it.

The Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) stands as the first federal law to ensure access to the built environment for people with disabilities. This fall, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) is partnering with the U.S. Access Board to host a three-part webinar series on the ABA to help PVA members learn more about this important law.

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Federal Accessibility

The ABA mandates that federally funded buildings and facilities used by the public that were designed, built or altered with federal dollars or leased by federal agencies after Aug. 12, 1968, must be accessible to people with disabilities.

Facilities that predate the law generally aren't covered, but alterations or leases undertaken after the law took effect can trigger coverage. Structures built on "behalf" of the federal government, such as structures built on federal land with private sector funding, are also covered.

The access board is responsible for developing accessibility standards and enforcing the ABA. The standards indicate where access is required and provide detailed specifications for accessible building elements, including ramps, parking, doors, elevators, restrooms, fire alarms and signs. Facilities covered under the ABA must meet these standards.

The access board develops the ADA Standards for Accessible Design, which are used for ADA compliance. The ABA standards are similar, but they are specific to the unique requirements of federal facilities. Complaints alleging federal facility noncompliance can be filed with the U.S. Access Board.

Working With Allies

Despite the fact that the ABA is almost 60 years old, people with disabilities continue to encounter features in trails, outdoor recreation areas, military campgrounds, commissaries, post offices, Department of Veterans Affairs medical facilities and beaches that present barriers to their ability to access these places like every other American.

For example, one PVA member reported not being able to access a military campground due to all of its accessible spots being taken. Upon review of the campground's layout, PVA discovered that the campground didn't have the ABA-mandated number of accessible camping facilities.

Under the law, camping facilities must provide a minimum number of camping units with mobility features based on the total number of camping units provided in the camping facility.

Due to the PVA member's knowledge and understanding of the ABA, he recognized that a violation was occurring and reached out to PVA for assistance.

PVA is working with allies in the disability community to combat any efforts that would weaken disability civil rights.

Advocacy & Education

In April, PVA hosted the U.S. Access Board to discuss the organization’s mission and goals.

PVA is also looking at new ways advocates and people with disabilities can learn about disability civil rights. These avenues include collaborating with organizations and agencies to provide advocacy they can use to help others or perform self-advocacy.

In line with its mission, PVA is focused on ensuring veterans with disabilities have full access to the opportunities and freedoms available to all Americans to allow them to live, work, travel and fully participate in society.

It’s important for people with disabilities and advocates to understand and be familiar with disability civil rights laws. If members reach out to PVA chapters or the national office when they suspect they have encountered a disability civil rights violation, PVA can then take the next steps to further its advocacy.

Learning about the issues PVA members are encountering allows the organization to better advocate for policy and legislation that will help eliminate access barriers for veterans with spinal cord injuries and disorders.

This brings us back to the ABA webinar series. Through this series, PVA seeks to educate members and other advocates on the ABA. This knowledge will equip them with the tools necessary to locate and report ABA violations.

The first webinar will cover an ABA overview. The next two webinars will cover military areas and recreation and outdoor developed areas, respectively. The webinars will take place in October, November and December.

For more information, visit pva.org/research-resources/disability-rights-advocacy/.

Anthonya James, Esq., is PVA’s advocacy attorney in Washington, D.C. ■

BRITTANY MARTIN

Invisible MS Symptoms

When someone is diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS), the symptoms can impact nearly every aspect of life.

While physical symptoms such as walking, mobility and speech challenges, falls and tremors typically accumulate over time with relapses and progression, some of the most debilitating symptoms are invisible, including fatigue, pain, vision problems, bowel and bladder issues, swallowing difficulties and mood and cognitive changes.

As part of the Consortium of Multiple Sclerosis Centers Annual Meeting May 28-31 in Phoenix, national nonprofit organization Can Do MS presented a program to educate, support and provide resources to people with MS and their care partners.

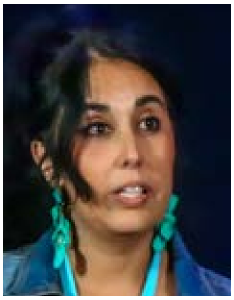
The program included a panel discussion focused on what people can do to manage a few of these invisible symptoms, specifically fatigue and mood and cognitive changes.

Fatigue

Hannah Richardson, MOT, OTR/L, BCPR, an occupational therapist at Barrow Neurological Institute in Arizona, says fatigue functionally impacts 90% of people with MS.

The term lassitude is used to describe MS-specific fatigue characterized by overwhelming tiredness that starts in the morning, progressively worsens and is exacerbated by heat or humidity.

Richardson says issues with sleep caused by pain or discomfort, bladder problems or poor sleep hygiene can impact fatigue, as well as energy required for daily tasks and disease-related body temperature issues. In addition, muscle deconditioning and spasms, depression, anxiety, daily stressors and medication can cause fatigue.


BRITTANY MARTIN

Hannah Richardson, MOT, OTR/L, BCPR

Richardson says it's important to identify and manage the factors that disrupt sleep and lead to lassitude. One method is called the four P's of energy conservation:

- Planning: Look ahead at daily and weekly schedules to determine what needs to be accomplished.
- Pacing: Take breaks. "If you feel like you've exerted yourself or done a lot for the day, sit down, rest," Richardson says. "After about two hours, if you're still feeling pretty tired, you probably overdid it, and you'll know better for planning in the future."
- Prioritizing: People must decide what must be done and what they want to do, prioritizing so they still have energy at the end of the day.
- Positioning: Discover which activities can be accomplished while sitting or lying down to preserve energy.

Richardson says exercise benefits people with MS by increasing their

© GETTY IMAGES/NES

Invisible multiple sclerosis symptoms, such as fatigue and mood and cognition changes, can be just a debilitating as the physical symptoms.

muscle endurance, and adaptive equipment can help people conserve energy and maintain independence.


BRITTANY MARTIN

Huiam Mubarak, MD

Huiam Mubarak, MD, a neurologist at Barrow Neurological Institute in Arizona, talked about nonpharmacological interventions for fatigue and medication side effects. She says to start with lifestyle adjustments, rather than jumping right to pharmaceutical agents to treat an issue that is contributing to fatigue.

Mubarak says patients need to do their own research, ask questions and find out what works best for their body.

"So, even though you go through your routine checks, make sure that the most problematic parts of some of your invisible symptoms are still heard during your visits," she says.

Mood Changes

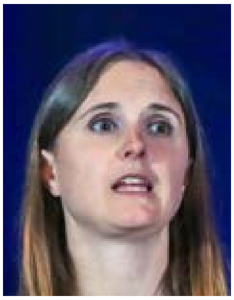
Another common invisible symptom, mood changes can occur at any point in the MS disease course, even as a first symptom, says Abbey Hughes, PhD, a clinical psychologist at Johns Hopkins Medicine in Baltimore.

Depression, sadness, grief, anxiety and irritability are common mood changes that occur in the context of MS, but they're treatable, Hughes says.

"Depression, mood concerns, anxiety, these originate in the brain, and with a central nervous system disorder like MS, changes in the brain can then elicit these mood changes even without a history of these concerns," she says.

To manage mood, cognitive behavioral therapy and other forms of psychotherapy can directly address depression symptoms, as well as treat fatigue, sleep disturbances and other physical symptoms that come with depression.

A variety of medications can help with depression treatment, in addition to behavioral changes such as physical activity, mental activation and social engagement.


BRITTANY MARTIN

Abbey Hughes, PhD

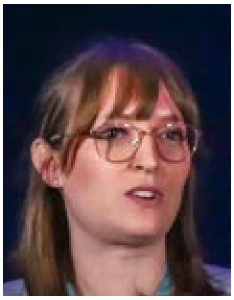
Hughes says the first step to managing mood issues is to acknowledge them, track them and discuss them with a health care provider.

Mubarak adds that the stigma of needing medication to help get through a difficult time needs to be removed.

"I think the bravest and most courageous people are the ones that open the door to say, 'I've done everything that I can do on my own. I think I need some more assistance,' and then we can kind of go from there and navigate who the right team and support team is for you, with your therapist monitoring the medications, making sure that they're not causing more harm than good," Mubarak says.

Cognition

When it comes to cognitive issues, Beth Wiggs, MS, CCC-SLP, a speech language pathologist at Barrow Neurological Institute in Arizona, says 65% of people with MS will experience them at some point. Some symptoms, such as brain fog and challenges with recalling words, can even start before diagnosis. One common cognitive symptom is processing speed challenges. This affects the ability to take information in, manage it and use it.


BRITTANY MARTIN

Beth Wiggs, MS, CCC-SLP

"If you're not able to be focused, pay attention, multitask, use your working memory, process information, then it's hard to do things like make a new memory," Wiggs says. "It's hard to make a decision of what to do. It can be challenging to find your words in conversation. Your brain just doesn't feel like it can quite keep up the pace of conversation."

Wiggs says in-depth health evaluations can identify where breakdowns are occurring and help providers personalize therapy approaches.

Methods can be put in place to help people with cognition, including setting reminders or having family, friends or caregivers give reminders, writing tasks down in a planner and utilizing computerized memory and attention training, among other strategies to facilitate function at work and home.

Lifestyle interventions might include diet, physical activity, stress management and mental stimulation.

Mubarak says cognitive challenges can be addressed by putting together a comprehensive care team early in the patient's diagnosis.

"I think handling cognition changes over time with the person, but I think having those open conversations of how we can help and meet you where you're at is really important," she says.

For more information and resources, visit cando-ms.org. ■

TIME IN NATURE

There are thousands of state parks in the U.S., and many of them offer a variety of accessible amenities.

by Barbara & Jim Twardowski

Each morning of our stay in Gulf State Park near Gulf Shores, Ala., a jackrabbit quietly greeted us beside the ramp of our cabin. My husband suspected she was protecting a nearby nest of babies.

Spotting wildlife up close is one of the many joys of spending time outdoors. During our three-day visit, we saw a squadron of pelicans flying in formation, a skittish great blue heron, a bald eagle fledgling on the verge of leaving the nest, an alligator resting on the bank of the lake and a pod of playful dolphins.

State parks provide a place to appreciate the natural environment and engage in outdoor recreation. All across the country, scores of state parks are improving their facilities and services so people who have disabilities can see and do more.

From all-terrain wheelchairs and adaptive kayaking to wheelchair-friendly fishing piers and accessible trails, connecting with nature is becoming easier for wheelchair users.

ILLUSTRATION BY KERRY RANDOLPH
PHOTOS THIS PAGE BY JIM TWARDOWSKI

Above left, the cabins at Gulf State Park near Gulf Shores, Ala., and a great blue heron preparing to hunt for dinner. Above right, Barbara Twardowksi explores an accessible trail at Gulf State Park.

Gulf State Park

One of our favorite vacation destinations, Gulf State Park, opened 20 lakeside cabins last year, and three of the units are built to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) specifications.

There's nothing rustic about the new two-bedroom, two-bathroom cabins of Gulf State Park (thecabinsatgsp.com). A wide ramp and a staircase provide access to the two-story high accommodation nestled beside Lake Shelby.

Each cabin has a screened porch with a table and four chairs, a living room with a sleeper sofa and a full kitchen. Open space underneath the kitchen sink and counter allows a wheelchair user access. Glasses and cups are stored in cabinets with a shelf that pulls down to the counter.

Both bedrooms and the living room have a flat-screen television. There's enough clear-

An accessible cabin's living room and kitchen area at Gulf State Park.

COURTESY OF JIM TWARDOWSKI

Barbara Twardowski, purple shirt, shares the boardwalk with other guests at Gulf State Park near Gulf Shores, Ala.

ance under the beds for a Hoyer lift. The raised beds are much higher than the seat of a wheelchair (ask the staff to remove the box springs).

A full-size washer and dryer are stored in a shed on ground level. The bathrooms have roll-in showers, plenty of storage, ample floor space and raised toilets. A grill, fire pit (wood can be delivered for a fee) and a picnic table complete the amenities.

Staying inside the more than 6,000-acre Gulf State Park with 28 miles of hiking trails and over 3.5 miles of white sand beach is a treat. Rolling on the wide wooden boardwalks and asphalt paths is a breeze in a power wheelchair.

The recently reopened Gulf State Park Fishing and Education Pier has wheelchair-accessible fishing stations where the rail is lower. Even if you don't fish, the pier is an excellent way to have a bird's-eye view of the water. In the future, an elevator will be installed in the pier's elevated observation deck.

Check the park events calendar for daily hikes, lectures and art-making sessions. If you don't feel like cooking, the Woodside Restaurant inside the park is a relaxing option with live music, games and a daily happy hour.

For more information, visit alapark.com/parks/gulf-state-park.

By Trail, Sand & Water

Whether it's a state park with a beach, one in the mountains or elsewhere, research repeatedly finds time spent in nature is beneficial for one's physical and mental health.

From enjoying a picnic close to home or exploring a new destination, state parks offer a chance to get outside and witness ever-changing scenery. Transferring from your personal wheelchair to one that's designed for outdoor usage gives you a more immersive encounter with the great outdoors.

All-terrain wheelchairs (ATW), also known as track chairs, are available at dozens of state parks. Instead of wheels, these wheelchairs have tank-like treads to roll on a variety of terrains and allow a rider entrance to previously inaccessible areas of the park.

As part of their Outdoors Beyond Barriers initiative, Georgia state parks and historic sites have 20 ATWs. Last year, Big Creek State Park in Polk City, Iowa, and Logoly State Park in Magnolia, Ark., were the first parks in their respective states to introduce the burly wheelchairs.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources launched a program in 2022 with five track chairs and now has 23. The department has expanded its all-terrain track chair program at the following locations:

- Fort Snelling State Park
- Jay Cooke State Park
- Lake Shetek State Park
- Lake Vermilion-Soudan Underground Mine State Park
- Mille Lacs Kathio State Park

COURTESY OF ARKANSAS, THE NATURAL STATE

Logoly State Park in Magnolia, Ark., offers track chairs for patrons with disabilities.

COURTESY OF KIM HATCHER, TMP

Georgia had its Outdoors Beyond Barriers "First Day Hike" Jan. 1.

- Moose Lake State Park
- Northwest region parks (one shared track chair for Big Bog State Recreation Area and Hayes Lake, Lake Bronson and Zippel Bay state parks)
- Rice Lake State Park
- William O'Brien State Park

Increasing accessibility at state parks isn't just limited to paths and hiking trails either. Many have added beach wheelchairs to their list of amenities. The wheelchairs come in various styles, but most have oversized wheels that prevent the chair from getting stuck in soft sand. Some chairs can even go into the water and float, while others are motorized and cannot.

Every state park located on Florida's more than 8,000 miles of coastline has a beach wheelchair. In Texas, Galveston Island State Park and Mustang Island State Park in Corpus Christi each have a beach wheelchair that visitors may borrow. Vermont recently added more beach wheelchairs, and visitors can find them at eight state parks.

More Amenities

Besides off-road and beach wheelchairs, many state parks are implementing programs and building facilities that make visiting more inclusive for people who have a range of disabilities.

These are a few of the accessibility enhancements from across the nation.

Colorado

The Aira Explorer app helps those who are blind or have low vision navigate trails, experience signage and share their visit with family and friends. Using the camera on a smartphone, park guests have access to a live agent, who visually interprets what's streaming in real time. This 24-hour-a-day service is offered in all of Colorado's state parks. It's free for up to 30 minutes per session.

For more information, visit oit.colorado.gov/accessibility/aira.

People who are blind or have low vision can use the Aira Explorer smart device app to navigate Colorado's state parks.

COURTESY OF APPLE

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Henderson Beach State Park in Destin, Fla., features ramps, as well as beach wheelchairs and accessible campsites.

Florida

Besides beach wheelchairs, state parks in Florida offer a number of accessible amenities.

Accessible electric trams with ramps are available at:

- Henderson Beach State Park in Destin, Fla.
- Oscar Scherer State Park near Sarasota, Fla.
- Big Lagoon State Park in Pensacola, Fla.
- John D. MacArthur Beach State Park in North Palm Beach, Fla.
- Hugh Taylor Birch State Park in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.
- Oleta River State Park in North Miami Beach, Fla.

Several state parks in Wisconsin are adding universal kayak launches.

COURTESY OF WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Meanwhile, one of Florida's best known state park attractions is also accessible to wheelchair users. Glass-bottom boats have awed visitors at Silver Springs State Park in Silver Springs, Fla., since the 1870s. Now, the fleet includes one boat that can accommodate wheelchairs.

For more information, visit floridastateparks.org/access-all.

Louisiana

Fontainebleau State Park in Mandeville, La., recently added an all-terrain wheelchair, unveiled an all-inclusive playground for children of all abilities and opened three accessible lakefront cabins.

For more information, visit lastateparks.com/parks-preserves/fontainebleau-state-park.

Mississippi

Percy Quin State Park in McComb, Miss., held a grand reopening in 2024 and unveiled five renovated two-bedroom cabins. One cabin is ADA accessible. Some notable features include a screened back porch, 50-inch flat-screen television and stainless steel kitchen appliances.

For more information, visit mdwfp.com/parks-destinations/park/percy-quin-state-park.

Montana

A new accessible boat launch opened at Frenchtown Pond State Park northwest of Missoula, Mont. The 18-acre pond is a popular spot for picnics, walking and fishing.

For more information, visit fwp.mt.gov/frenchtown-pond.

Pennsylvania

With 124 state parks, there's loads to explore in Pennsylvania.

The state's first ADA-accessible sensory trail at Cook Forest State Park, about two hours northeast of Pittsburgh, is designed for those who have vision and/or mobility disabilities.

For information, visit pa.gov/agencies/dcnr/recreation/where-to-go/state-parks.

Texas

They say everything is bigger in Texas, and that certainly holds true when it comes to state

COURTESY OF LOUISIANA STATE PARKS

Fontainebleau State Park in Mandeville, La., recently opened three accessible lakefront cabins.

parks. The Lone Star State features 89 of them, and they have a variety of accessible highlights.

Learn to fish at one of the numerous training workshops. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Angler Education program prioritizes accessibility. Participants who have a disability can fill out an Accessibility Modification Request Form to ensure their needs are met.

For park guests who are color-blind, several parks offer EnChroma viewers and scopes that give visitors the opportunity to see color in nature in a way they never have before.

For information, visit tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks.

Wisconsin

Adaptive kayaking is a fast-growing recreational activity, and several state parks in Wisconsin have taken note.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources is adding universal kayak launches to three state parks:

- Merrick State Park, northwest of La Crosse, Wis.
- Twin Valley Lake at Governor Dodge State Park, west of Madison, Wis.
- Yellowstone Lake State Park, southwest of Madison, Wis.

Guests will find an accessible route to the launch site, a transfer bench, handrails and rollers or launch guides, which assist with gliding into the water.

For information, visit dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/parks.

Know Before You Go

It's estimated there are almost 7,000 state parks across the United States. Whether you're visiting for a few hours or a few days, always go prepared. These are few tips to keep in mind:

- Be ready for inclement weather.
- WiFi can be iffy, especially in remote locations, so download the park map to your smartphone before you go exploring.
- Review the state park's website and call the park directly to discuss the types of accessible features it offers.
- A limited number of ADA cabins and campsites are available at some state parks, and reservations may be taken as early as a year out.
- Ask about the procedures for borrowing equipment, such as an all-terrain or beach wheelchairs. Some parks require a reservation and others loan on a first-come, first-served basis.

To find a state park near you or for more information, visit stateparks.org or americasparks.com. ■

Motivation in Minneapolis

Older and seasoned athletes brought a wealth of knowledge and experience to the 2025 National Veterans Wheelchair Games.

by Brittany Martin

For wheelchair athletes attending the National Veterans Wheelchair Games (NVWG), an emphasis is often placed on the word "new" — new friends, new experiences and veterans with new injuries or disabilities. And as important as the Games are for those reasons, older and seasoned athletes also play a crucial role in helping inspire and mentor their younger counterparts.

This year's 44th NVWG, co-sponsored by Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) and the Department of Veterans Affairs July 17-22 in Minneapolis, was no exception. More than 530 veteran athletes, including 180 novices, competed in over 20 sports and took part in new events, such as an ax throwing exhibition, a power soccer all-star game, a family pickleball up/down tournament and more.

Happy & Sad

For Air Force veteran and PVA Wisconsin Chapter member Arron Powless, it was a memorable return.

The 53-year-old Shawano, Wis., resident started going to the Games in 1993 and went every year until 2007 before taking a break for 18 years. This year was his first year back.

Arron Powless, purple shirt, waits to catch the ball during wheelchair rugby at the 2025 National Veterans Wheelchair Games in July in Minneapolis.

ILLUSTRATION BY KERRY RANDOLPH
PHOTOS THIS PAGE BY KERRY RANDOLPH

"For me, not coming for a while, I've seen, like, five of my friends that I haven't seen in that long. And I'm just older, and I know I'm older, but you still recognize them because when we did compete, you know, it was good competition. That's how you get to know each other," says Powless, who served from 1990 to 1993 and sustained a level C7 incomplete spinal cord injury (SCI) in a 1992 car accident. "And that's what the Games bring. It's the competition, but it's still meeting friends. And just to see them, I'm happy and sad because I'm like, 'Oh, they're getting older, too.' And some of them are worse off."

It was also a chance for Powless' twin 11-year-old son and daughter, Kaleo and Annako, to see their dad play sports for the first time.

"My daughter is a swimmer, so that's why I want to show her, you know, give her all you've got," Powless says. "My son, he plays baseball, he plays basketball, hockey. He plays every sport he can play. I just tell him, you know, 'You keep playing hard no matter what's going on around you.' So, I'm going to show him you've got to stick to it. Keep playing hard. You don't take breathers when your teammates depend on you."

Powless competed in the ax throwing exhibition,


KERRY RANDOLPH


KERRY RANDOLPH

Arron Powless takes on the sand, gravel and rock pit during the obstacle course called “slalom.”

wheelchair rugby, the obstacle course called “slalom,” backstroke and freestyle swimming and discus. He earned bronze medals in the Open IC Division slalom (3 minutes, 43.52 seconds) and Open IC Division discus (9.80 meters). He won gold in both the Open IC Division 25-meter backstroke (48.49 seconds) and 25-meter freestyle (46.74 seconds). And he capped the Games with a silver medal with Team Wild in wheelchair rugby on the final day.

To get in shape for this year’s Games, Powless lost 30 pounds since March by pushing his wheelchair about 10 miles every day on a track and eating better. He wanted to increase his endurance, especially to keep up in wheelchair rugby.

“The younger ones are all in it, like how I was 18 years ago,” he says. “You know, I was so into it. It’s neat to see that. And [they’ll] be in my spot in another 18 years, looking back, looking for friends and seeing the new guys do good.”

Powless says he’s had to learn to play smarter as he’s gotten older because the equipment has made the game faster.

“I feel with the equipment and stuff that the athletes are better definitely, because they’re in better equipment,” he says. “Better for training, probably easier on your shoulders than the equipment we had a long time ago. You know, titanium is out now. Carbon fiber [is in], all this stuff to make you excel to your best.”

Powless tells new athletes they should try everything to see what they like.

“And as your age grows older, you’ll do not as aggressive sports. Maybe pool [billiards] you can do,” he says. “There’s something for everybody. You just at least try something and see what you might lean towards.”


KERRY RANDOLPH

Getting Out

Although it was only her second NVWG, Air Force and Navy veteran Coreen Broomfield has fully embraced that attitude.

The 72-year-old PVA Mid-Atlantic Chapter member didn’t let anything stop her from competing this year — not a broken scooter or a 30-hour-plus Amtrak train ride from Richmond, Va., to St. Paul, Minn.


CHRISTOPHER DI VIRGILIO

Coreen Broomfield prepares to launch a shot put during field events.

“Ever since I hooked up with PVA, I have been getting out of the house,” says the Midlothian, Va., resident, who served in the Air Force from 1974 to 1979 and the Navy from 1979 to 1983. “I’ve been doing all these PVA things from fishing and meeting people and

CHRISTOPHER DI VIRGILIO

Coreen Broomfield earned a silver medal in 9-ball billiards in the Novice V Division.

going to these Games and adaptive sports … every time I turn around, I'm getting a medal or a trophy. I never had trophies before."

Broomfield, who has a level C2 incomplete SCI after several falls caused by chemotherapy-induced neuropathy, competed in a loaner power wheelchair after her scooter broke at home.

"I wish there would be more older people, because I was kind of housebound for, like, six years until I started learning about programs like PVA and this and that, and it gets them out of the house," she says. "And the more people you tell that are older to get out of the house, I mean, I still have value. And they need to know that they have value, too."

Broomfield brought home plenty of medals, including bronze in motor rally (trivia) and table tennis, silver in 9-ball billiards, discus (3.99 meters) and shot put (2.15 meters) and gold in bowling and the motor "slalom" obstacle course (3:58.5), all in the Novice V Division. She also competed in javelin, boccia and disc golf. She says motor rally is her favorite because she likes museums and reading.

"These [Games] are fun because I met a lot of the same people last year, and they recognized me … it's nice to see that they're still hanging in there," she says. "And I think this kind of

CHRISTOPHER DI VIRGILIO

Cool Kids

This year's National Veterans Wheelchair Games Kids Day, featuring a *Frozen* theme, included an obstacle course called "slalom," cornhole and an inflatable Snow Throw game, where kids with disabilities could throw Velcro snowballs or plush ice axes at a target, as bubbles filled the air to simulate snow. Veteran athletes volunteered to coach and cheer on the young athletes. The event ended with a "snowball" fight between veterans and the kids using stuffed balls, and the kids received participation medals.

CHRISTOPHER DI VIRGILIO

COURTESY OF PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

KERRY RANDOLPH

CHRISTOPHER DI VIRGILIO

Ray Brown competes in field events during the 44th National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Minneapolis.

revitalizes people … you pick up little tricks from others, especially the girls. And the girls, even though they're on different teams, they still have something kind to say about you."

Always A Way

Marine Corps veteran and PVA Michigan Chapter member Ray Brown is happy to offer some of those tips and tricks to other athletes, too.

The 76-year-old North Branch, Mich., resident, who served from 1968 to 1970 and has muscular dystrophy, has competed at the NVWG all but three years since 1999. He didn't attend in 2021, 2022 and 2023 during the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Field events — especially javelin — are his passion, which he discovered at the 1999 Michigan Victory Games.

"[Before], I wasn't aware that you could throw from a throwing chair. I always just threw from my wheelchair," Brown says. "That's why we try to encourage these young guys to come to the Games, because you're going to see ways that you can do things. You know, there's always a way."

During his field events, Brown utilized a breathing technique from the Chinese practices of tai chi and qi gong.

"At this point in the game, I'm older, and your aerobic threshold doesn't recover as quick as a young person's, so I take time, and I just do a little relaxing and a little praying and then bring in everybody's energy that I can," Brown says. "I pull it all in and unlock it. Tai chi, I suggest anyone do that. It relaxes you, but it builds strength up at the same time."

And on his releases, he uses what the Marines call a "battle cry."

KERRY RANDOLPH

On Target

Athletes lined up to try out this year's National Veterans Wheelchair Games exhibition sport, ax throwing.

COURTESY OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Huge Deadlift

Anthony Martinez set a National Veterans Wheelchair Games record with a 700-pound deadlift as part of the adaptive fitness event inside the Minneapolis Convention Center.

COURTESY OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Fire Lit

After 20-plus years of watching other athletes compete at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games (NVWG), Carl Blake decided he wanted to experience the action. So, this July, the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) CEO and Army veteran surprised plenty when he wheeled himself into the Minneapolis Convention Center during the 44th NVWG opening ceremony — as a novice athlete.

It's an experience he won't soon forget.

A PVA Mid-Atlantic Chapter member now in his eighth year as CEO, Blake competed in four sports — 9-ball billiards, pickleball, boccia and table tennis. And he learned some humbling lessons, especially when getting crushed in pickleball.

An avid racquetball player before his injury, Blake loved pickleball and says it gave him the same feeling when he played racquetball. His wife, Venus, and daughter, Brooke, who watched, mentioned he might want to practice some sports months before competing in them. But he didn't heed it.

"And I thought, well, I'm at least coordinated enough that I should be able to hold my own. And that's when I learned coordination doesn't make up for the skill that so many of these people have, so many of these veterans here have that that spend some time doing it," says Blake, a Virginia resident who retired from the military in October 2000 after injuries sustained during a parachute training exercise.

But Blake also won a match in 9-ball and nearly earned a medal in table tennis, before falling in the Division V Novice bronze-medal match.

"The best part about it is it didn't matter, losing didn't matter. I wasn't here to win. In all fairness, the only time I wanted to win was when I finally had a chance to win a medal, which was the only one out of four events anyway. And it was humbling," Blake says. "But all I did was maybe light a little bit of a fire. Like, I am an intense competitor. Now, I want to make myself better."

Written by PN *Assistant Editor John Groth.*

CHRISTOPHER DI VIRGILIO

KERRY RANDOLPH

KERRY RANDOLPH

Ray Brown throws a bag during the cornhole competition.

> “Just try everything that you can. There’s an old saying that fear destroys learning, so don’t be afraid to try.” **— Ray Brown**

“I once had a sports psychologist tell me that probably gives me 60 percent more energy because you’re not holding nothing in. Everything’s going out,” Brown says. “So, it’s like a thrust. It’s everything I’ve got.”

Despite a torn right shoulder rotator cuff, Brown won gold in javelin (16.33 meters) and shot put (5.85 meters) and earned silver in discus (12.02 meters), all in the Seniors V Division, and bronze in powerlifting/bench press (115 pounds) in the Seniors II/X Division. He also competed in cornhole and boccia.

Brown says the most challenging part of sports is keeping his body

Support Sisters

COURTESY OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

More than 40 women veteran athletes took part in a meetup during the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Minneapolis.

healthy, but he's improved mentally over his years competing at the NVWG.

"And that's what I suggest to all the young vets is, you know, get some physical activity, feel better about yourself with these Games. Mentally and physically, I'm going to go home feeling better," Brown says. "Just try everything that you can. There's an old saying that fear destroys learning, so don't be afraid to try."

Positive Attitude

Bennie McQueen also emphasizes keeping positive mindset, both at the Games and in life. At 83 years old, the Army veteran and PVA Vaughan Chapter member enjoys passing on his knowledge to other veterans.

"You know, just learn to talk it through. You know, don't fight it through 'cause you're not gonna win. No win at all. That's number one. Go with a good attitude," says the Chicago resident, who served from 1964 to 1967 and was diagnosed in 1995 with a level C3-C7 SCI that was aggravated by his work with nuclear missiles and slowly developed over time.


COURTESY OF PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

Bennie McQueen, below and left, competed in archery and bowling, as well as 9-ball billiards and table tennis.


KERRY RANDOLPH

McQueen competed in archery (recurve) and shot a 73 out of a possible 300, earning a silver medal in the Seniors V Division. He also competed in 9-ball billiards, bowling and table tennis.

He says he's been shooting archery at the NVWG since his first one in 2011 in Pittsburgh.

"I like Robin Hood. And I don't know if I want to be a Robin Hood, but it's fun," McQueen says. "I saw a few of my old buddies, and always at the Games try to make friends with another veteran, and don't judge because there's always somebody worse off than you."

For more stories and photos from the 2025 NVWG in Minneapolis, visit pnonline.com, facebook.com/pnmagazine, sportsnspokes.com and facebook.com/sportsnspokes.

For more information on the NVWG, visit wheelchairgames.org. ■


KERRY RANDOLPH

Improving

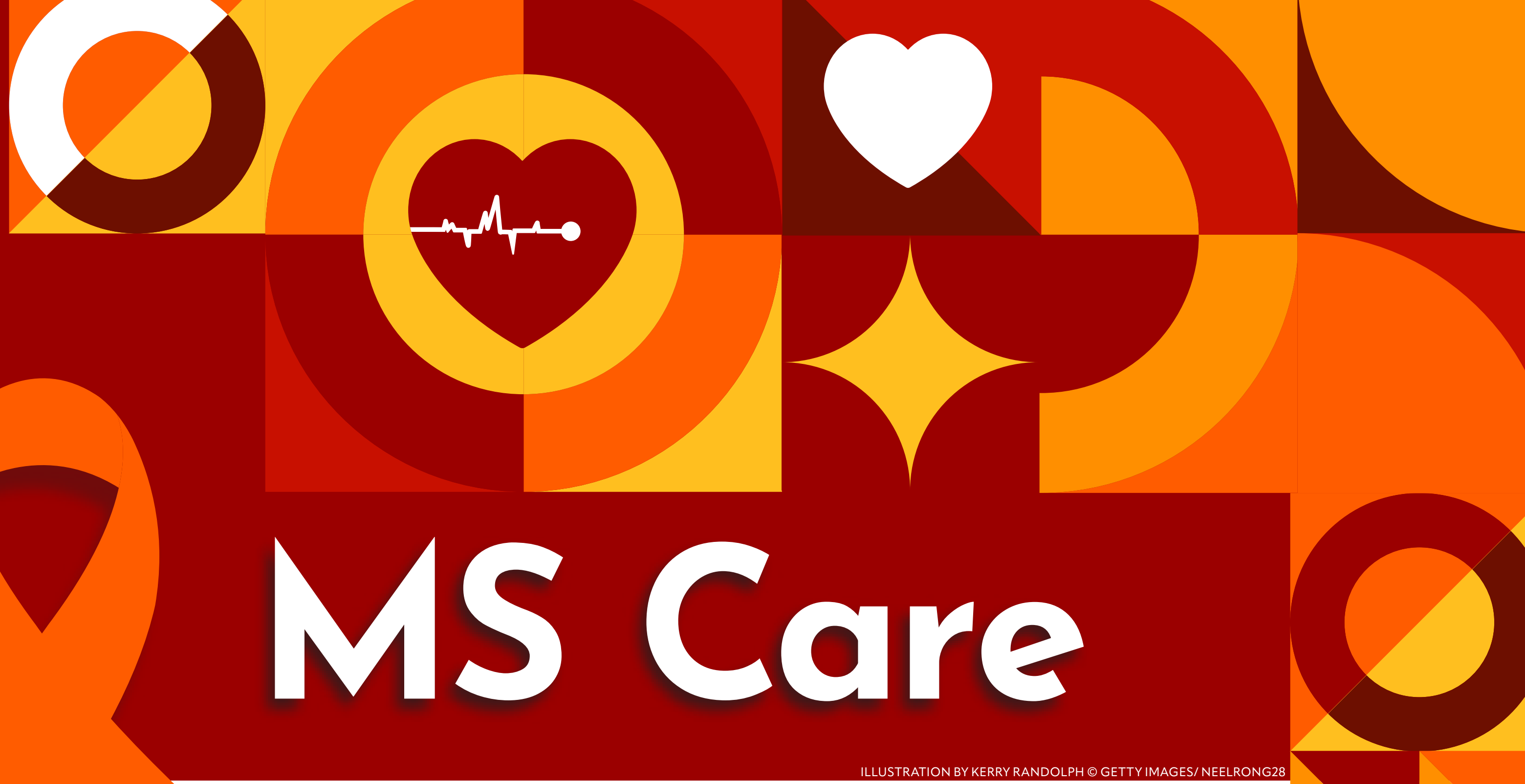
Cutting-edge research was presented at this year's Consortium of Multiple Sclerosis Centers Annual Meeting.

For 39 years, the Consortium of Multiple Sclerosis Centers (CMSC) has brought together leading multiple sclerosis (MS) health care professionals during its annual meeting for networking opportunities and to learn about cutting-edge research, best practices and comprehensive care.

This year's meeting held May 28-31 in Phoenix included four keynote speakers and more than 50 symposia, clinical courses, supporter showcases and platform presentations, along with poster sessions and a vendor expo hall, on topics ranging from disease-modifying therapies (DMTs) and MS symptom management to cogni-

Consortium of Multiple Sclerosis Centers interim CEO Kathleen Costello speaks during the annual meeting.

SHMULIK ALMANY



MS Care

ILLUSTRATION BY KERRY RANDOLPH © GETTY IMAGES/ NEELRONG28

tive wellness, aging and diet.

The meeting, themed "MS Heroes Unite," held an even deeper meaning this year for the nearly 1,800 health care professionals, people living with MS and more, as they honored the memory of the late June Halper, MSN, ASPN-C, FAAN, MSCN, who passed away July 24, 2024, at age 86. Halper was a founding CMSC member and served as the organization's president from 1995 to 1997 and as its executive director/CEO from 1992 until her death.

"She championed a model of care that saw the whole person and that identified the need for multiple disciplines working in a coordinated way to meet the needs of each individual," says Kathleen Costello, interim CEO of the CMSC. "And that philosophy continues to guide us, inspire us and challenge us to be better and to do more."

Helping Veterans With MS

The event also gave several members of the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) MS Committee a chance to educate clinicians about the work PVA does for veterans with MS, while also learning more about their disease.

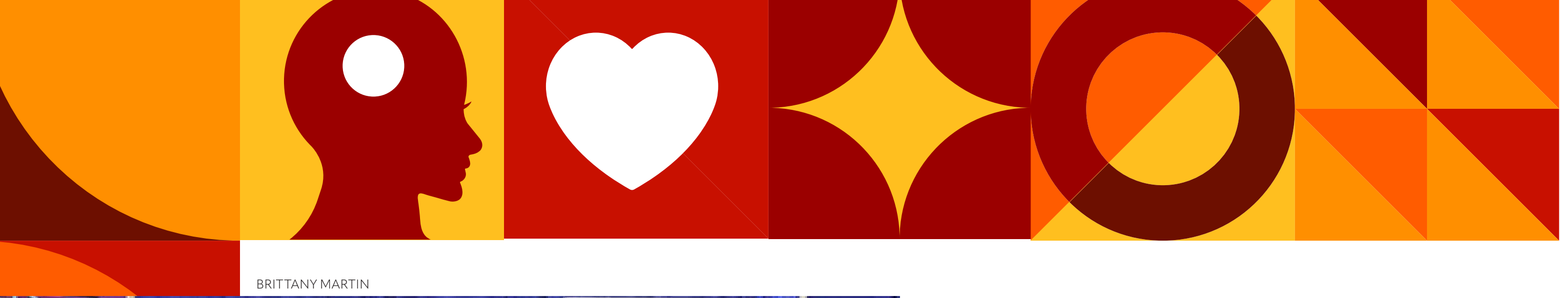
PVA Great Plains Chapter member and PVA MS Committee member Shayna Goerdt says she wanted to attend the meeting because she's always been involved in her own care and understanding the mechanisms behind the medications that treat MS symptoms, but she's also interested in the movement toward delaying disability and recovering from bouts of disability that happen with MS flares.

"I'll take the ideas that I learn here about medications or about research, and I'll go talk to my neurologist and talk about what would work for me and what wouldn't, based on my own medical history," Goerdt says.

The 42-year-old Army National Guard veteran, who served from 2006 to 2008, lives in Lincoln, Neb., and was diagnosed with relapsing-remitting MS in 2010. One session

BRITTANY MARTIN

Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) Great Plains Chapter member Shayna Goerdt is on the PVA Multiple Sclerosis Committee.



BRITTANY MARTIN

Members of the Paralyzed Veterans of America Multiple Sclerosis Committee attended the Consortium of Multiple Sclerosis Centers Annual Meeting in Phoenix.

she enjoyed was on remyelination, a process that generates new protective myelin sheaths around the axons that facilitate communication in the central nervous system. She looks forward to sharing the information with her chapter and says it gives her hope.

“What I learned is that it won’t ever be as good as it was initially, but even with a thinner sheath that’s shorter, you can still get quite a bit of communication that passes through, and people not just slow disability progression but also can bring back some ability that you’ve lost,” Goerdt says. “And all of this is in research phase, so it’s not something that’s readily available right now, but it’s really helpful to me to know those kinds of research are happening. In the big picture, if MS is a disease that attacks that location in the brain and they can rebuild it, that really is a stepstone to a cure. And that’s why I think research is so important.”

Health & Wellness Coaching

Some of that research was presented in a session on evidence-based wellness strategies and health coaching, in partnership with the National MS Society.

Cassandra Moore, MPH, CPH, was one of four session speakers and presented results from two years of the National MS Society’s pilot health and wellness coaching study, which explored the impact of personalized coaching and helping people with MS build skills, set goals and take meaningful steps toward better well-being.

Moore, associate vice president of strategy and innovation on the programs and support team for the National MS Society, says the National MS Society’s health and wellness coaching pilot study began in fall 2022. The society conducted a landscape assessment and survey to help inform the pilot. Over 150 people living with MS provided feedback.

Next, they contracted with six coaches credentialed through the National Board of Health and Wellness Coaching. All the coaches had experience working with people with chronic conditions, and they underwent 20 hours of training to better understand MS and the society.

There was no set a curriculum for the coaching program, rather people chose what they wanted to work on and discuss. The free, one-on-one coaching lasted six months, and participants met weekly or biweekly with their coaches.

Pilot participants had to be diagnosed within the last three years. Of 250 applicants, 66 people with MS were chosen. Participants agreed to fill out surveys in the beginning, at the conclusion, and then at six and 12 months post-pilot. Meetings lasted around 45 minutes, and people focused on physical activity, mental well-being, nutrition, weight loss, career, spirituality,

BRITTANY MARTIN

Cassandra Moore, MPH, CPH, left in photo at right, talks about a health and wellness coaching pilot study for people with multiple sclerosis.


COURTESY OF 2025 CONSORTIUM OF MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS CENTERS ANNUAL MEETING

Health care professionals listen to a keynote speaker during the meeting in Phoenix.

sleep hygiene and general happiness.

The researchers found evidence that the coaching pilot was effective in improving physical health and self-efficacy among participants, as well as a lasting effect.

"We really believe that health and wellness coaching has the potential to change people's mindset and lives and assist them in living their best lives, which is why we decided to add a second cohort," Moore says.

The first cohort ended in March 2024, and the second started in September 2024 and wrapped up a few months prior to the CMSC annual meeting in May. The cohort was structured similarly to the first cohort with some minor changes, including letting coaches and participants decide after one month when and if they wanted to start meeting biweekly and the introduction of group sessions.

Preliminary data showed 83% of participants felt an increase in confidence, and 98% felt they'd stick with the healthy changes they made after the coaching program concluded.

"People actually saying, 'Hey, this program changed my life,' is so important. But this quantitative data, these outcomes, really validate us and continue to push us to find meaningful ways to support our mission and empowering people to live their best lives," Moore says.

She says they plan to use this data to determine the feasibility of offering coaching through the National MS Society in the future.

Which Diet?

When it comes to modifying habits, diet is often high on the priority list. But Mona Bostick, RDN, LDN, MSCS, a registered dietitian, says there is a communication problem about nutrition and MS.

She says poor health literacy, food literacy and research and media literacy can make it difficult for people to wade through overwhelming, conflicting and often nonsensical nutrition information.

Survey studies have shown that people with MS are interested in alternative treatments, including dietary modifications. However, according to the National MS Society, diet is not currently a recognized MS treatment. People are simply encouraged to follow a healthy eating pattern to prevent or manage comorbid conditions, such as hypertension and diabetes, which can contribute to negative MS outcomes.

"Multiple sclerosis does not impact the way we absorb nutrients ... it does not impact how we utilize nutrients, and it doesn't impact our metabolic rate," Bostick says. "However, nutrition does play a very important indirect role in how well we live with MS."

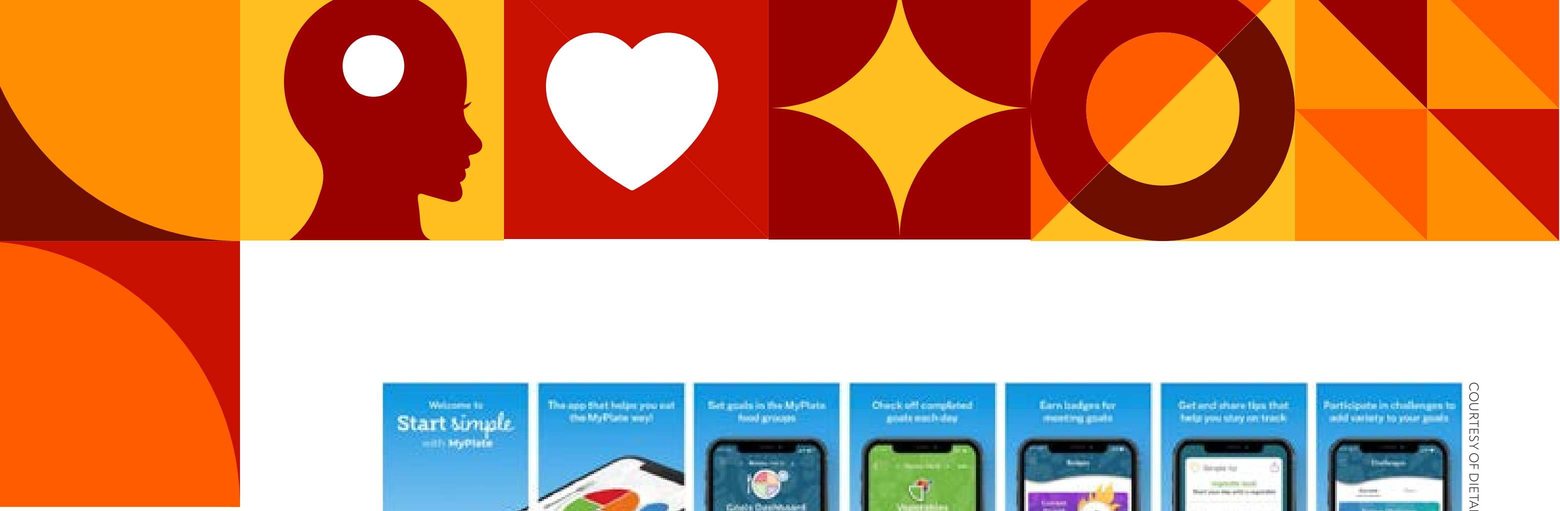
In her session titled Ask the Dietitian: How to Navigate Frequently Asked Questions on Diet and MS, Bostick elaborated on a few of the most frequently asked questions she receives from patients and caregivers.

The first was, "What foods are 'MS-friendly' or 'MS-unfriendly?'" She says these overgeneralizations are widely used on social media, leading to confusion.

For example, Bostick says potatoes have been villainized and deemed as bad for people with MS in a variety of publications. However, they are a source of complex carbohydrates, are high in fiber, especially with the skin, are packed with vitamins and minerals and are relatively inexpensive. On the flip side, kale is a food that has been deemed "MS-friendly," but labeling foods in this way is a vast oversimplification and lacks clarity and context.


BRITTANY MARTIN

Mona Bostick, RDN, LDN, MSCS, a registered dietitian, discusses questions she often receives about nutrition from people with multiple sclerosis.



COURTESY OF DIETARYGUIDELINES.GOV

People with multiple sclerosis are encouraged to follow dietary recommendations from dietaryguidelines.gov or myplate.gov.

"What if you don't like kale? And now you have MS, and you've heard that kale is MS-friendly, and I don't like kale," Bostick says. "So, am I harming myself because I won't eat the kale salad? These are things that are unnecessary barriers to comprehension."

A second question is what supplements someone with MS should consider. Bostick says the human body prefers to get its nutrients from food.

"Many diets that are promoted to benefit multiple sclerosis are actually quite restrictive and might contribute to nutrient deficiencies, which is why you might notice that many of the people who promote those diets also sell supplements to replace those important nutrients," she says.

Correcting a deficiency is important, but supplements aren't Food and Drug Administration-regulated and sometimes come with their own side effects in large doses. They also can interact with other medications and compete for absorption in the body.

Bostick says those who are taking supplements should look for the U.S. Pharmacopeia (USP)-verified label to be sure they're getting a quality product that contains what is advertised.

The most frequently asked question Bostick receives is, "What is the best diet for people with MS?"

The National MS Society offers some options on its website that align with the consensus, evidence-based Dietary Guidelines for Americans (dietaryguidelines.gov) or MyPlate (myplate.gov) recommendations.

Bostick says many MS diets focus on subtraction, but the guidelines can be a starting point for a conversation about what foods can be added to promote health and MS symptom management.

For example, dietary sources of fiber — vegetables, fruits, whole grains, nuts, seeds and legumes — can improve bowel regularity, which is a common concern for people with MS. Fiber intake has also been associated with lower C-reactive protein levels, and colorful fruits and vegetables are a rich source of antioxidants and phytonutrients, which neutralize free radicals that would otherwise trigger an inflammatory pathway, Bostick says.

In addition, protein is essential for immune function, maintaining muscle mass and protecting skin integrity, and monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fatty acids can combat inflammation.

Overall, experts say the "best diet for MS" is likely balanced, varied, less processed, affordable, enables social connections, is flexible and sustainable.

"It's very difficult to make informed decisions about how to feed yourself when you are unable to sort out the information from misinformation, and that's part of our collective role [as clinicians]," Bostick says.

Aging With MS

Another big issue people with MS face is the natural aging process.

Crystal Wright, RN, MSN, AGPCNP-BC, MSCN, an adult and geriatric primary care nurse practitioner, who presented a session titled Aging and Disability in MS, says both aging and MS affect the central nervous system, including brain structure and function.

“So, some of the age-related changes that we can see are atrophy, reduced plasticity, decreased gray matter volume, as well as some ischemic changes,” she says. “Well, you take that, combine it with someone who has MS, and it gets really complex really quickly.”

Together, this increases the risk of disability and may also alter how people respond to symptom management treatments and DMTs.

Not only does the central nervous system change with aging, but the immune system also alters. Because of this, there is an increased risk for infections and cancers, morbidity and mortality and decreased vaccine response.

“As we treat these patients with DMT therapies, because of the lowered immune system, there’s also a higher risk for side effects and a higher risk for infections or adverse reactions with these medications,” Wright says.

Wright says there are a few studies that have looked at discontinuing DMTs in older adults, but ultimately the decision requires a discussion of the risks and benefits for individual patients.

BRITTANY MARTIN

Crystal Wright, RN, MSN, AGPCNP-BC, MSCN, gives a presentation on aging and disability.

“Studies suggest that discontinuing therapy is linked to higher risk of relapses in older individuals, so if you are going to discontinue treatment, you want to talk to them about their risk factors,” she says.

Clinicians also should consider that home care needs may increase for older individuals, those with more aggressive disease or higher disability levels. A referral may be needed for a home health occupational therapist, who can look at the home environment and make recommendations to make it safer, such as utilizing smart home technology for tasks like turning lights on and off, temperature control or calling for help.

COURTESY OF 2025 CONSORTIUM OF MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS CENTERS ANNUAL MEETING

Poster presentations were part of the 2025 Consortium of Multiple Sclerosis Centers Annual Meeting.

As part of a multidisciplinary approach, emotional and social needs are important to address as people with MS age, and resources are available through the National MS Society, the MS Foundation and more.

“Individuals that do have higher levels of disability have higher levels of depression, and we need to make sure that we’re talking to these people about their depression, about their mood,” Wright says.

However, caregivers also need support and need to be encouraged to make healthy choices. Clinicians need to ask if caregivers need respite care or if they would consider paying for assistance.

“As we have these individuals that do have higher levels of disability, their caregivers are going through a lot. They’re from sunup to sundown, nonstop probably caring for these individuals,” Wright says. “So, we want to make sure that they’re also caring for themselves. We want them to make good decisions so that patients make good decisions.”

For more stories from the CMSC Annual Meeting, read In Depth on page 18 and visit pnonline.com. ■

Accommodations Toolkit

The Department of Labor announced the launch of the Veterans Accommodations Toolkit, a resource aimed at increasing employment rates and participation in apprenticeship programs for American veterans with disabilities.

Developed by the department's Veterans' Employment and Training Service and the Office of Disability Employment Policy, the Veterans Accommodations Toolkit offers tips and strategies on ways to enhance workplace supports and accommodations designed to facilitate the recruitment, hiring, training and retention of American veterans with disabilities in apprenticeship and other employment settings. The toolkit includes resources that not only help veterans with disabilities, but also benefit employers, apprenticeship sponsors and workforce development specialists.

"Our nation owes a debt of gratitude to the brave men and women who have sacrificed so much to secure our freedoms," says Secretary of Labor Lori Chavez-DeRemer. "One of the most meaningful ways we can honor their service is by increasing employment opportunities for all veterans, including the disabled. By supporting our distinguished veterans through Registered Apprenticeships and other job opportunities, the Veterans Accommodations Toolkit will ensure they have every tool at their disposal to build valuable skills, earn a paycheck and provide for themselves and their families."

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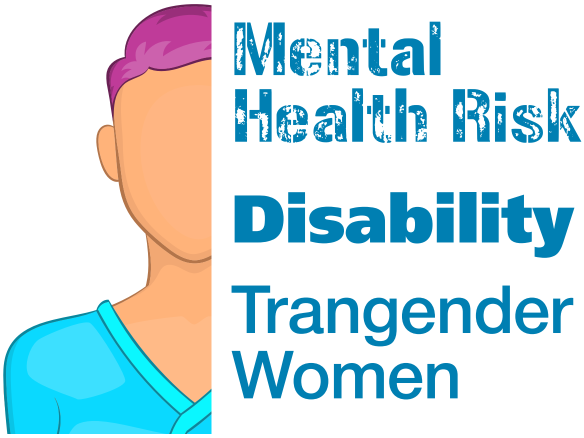
To learn more about the toolkit, visit dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas/individuals/veterans.

Transgender Mental Health

Researchers from the University of California-Irvine (UC-Irvine) Joe C. Wen School of Population & Public Health found that more than 70% of transgender women living with disabilities experience high levels of mental health risk, including psychological stress and suicidal ideation.



GRAPHICS BY FREEPIK

Corresponding author Sean Arayasirikul, PhD, associate professor in-residence of health, society and behavior at the UC-Irvine Joe C. Wen School of Population & Public Health, led a study published in *Preventive Medicine Reports*.

Using data from the San Francisco site of the National HIV Behavioral Surveillance Transgender Study within the years 2019 to 2020, researchers found that more than 70% of the roughly 200 transgender women surveyed reported living with at least one disability. Those individuals with disabilities had significantly greater odds of experiencing serious psychological distress and suicidal ideation.

"The fact that over 70% of transgender women in our study reported living with at least one disability is both striking and deeply concerning," says Arayasirikul in a July UC-Irvine release. "It underscores the urgent need to recognize how disability and gender identity intersect to create compounded barriers to mental health and well-being."

Notably, 22.4% of participants with at least one disability reported suicidal ideation in the past year, compared to only 5.2% of participants with no disabilities.

These findings reinforce the fact that people with disabilities experience higher rates of depression and anxiety, often driven by a lack of social and emotional support. The researchers argue that social and environmental contexts, including discrimination, inaccessible systems and insufficient support networks, play a central role in perpetuating these disparities.

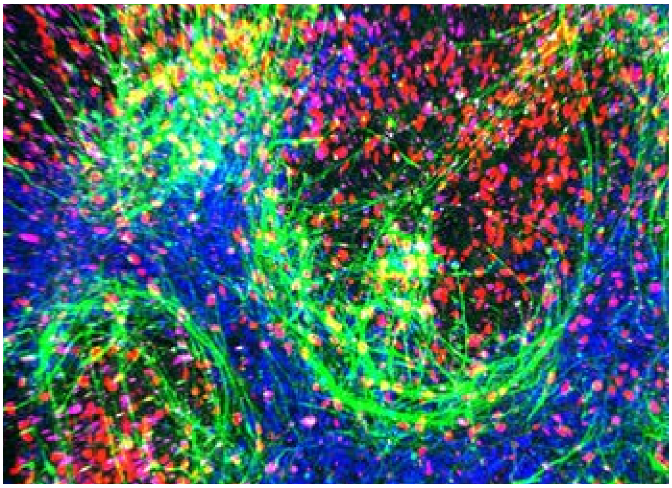
The study calls for urgent, system-level changes. Researchers emphasized the need for an intersectional approach in both future research and clinical practice — one that acknowledges the overlapping impacts of gender identity, disability, race and other social positions.

Ultimately, the study urges health care systems to be reimagined to serve all bodies and identities.

Contributor: Sean Arayasirikul, PhD, associate professor in-residence of health, society and behavior at the UC-Irvine Joe C. Wen School of Population & Public Health

Unlocking ALS Mystery

Clive Svendsen, PhD



Motor neurons, shown with their axons (nerve fibers), in green, are seen growing on a spinal cord organ-chip developed by Cedars-Sinai.

BOTH PHOTOS COURTESY OF CEDARS-SINAI

Using stem cells from patients with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), researchers at Cedars-Sinai in Los Angeles have created a lifelike model of the fatal disease that could help identify a cause of the illness, as well as effective treatments.

In a study published in the peer-reviewed journal *Cell Stem Cell*, investigators detail how they created “ALS on a chip” and the clues the specialized laboratory chip has already produced about nongenetic causes of the disease.

In this study, the motor neurons from ALS patients were seeded into the top channels of microengineered chips. Cells that make up the blood-brain barrier were seeded into the chips’ bottom channels. The two channels are connected through a porous membrane that allows investigators to flow fluids through the chips in order to mimic blood flow.

Investigators created a second group of the specialized chips using cells from individuals who did not have ALS, then used advanced technologies to analyze more than 10,000 genes in the motor neurons in both chip groups.

In the specialized chips, the motor neurons matured more completely than they would in a traditional lab culture, and investigators could detect distinct differences in the cells from ALS patients.

“We were intrigued to find that signaling for glutamate, a chemical that sends excitatory messages between neurons, was altered in the ALS motor neurons,” says Clive Svendsen, PhD, executive director of the Board of Governors Regenerative Medicine Institute at Cedars-Sinai and senior study author, in a June Cedars-Sinai release. “Excessive release of glutamate has long been considered a possible cause of ALS, and one of the few drugs approved to treat the disease targets this neurotransmitter. The changes we found don’t seem to cause any issues for the motor neurons when they are young, but over many years, it is possible that this increased glutamate signaling may be part of why motor neurons die in ALS.”

Svendsen says while these results are exciting, the team’s next task is to determine whether this increased glutamate signaling directly leads to the dysfunction or death of the cells. He also noted that glutamate is likely only one piece in a much larger puzzle that underlies the cause of ALS.

“If we can show that glutamate signaling eventually makes the ALS motor neurons sick, for instance, we can apply drugs to the blood vessel side of the chip to mimic a clinical trial,” Svendsen says. “Those experiments are underway.”

Gene Therapy For ALS

Researchers have developed a gene therapy that significantly slowed motor function loss in preclinical models of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), offering new hope for treating the neurodegenerative disease.

"Silencing" a gene associated with regulating TDP-43, the protein that accumulates in the brain and causes ALS, with a technique called RNA interference (RNAi) allowed mice to survive an average of 54% longer. Subjects also experienced improvements in strength and reduced inflammation in the brain and spinal cord, according to research from the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania and Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, published in *Nature Communications* in June.

Discovered at Penn Medicine, TDP-43 is a protein that lives in the nucleus of cells and regulates RNA splicing, part of the protein synthesis process. In people with ALS, the TDP-43 leaves the nucleus of the cell and aggregates in the cytoplasm, both of which contribute to the death of motor neurons and the symptoms associated with ALS, including muscle weakness, difficulty speaking and respiratory failure.

Previous research revealed that lowering levels of a protein in cells called Ataxin-2 (ATXN2) reduced TDP-43 leaving the nucleus in error and accumulating to cause the death of motor neurons. These efforts involved the use of strategies that required repeated delivery via spinal tap, which is difficult for humans to tolerate, and did not achieve a strong reduction in a previous clinical trial.

To lower ATXN2 levels more and with a single treatment, researchers used RNAi to "silence" ATXN2. Researchers delivered the RNAi to cerebrospinal fluid of mouse models of sporadic ALS using an adeno-associated virus (AAV) vector.

Researchers found that mice treated with RNAi showed a reduction in ATXN2 protein in their brain, brain stem and spi-

nal cord, all critical areas affected by ALS.

"Sporadic ALS is an extremely complicated condition that involves many different genes and systems malfunctioning," says first author Defne Amado, MD, PhD, an assistant professor of neurology at the University of Pennsylvania's Perelman School of Medicine. "By learning what this treatment corrects, we can also understand more about how the disease is caused and how it progresses and develop new treatments."

To read the original release, visit chop.edu/news/gene-therapy-may-slow-loss-motor-function-als-penn-and-chop-research-finds.

Women & MS Drugs

Women are less likely than men to receive drugs for multiple sclerosis (MS) between the ages of 18 and 40, during women's childbearing years, even when those drugs have been shown to be safe for use during pregnancy or to have a prolonged effect against the disease even when stopped before conception, according to a study published on July 30 in *Neurology*, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology (AAN).

"We found that women were less likely to be treated with a disease-modifying drug than men with the same level of disease severity, even when we took into account people who stopped taking their drugs during pregnancy or postpartum," says study author Sandra Vukusic, MD, PhD, of the University of Lyon in France, in a July AAN release. "When used early, MS drugs can delay the burden of the disease, so women who are not treated could have worse outcomes in the long term and an increased risk of long-term disability. This loss of chance is not acceptable anymore, as there are drugs that are compatible with pregnancy or can continue to fight the disease long after people stop them when they are trying to conceive."

For the study, researchers looked at more than 27 years of health records for people in France with relapsing-remitting MS that started when they were between 18 and 40 years old. A total of 16,857 women and 5,800 men were included in the study, with an average age of 29, and they were followed for an average of 12 years.

When researchers examined the percentage of person-years that people in the study received a disease-modifying drug, the number was 60.2% for women and 61.3% for men. Person-years represent both the number of people in the study and the amount of time each person spends in the study. For the highly effective drugs, the numbers were 23.5% for women and 25.3% for men.


FREEPIK

A study shows women are less likely than men to receive drugs for multiple sclerosis during their childbearing years, even when those drugs have been shown to be safe for use during pregnancy.

However, Vukusic says these raw percentages do not take into account differences that might explain a gap in drug exposure between men and women such as disease severity since women tend to have a more active disease, or pregnancy and postpartum periods during which certain therapies may be interrupted.

After adjusting for disease severity, pregnancy and postpartum periods, women had 8% lower odds of receiving a disease-modifying drug compared to men. In the case of newer drugs that are highly effective at reducing MS relapses, women had 20% lower odds of receiving the drugs.

"Anticipation of pregnancy was probably an important factor in this difference between women and men with MS, but there could also be a reluctance to use these treatments when they may actually be the best way to manage the disease and delay disability," Vukusic says. "Another factor could be that new data continues to be collected on the safety of newer MS drugs, so more work is needed to communicate those findings to people with MS and their doctors."

A study limitation was that information on pregnancies ending in miscarriage or stillbirth, as well as unsuccessful attempts at pregnancy, was not available, so discontinuations of medications due to these events were accounted for by adjusting the results for sex.

To read the original AAN release, visit aan.com/pressroom/home/pressrelease/5274. ■

people

JOHN GROTH

Full Of Life After Games Honor

For Jesse Lind, the National Veterans Wheelchair Games (NVWG) has given him another family.

The 44-year-old Marine Corps veteran has attended each of the past 12 Games, nearly all of them with his now 15-year-old son, Julian. And on July 22, father and son shared another special moment together — as Lind was honored as the 2025 NVWG Spirit of the Games award recipient inside the Minneapolis Convention Center in Minnesota.

COURTESY OF PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

Jesse Lind, right, and his son, Julian, share a moment after Jesse's Spirit of the Games award presentation.

As Lind wheeled up to the stage, with veterans yelling "Jess-e, Jess-e," to receive the award, he waved and pointed to the crowd a few times, while Julian recorded the moment from their table before joining his dad on stage. Once up there, Lind kept his speech short and sweet before handing the award to Julian, and they shared a handshake and a hug.

"You know, they say that you can't pick your family. But I disagree — because I chose y'all. And evidently, y'all chose me," says Lind, who lives in Little River, S.C. "It's an honor. Thank you."

Wild Final Day

Lind was selected as this year's Spirit of the Games award winner at the 44th NVWG, which ran July 17–22 and was co-sponsored by the Department of Veterans Affairs and Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA).

The award recognizes an athlete who is nominated by his or her peers and whose attitude, sportsmanship and courage reflect the best of what NVWG represents to all athletes.

Along with the honor, Lind received a trip from First Nation Group that's valued up to $2,000 anywhere in the U.S. The company will also sponsor his 2026 NVWG attendance in Detroit, paying for lodging and travel for Lind and one guest.

A PVA Mid-Atlantic Chapter member, Lind served from 1999 to 2001 in aviation operations and was injured in a car accident in California when he was 18 years old and early on in his career, sustaining a spinal cord injury with level T10, T12 and L2 fractures that left him an incomplete paraplegic.

This year, Lind competed in air rifle, shot put, pickleball, cornhole, wheelchair softball, disc golf and wheelchair basketball, winning gold in wheelchair basketball and earning a bronze in the Open V division discus with a 6.54-meter throw.

He had an eventful and memorable final Games day.

Less than two hours before the closing ceremony and award presentation, Lind scored 32 points to lead Team Huskies to a 61-52 victory over Team Bulldogs in the gold-medal wheelchair basketball game.

He closed the first half with a buzzer-beating putback off Army veteran Gene Calantoc's miss to tie the game at 31-all.

Then, Lind scored 20 points in the second half to help push his team to the victory.

And right there on the sidelines was Julian, who Lind says is like his biggest fan and de facto coach.

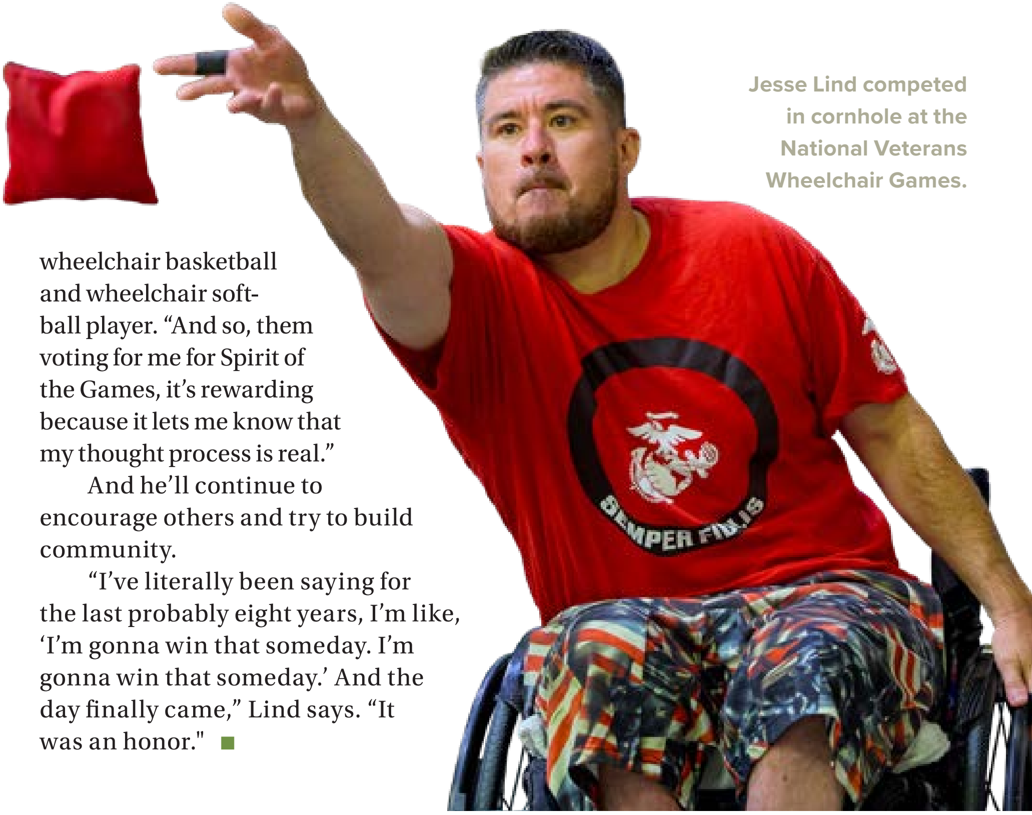
"Oh, man. He's my road dog. He's my biggest supporter, my biggest fan since he was a little guy," Lind says.

Afterwards, Julian was still wide-eyed.

"It was surreal," he says of his dad's title-game performance.

Julian's learned some lifelong lessons from his dad along the way, too.

"He's really great for proving that people can overcome really anything that's handed to them, good or bad, specifically bad," Julian says. "Even, you know, if people get hit with the worst possible thing they could have ever have, you literally think your life's over, you pop out here, it's a game-changer. It changes your life."



Jesse Lind competed in cornhole at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games.

COURTESY OF PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

Positive Mindset

It's changed both of theirs. And Lind wants to show others that a person's mindset is one major key in overcoming life's obstacles.

"At any time you want to feel bad about yourself, you know, you look around and realize that someone has it worse, you know what I mean? And you make peace with your situation. Make the best of it," he says.

Reflecting after the closing ceremony, Lind says it left him fulfilled.

"So, I've always tried to be that positive voice, you know, in the huddle, on the sidelines, try to gas people up. I try to keep things positive because it's important," says Lind, who's an avid wheelchair basketball and wheelchair softball player. "And so, them voting for me for Spirit of the Games, it's rewarding because it lets me know that my thought process is real."

And he'll continue to encourage others and try to build community.

"I've literally been saying for the last probably eight years, I'm like, 'I'm gonna win that someday. I'm gonna win that someday.' And the day finally came," Lind says. "It was an honor." ■

Winter Sports Clinic Applications

Applications for the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic called “Miracles on a Mountainside” are now open.

Sponsored by the Department of Veterans Affairs and Disabled American Veterans, the event is set for April 4–11 in Snowmass, Colo. Veterans will get to participate in adaptive alpine and Nordic skiing, sled hockey, scuba diving, rock wall climbing, fly fishing, curling, snowmobiling and other adaptive activities, sports and education.

40TH NATIONAL DISABLED VETERANS WINTER SPORTS CLINIC

WINTERSPORTSCLINIC.ORG

The clinic is open to male and female military service veterans who have disabilities including spinal cord injuries, multiple sclerosis, traumatic brain injury, cerebrovascular accident or stroke with residual, orthopedic amputations or visual impairments. Additionally, all veterans are required to ski, and there’s a sit-down skiing weight limit of 220 pounds and a stand-up skiing limit of 300 pounds.

All disabilities are subject to review by the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic medical director and program director. For more information, contact VA Event Deputy Director Alex Maitre at 970-263-5040 or visit wintersportsclinic.org/participate.

AXEL VILLACIS-MALDONADO/NATIONAL DISABLED VETERANS WINTER SPORTS CLINIC

The National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, which features adaptive skiing, has opened its applications for 2026.

Concussion Research

A University of Alabama faculty member and researcher has received a major award and will continue to work on developing a new athlete concussion tool and additional data.

Ryan Moran, PhD, a faculty member at the University of Alabama and a researcher in its Department of Health Science and the Athletic Training Research Laboratory, has received a research award from the Lakeshore Foundation’s Sport Science and Performance Center to explore innovative methods for detecting sport-related concussions in wheelchair athletes, according to an Aug. 10 press release from the University of Alabama.

COURTESY OF LAKESHORE FOUNDATION

Ryan Moran, PhD

His project focuses on assessing postural control using pressure-mapping systems as a potential tool for detecting concussions in adaptive athletes, and his research will continue through the 2025 adapted athletics season, with a focus on collecting data during wheelchair basketball, tennis and track and field events at Alabama, according to the release.

“We know that concussion signs and symptoms can look different in wheelchair athletes, and the current tools aren’t designed or validated with that in mind,” Moran says in the release. “This project is about ensuring our athletes receive the same level of care and inclusion in basic science research as their intercollegiate athletics peers."

NWBA Tourneys On The Move

After two years in Virginia, the National Wheelchair Basketball Association (NWBA) Adult and Junior Division wheelchair basketball national tournaments are headed to the South.

The 2026 NWBA Adult and Junior Division championships will head to the West Monroe Sports & Events facility in West Monroe, La., over two back-to-back weekends in March. The move was announced in late June after the two-year contract at the Henrico Sports & Events Center in Glen Allen, Va., ended.

The Junior Division championships will kick off tournament play from March 20–22 with the top 32 ranked Varsity teams and top 16 ranked Prep Division teams, while the Adult Division I, II and III tournaments will run from March 26–29.

The West Monroe Sports & Events facility is northeast Louisiana's newest indoor facility and is a 110,000-square-foot venue that features eight basketball courts and concessions on dual levels. There are 96 teams and more than 1,300 wheelchair basketball athletes expected to compete. ■

CHRISTOPHER DI VIRGILIO

The 2026 National Wheelchair Basketball Association Adult and Junior Division wheelchair basketball championships will be held in West Monroe, La.

PVA
Paralyzed Veterans of America
Sports & Recreation

EVENT SCHEDULE FY26

October 2025

PVA Intro to Paracycling Series: Denver	October 3-4, 2025	Denver, CO
PVA Wheelchair Football Camp - Augusta	October 10-11, 2025	North Augusta, SC
PVA Off-Road Paracycling Camp: Pocahontas State Park	October 16-18, 2025	Chesterfield, VA
PVA Billiards Tournament Series: Mid-South	October 17-18, 2025	Memphis, TN
PVA Pickleball Camp	October 18-19, 2025	San Antonio, Texas
PVA Off-Road Paracycling Camp: Bentonville	October 23-26, 2025	Bentonville, AR
Paracycling: High Performance Road Racing Camp	October 27-31, 2025	Colorado Springs, CO

November 2025

Intro to Paracycling Series: Phoenix	November 12, 2025	Phoenix, AZ
PVA Off-Road Paracycling Camp: Phoenix	November 13-16, 2025	Phoenix, AZ
PVA Billiards Tournament Series: Buckeye	November 14-15, 2025	Westerville, OH

December 2025

PVA Bowling Tournament Series: Nevada	December 4-7, 2025	Las Vegas, NV
PVA Boccia Tournament Series: New England	December 6-7, 2025	Brockton, MA

January 2026

PVA Wheelchair Rugby Invitational	January 28-February 1, 2026	Louisville, KY

February 2026

PVA Boccia Tournament Series: Bayou Gulf States	February 7-8, 2026	Gulfport, MS
PVA Airgun Tournament Series: Central Florida	February 14-15, 2026	Orlando, FL
PVA Bowling Tournament Series: Florida Gulf Coast	February 25-27, 2026	Tampa, FL
PVA Outdoor Experience: Maine Winter Sports	February 25-March 1, 2026	Carrabassett Valley, ME

March 2026

PVA Bowling Tournament Series: Tri-State Tournament	March 13-15, 2026	Beaverton, OR
PVA Billiards Tournament Series: Mid-Atlantic	March 14-15, 2026	Midlothian, VA
PVA Bass Tournament Series: Southeastern Challenge	March 27-29, 2026	Appling, GA

PVA
Paralyzed Veterans of America
Sports & Recreation

EVENT SCHEDULE

FY26

April 2026

PVA Bass Tournament Series: Bluegrass Bass Bash	April 10-12, 2026	Kuttawa, KY
PVA Off-Road Paracycling Camp and Race: Pocahontas	April 16-19, 2026	Chesterfield, VA
PVA Bass Tournament Series: Citrus Slam	April 17-19, 2026	Kissimmee, FL
PVA Bowling Tournament Series: Texas	April 22-24, 2026	San Antonio, TX
PVA Billiards Tournament Series: Mid-America	April 23-25, 2026	Oklahoma City, OK
PVA Wheelchair Pickleball Tournament	April 25-26, 2026	TBD

May 2026

PVA Bass Tournament Series: Land of Lincoln	May 1-3, 2026	Sesser, IL
PVA Boccia Tournament Series: Puerto Rico (Year-End)	May 2-3, 2026	San Juan, PR
Intro to Paracycling Series: Salt Lake City	May 4-5, 2026	Salt Lake City, UT
Intro to Paracycling Series: Milwaukee	May 20-21, 2026	Milwaukee, WI
PVA Trapshooting Tournament Series: Vaughan	May 22-24, 2026	Elburn, IL
PVA Bass Tournament Series: Buckeye Bash	May 29-31, 2026	Cortland, OH
PVA Airgun Tournament Series: Texas	May 30-31, 2026	San Antonio, TX

June 2026

PVA Bass Tournament Series: Capital Clash	June 5-7, 2026	Waldorf, MD
PVA Wheelchair Basketball Camp	June 8-14, 2026	Arlington, TX
PVA Trapshooting Tournament Series: Wisconsin	June 12-14, 2026	Green Bay, WI
PVA Outdoor Experience	TBD	TBD
PVA Bowling Tournament Series: National Championship	June 25-28, 2026	Omaha, NE
PVA Trapshooting Tournament Series: Iowa (Year-End)	June 26-28, 2026	Cedar Rapids, IA

July 2026

National Veterans Wheelchair Games	July 9-14, 2026	Detroit, MI

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PVA PUBLICATIONS FILE PHOTO

Happy Halloween!

Get into the spirit of the season with this cover from the October 1978 issue of *PN*. The PVA Publications staff wishes everyone a fun and safe Halloween.