

## About Our History

75-20 Astoria Boulevard  
Jackson Heights, NY 11370-1177

Tel 800 404 2898  
Fax 718 803 0414  
[www.unitedspinal.org](http://www.unitedspinal.org)

### About Our History

For thousands of individuals with spinal cord injury or disease, the road back to a full and meaningful life has been charted and paved by United Spinal Association. For 60 years we have fought for equal opportunity; we've funded hundreds of important research initiatives; we've mastered the frustrating tangles of applying for benefits programs at the state and federal level; designed and built accessible facilities in both the public and private sectors and shared our expertise with thousands of architects and designers; we've written historic federal legislation expanding the scope of civil rights; repaired, maintained, sold, and donated hundreds of wheelchairs and other adaptive equipment; created and nurtured wheelchair sports teams and forged alliances with numerous professional franchises.

And, most important of all, we've aggressively championed the right of all citizens with disabilities to share in the same American Dream as everyone else. Below are some highlights from our first 60 years.

### Highlights

**1946--Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association Formed:** A small group of veterans with spinal cord injuries suffered in World War Two reject being warehoused in VA hospitals and form a support group to help themselves and other paralyzed veterans lead independent lives. From these modest beginnings the nationwide powerhouse we know today as United Spinal Association was born.

**1946--Public Law 663 Enacted:** One of the first laws we worked for was the VA Automobile Grant, which provided funding to wartime paraplegics and amputees to buy specially adapted vehicles. The fight to have quadriplegics granted the same benefit takes six more years.

**1948--Public Law 702 Enacted:** Seventy of our members roll into Grand Central Station in New York City and collect signatures supporting an accessible housing bill. Days later, President Truman signs the legislation into law.

**1968--Architectural Barriers Act Passed:** We lobbied hard to get this legislation enacted and it marked one of the first efforts to ensure equal access to public buildings for Americans with disabilities.

**1970--Jim Peters and *Life* magazine Expose Conditions at Bronx VA:** Executive Director Jim Peters convinces editors at *Life* magazine to expose the deplorable condition of veteran care at the old Bronx VA Medical Center. Cover story in May causes a sensation and within a year the VA establishes a nationwide Spinal Cord Injury Service office in Washington, DC. Several years later, the Bronx VA hospital is razed and a new facility is constructed with a special emphasis on treating SCI.

**1978--Stanford Medical School Endowment:** We provide a \$260,000 endowment to Stanford University Medical School to establish a professorship in SCI medicine.

**1985--Center of Excellence in Neurology Created:** We make a \$500,000 grant to Mount Sinai Medical School to research urological complications due to SCI at the new Bronx VA Medical Center.

**1986--R\*A\*M\*P Launched:** We inaugurate our Residential Accessibility Modification Program to help make member homes and apartments fully accessible. Program includes building ramps, widening doors, retrofitting bathrooms and kitchens and installing lifts and elevators.

**1987--Yale Center for Neuroscience Established at West Haven VAMC:** In association with the Yale University Medical School, we help create the Center for Neuroscience Regeneration Research at the West Haven, Connecticut, VAMC.

**1989—Legal Action Against VA for Castle Point Conditions:** We initiated a lawsuit against the Department of Veterans Affairs alleging substandard care for veterans with SCI at the Castle Point, NY, VAMC. The 1994 settlement creates Clinical Practice Guidelines, which promises to elevate SCI care throughout the VA system.

**1990—Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 Signed:** President Bush signs the Americans With Disabilities Act into law. This landmark legislation protects the basic civil rights of over 43 million Americans with disabilities. We helped write a significant portion of the Act, which was largely based on a NYC law that we co-wrote. The ADA provides a clear and comprehensive national mandate for elimination of discrimination against individuals with disabilities.

**1996—NYC Agrees to 100% Accessible Bus Fleet:** A major advocacy program we initiated results in an agreement by New York City to make every bus and many of its subways stations wheelchair accessible. Every month, more than 30,000 riders with disabilities ride the NYC lift-equipped buses and the program becomes a “blueprint” for other US cities.

**1999—Congress Adds to VA Health Care Budget:** After gathering over 10,000 signatures, we hand-deliver our demands for an increased VA health care budget to Congress and lawmakers add \$1.7 billion to the VA appropriation.

**2004—United Spinal Association is Formed:** We take a bold step into the future by significantly expanding our mission and launching a comprehensive initiative to serve the entire nation and all individuals with spinal cord injury or disease. In September, the Bronx VA hospital is formally re-named the James J. Peters Veterans Affairs Medical Center in a dedication ceremony led by Senator Hilary Rodham Clinton and VA Secretary James Nicholson. This long-overdue tribute honors the memory of Jim Peters, United Spinal's Executive Director and driving force for over 30 years.

**Contact Public Affairs**

Phone: 800.404.2898 ext. 283

E-mail: [publicaffairs@unitedspinal.org](mailto:publicaffairs@unitedspinal.org)

For more information, visit [www.unitedspinal.org](http://www.unitedspinal.org)