

As a veteran of Vietnam, I returned home after two tours in country to find life somewhat different in the attitudes of those at home who never served in the armed forces. For me the adjustment was not hard, but for many veterans the return home and adjustment is a difficult road. Sometimes a painful one for those who had service connected disabilities as a result of the campaign they were involved in. Life is and will be a struggle for many, which in many cases puts a strain on their caregivers. The Department of Defense estimates that Afghan and Iraq war related traumatic brain injuries is 161,025, but other research by RAND puts that figure at 320,000. In addition, invisible mental wounds (post-traumatic stress disorder) also play a major concern for returning veterans. It is estimated that 300,000 service members have psychological wounds.

Carer or caregiver is used to refer to unpaid relatives or friends who support veterans with disabilities. The accepted definition of a caregiver is: "Someone whose life is in some way restricted by the need to be responsible for the care of someone who is mentally ill, mentally handicapped, physically disabled or whose health is impaired by sickness or old age"

Most caregivers feel positive about their experiences than they did before they took on the responsibility. This was concluded in a 2007 survey on family caregivers. Often caregivers are burdened by high out-of-pocket costs in caring for an individual, but:

1. 60% called the experience very or extremely rewarding
2. 54% formed a strong bond with the individual they were rendering care for
3. 60% reported improvement in the quality of their relationships with the person they were caring for.
4. 68.7% said they enjoyed the tasks associated with care giving
5. The amount of satisfaction was directly related to the type of disease from which the care recipient suffers.

More than $\frac{3}{4}$ of all caregivers are female and range in age 35-59. The other $\frac{1}{4}$ of all male caregivers are 60 and older. More than 50 million people provide care for chronically ill, disabled or aged family members during any given year. Thirty percent of family caregivers for seniors are themselves aged 65 or over. Caregivers, no matter what the age offer companionship, conversation, meal preparation, light housekeeping, general assistance, personal care and sitter services just to name a few of the services.

The value of the services caregivers provide "free" is estimated to be over \$306 billion a year and that is twice as much as is actually spent on homecare and nursing home services combined (\$158 billion).

Stress associated with unsupported care of chronically ill family members may result in a condition commonly referred as caregiver's syndrome. In the US about 50 million people are caregivers and without them our loved ones would be require permanent placement in institutions or health care facilities at a greater cost to society. The physical, emotional and financial consequences for family caregivers can be overwhelming without support.

Until 2009 there was support, but not to any great extent for caregivers could get to help them in supporting veterans.

In 2009 the Senate passed the Veterans and Caregivers Support Bill with a vote of 98-0. The Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Services Act of 2009 contain provisions to provide:

1. Caregivers assistance to wounded veterans
2. telecommunications with VA doctors and specialists for wounded veterans in rural areas
3. Travel benefits for caregivers to travel to the veterans hospital or rehab center
4. Caregiver education, training and counseling
5. Oversight of caregivers via home visits
6. Reprise caregiving services
7. National survey of Family Caregivers

The main focus on the bill is to provide better care for both veterans who have been wounded while serving since September 11, 2001, and the caregivers. As medical technology in combat has advanced, more soldiers are surviving after losing limbs or having serious injuries, but require ongoing care, for many for the rest of their lives. There are also federal recovery coordinators, who can help caregivers make sense of the military's medical resources.