

Expansion of veteran caregiver program delayed until at least next summer

Families of veterans who served before the recent wars won't be added to the [Veterans Affairs caregivers program](#) until summer 2020 at the earliest, department officials announced Wednesday.

The delay had been expected for months, as VA officials struggled to get new technology and processes in place to handle [an influx of new applicants to the program](#). Currently, only families of troops injured after Sept. 11, 2001, are eligible for program stipends, which can total several thousand dollars a month.

Under the [VA Mission Act](#) passed last year, veterans who sustained a serious military-related injury before May 7, 1975, were supposed to be able to enroll starting this fall. Now, they'll have to wait at least June 2020 for entry, if not longer.

"VA will perform testing and verify that the system has full functionality before expanding the program as required under the MISSION Act," the department said in a statement.

The timeline shift also pushes back eligibility for families of veterans who served from 1975 to 2001, from fall 2021 to fall 2022 at the earliest. Lawmakers have included a phased application period for different generations of service members to ease pressure on VA systems.