



Idaho Division of  
**VETERANS  
SERVICES**

*Caring for  
America's  
Heroes*

# **BULLETIN**

**April  
2021**

# STATE OF IDAHO

BRAD LITTLE, GOVERNOR

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**To be connected with a VA suicide prevention and mental health professional,  
call the toll-free National Suicide Prevention hotline and indicate you are a veteran.**

**(800) 273-8255**

ALL EMPLOYMENT ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES ARE ADMINISTERED IN A NONDISCRIMINATORY  
MANNER IN CONFORMANCE WITH FEDERAL AND STATE EEO AND CIVIL RIGHTS LAWS



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by emailing  
[listserv.admin@veterans.idaho.gov](mailto:listserv.admin@veterans.idaho.gov)**



## FROM BILL'S DESK

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We have now made it through winter and are ready for the spring outdoor activities like yardwork, fishing, and dealing with seasonal allergies! Here are some of the issues ongoing within the Idaho Division of Veterans Services and the VA. I want to thank the Veterans of Foreign Wars' National Veterans Service for many of these updates.

We would like to welcome our new Chief Administrator for IDVS, Mark Tschampl. Mark achieved the rank of Captain in the Air Force and served from 1998 to 2005, and served as a Commander in the US Air Force, Security Forces with combat service in Iraq as part of Operations Iraqi Freedom. Mark has a degree in Public Administration and a Master's in Health and Human Performance from Iowa State University. He is a Certified Worksite Wellness Specialist through the National Wellness Institute and for the last 2 years, has been working as a Bureau Chief within the Family and Community Services Division at the Idaho Department of Health & Welfare. Prior to this, he spent 8 years as the Director of the Health and Wellness Center on Mountain Home Air Force Base. I would like to wish Pete Koehler the best in his continued/upcoming retirement! Thanks for everything that you have done Pete, you are a Great American!

The Boise VA Regional Office is open to the public even with the ongoing construction on the second floor. Many veterans think we are closed due to all of the heavy equipment surrounding the building, but we are open and veterans/family members still need to wear a mask prior to entering the building.

The VA Medical Centers are now offering Covid-19 vaccinations to all age groups of enrolled veterans and their spouses and caregivers. Call your local VA Medical Center to setup an appointment for the vaccine if you are interested.

The VA's Debt Management Center has now suspended the collection of all debts until September 30, 2021. Also, the recently passed American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (PL 117-2) authorized VHA medical copayments to be waived from April 6th, 2020, until September 30th, 2021. What this means is that any veteran who either paid or owes VHA medical copayments between April 6, 2020, and September 30, 2021, will not be responsible for those payments. Any veteran who paid VHA medical copayments during that timeframe will be refunded. However the VA is still working out their process and hopes to have refunds sent out within the next 90 days.

The VA Office of Community Care (OCC) contact center announced that specially trained call center staff are now available to work one on one with veterans to research and resolve collection-specific issues resulting from authorized VA community care claims. Affected veterans should gather any letters, notices, or information regarding debt collection or adverse credit reports related to authorized use of VA community care and call the toll-free number at (877) 881-7618 (option 1), from 8:00 am to 9:00 pm, eastern time. VA staff will collect the veteran's information, investigate the issue, and follow up with details of the final resolution. For more information, please visit [www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/about\\_us/contacts.asp](http://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/about_us/contacts.asp).

As mentioned in the last bulletin, the VA launched the new Single Access Point to all VA Contact Center which is available 24/7 and offers the following assistance to veterans:

- Information on COVID-19 and the MISSION Act.
- Health care eligibility and enrollment.
- Information on VA benefits.
- Information about the nearest VA facilities, directory assistance, and connection to VA Medical Center operators.
- Technical support for [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov).
- Financial information, such as debt and payment options.
- Referrals to VA specialists during business hours.
- Immediate transfer to the Veterans Crisis Line or the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans for services and support. This means regardless of what questions or services you are calling for, veterans are to call (800) MyVA411 or (800) 698-2411.

Due to the ongoing Covid-19, the National Personnel Records Center is still closed or working on a reduced capacity except for emergencies. As such, they will only work emergency requests associated with medical treatment, burials, and homeless veterans trying to gain admittance to a homeless shelter. They are asking to refrain from submitting non-emergency requests for this such as replacement medals, requests for administrative corrections, or copies of DD-214s until they return to pre-Covid staffing levels.

The 2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) has been approved and includes the addition of three new conditions which will be added to the approved herbicide exposure conditions associated with Vietnam service, service on ship within 12 nautical miles of the Vietnam coastline, service on the Korean DMZ from 1968-1971, served along the perimeters of an Airbase in Thailand during the Vietnam War, or served on a flight/ground crew for C-123 Aircraft until 1986. The three new conditions are bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, and Parkinsonism (or Parkinson-like symptoms). The VA still has to release the rules on how and when they will adjudicate these claims (to include Survivor benefits) similar to how the Blue Water Agent Orange claims were handled, but they will conduct initial development of the claim and then defer a

decision until after the final rules are released. If a veteran previously filed for one of these conditions and was denied, we can file a VA Form 21-0995 (Supplemental Claim) for those previously denied issues. If a veteran has never filed for those conditions, we should file either an Intent to File to protect the earliest possible date of claim or the VA form 21-526ez to begin the claim process. On an administrative note, hypertension (high blood pressure) was not included as an herbicide presumptive condition on the NDAA.

Effective February 7, 2021, the VA released changes to the musculoskeletal rating tables which effects multiple joint conditions. The largest noticeable changes impact the temporary 100% ratings for total knee and total hip replacements, which are reduced from 13 months to 5 months following surgery.

On January 5, 2021, former President Donald Trump signed H.R. 7105, Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 into law. This new legislation includes many needed improvements to veteran's care and benefits including:

- Deborah Sampson Act: will make many improvements to women veterans' health care.
- Will require the VA to make Disability Benefits Questionnaires available for public use again.
- Will lower the age from 57 to 55 to remarry without incurring penalties for surviving spouses receiving Dependency and Indemnity Compensation.
- Will modernize the Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance (SDVI) program.
- Will require the VA to study incidents of cancer and other illnesses experienced by service members who served at the Karshi-Khanabad (K2) Air Base in Uzbekistan between October 1, 2001, and September 30, 2005.
- Will change the statutory definition of Vietnam veteran to include individuals who served in the Republic of Vietnam from November 1, 1955, to February 27, 1961.
- Will increase certain veteran funeral benefits and authorize the VA to add spouses and eligible dependent children to VA-furnished headstones.
- Will increase the maximum amount the VA may grant in a fiscal year to states and tribal organizations for maintaining veterans' cemeteries from \$5 million to \$10 million.
- Will call for the elimination of the 12-year limit on using Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) benefits.
- Will require the VA to create a database on its website to explain public institution requirements for in-state tuition.
- Will expand benefits and services for homeless veterans.
- Will create certain education, employment, and housing protections for veterans impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Extends the payment of the Medal of Honor Special Pension to surviving spouses that are not already receiving Dependency & Indemnity Compensation (DIC).

Due to the American Rescue Plan Act and other COVID-19-related legislation recently passed into law, FEMA will be able to provide financial assistance for COVID-19-related funeral expenses acquired after January 20, 2020. Although applications are not yet being accepted, FEMA anticipates beginning later this month and is working on establishing a toll-free phone number for applying for assistance. People who have incurred COVID-19-related funeral expenses are being advised to keep and gather documents, like an official death certificate that shows the death is COVID-19 related and funeral expense documents. FEMA will also need proof of funds received from other sources such as the VA, to determine the amount of your benefit. BEWARE of scammers – FEMA will not contact people prior to them registering for assistance. We will include more information on the FEMA benefit in this bulletin.

The Idaho Tax Commission has extended the deadline to submit for the 2021 100% Service Connected Property Tax Benefit (if you are service connected by the VA at 100% or receiving Individual Unemployability) until May 17, 2021. You must apply/reapply for the benefit at your local County Assessor's Office. You must have a VA Benefit Letter showing that you are rated 100% or receiving Individual Unemployability that is dated January 1, 2021, or newer. You can print an award letter off of your VA.gov account, receive one from the Boise VA Regional Office's Public Contact Team, request a Benefit Letter by calling the VA's phone number (800) MyVA411 or (800) 698-2411, or you can contact one of our State Veterans Service Office locations and we can submit the request to the VA. This benefit will allow you to receive the \$1,320 property tax reduction on your December 2021 bill.

With the ongoing Covid-19 concerns, we will not be holding the Annual County and Post Service Officer Training this year. Hopefully, everything concerning Covid-19 gets resolved and we can resume the training in 2022. If there are any questions, please feel free to contact our offices. Have a fun and safe spring!

# ATTENTION VETERANS!

Are you interested in becoming a U.S. Citizen?



## Do you have:

- An Honorable or General Under Honorable Conditions Discharge?
- A copy of your DD-214?

**Then you may qualify for our Veterans Naturalization Assistance Program**

**It's free to apply for your naturalization as a U.S. Military veteran.**

**You may be eligible to apply for naturalization under special provisions.**



**The Veterans Consortium**

VETERANS NATURALIZATION ASSISTANCE PROJECT<sup>SM</sup>

If you or a veteran you know may qualify, please contact Nicqelle Godfrey at (202) 733-3337 or [vnap@vetsprobono.org](mailto:vnap@vetsprobono.org)

# SAVE LIVES ACT ALLOWS VA TO PROVIDE COVID-19 VACCINATIONS TO ALL VETERANS, THEIR SPOUSES, & THEIR CAREGIVERS

Press Release, March 24, 2021

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President Joe Biden signed the SAVE LIVES Act into law IN March, expanding the VA’s legal authority to provide COVID-19 vaccines to all veterans, regardless of their VA health care enrollment status, as well as their spouses, caregivers, and some beneficiaries. The SAVE LIVES Act removed some of the legal limits on the medical care the VA can provide to veterans, based on health care eligibility and priority groups. The expanded authority depends on readily available COVID-19 vaccine supply and requires the VA to continue to prioritize vaccinations and healthcare delivery for our nation’s veterans enrolled in VA care. “The SAVE LIVES Act increases the number of individuals who are eligible to get lifesaving COVID-19 vaccines from VA from 9.5 million to more than 33 million,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “Meeting the task of vaccinating this expanded population will be a tremendous undertaking for the VA and will require a significant increase in our allocation of vaccine supply, but I am confident that VA’s workforce is up to the task.”

The VA is providing COVID-19 vaccinations to veterans and employees per its COVID-19 Vaccination Plan. As of March 24<sup>th</sup>, the VA has fully vaccinated 1,594,812 individuals, including veterans, VA employees, and federal partners. The next steps in the VA’s prioritized expansion efforts are to offer the vaccine to all enrolled veterans – approximately 9.5 million – followed by those outlined in the bill, as vaccine supply permits:

- Non-enrolled veterans as defined in the new legislation, including those without service-connected disabilities and who have incomes above the VA’s threshold.
- Overseas veterans who rely on the Foreign Medical Program.
- Veteran caregivers who are enrolled in either the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers or the Program of General Caregiver Support Services.
- Veteran caregivers enrolled in certain Geriatrics and Extended Care Programs, such as Veteran Directed Care, Bowel and Bladder, Home Based Primary Care and the VA’s Medical Foster Home Program.
- Civilian Health and Medical Programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs recipients.
- Veteran spouses.

In March and April 2021, the VA will conduct pilots of COVID-19 vaccination for individuals specified in HR1276 at select VA medical centers. These pilots will work through critical steps in the process including communications, operations including space and staffing, systems for registration, enrollment and scheduling, documentation, and data transmission. The VA currently receives approximately 200,000 first, or single doses, of COVID-19 vaccine each week. The VA estimates that it will need a minimum of 300,000 first or single doses of COVID-19 vaccine weekly to offer COVID-19 vaccination to an additional three million veterans who are enrolled but not currently using VA health care. The VA estimates that it will need approximately 600,000 first, or single doses, of COVID-19 vaccine each week to further expand vaccination to all individuals outlined in HR1276. First or single dose supply is the best indicator of the VA’s capacity to offer expanded COVID-19 vaccination.

## PREMIUM REDUCTIONS COMING TO ENROLLEES OF VETERANS’ GROUP LIFE INSURANCE

Press Release, March 1, 2021

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All veterans insured under Veterans’ Group Life Insurance (VGLI) will receive a reduction in premiums effective April 1<sup>st</sup>, ensuring that VGLI remains a cost effective option for veterans and transitioning uniform service members who choose Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) insurance products. Premiums for VGLI will be reduced by an average of 7% across all age groups — allowing separating service members to continue their Servicemembers’ Group Life Insurance coverage level as a renewable term insurance policy after leaving service. “The reduction in VGLI premiums will make life insurance even more affordable for veterans,” said Acting Under Secretary for Benefits Thomas Murphy. “Offering our veterans better rates for their life insurance as they transition to civilian life is just one effort the department is taking to address the needs of our customers.”

While any separating service member who has SGLI coverage upon separation is eligible to sign up for VGLI after separation, they must submit their application and initial premium within 240 days after leaving the military to apply without proof of good health. Those who apply after the 240-day period but before the deadline of one year and 120 days from separation will need to submit proof of good health by completing a questionnaire regarding medical conditions. Additionally, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the VA is temporarily extending the application deadlines for VGLI by an additional 90 days beyond the initial 240-day period and the one year and 120 day-period, referenced above, to offer more flexibility to separating service members. This enrollment extension will remain in effect until June 2021.

## **NATIONAL PRESCRIPTION DRUG TAKE BACK DAY ON APRIL 24<sup>TH</sup>**

**Press Release, April 7, 2021**

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The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day aims to provide a safe, convenient, and responsible means of disposing of prescription drugs, while also educating the general public about the potential for abuse of medications. The DEA's National Prescription Drug Take Back Day is Saturday, April 24, 2021 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

This event is an important measure in helping remove potentially dangerous controlled substances from our nation's homes. VA employees, along with their friends, families, and neighbors, are encouraged to join this commitment to improving public health and safety by participating in this event. To learn more about the National Prescription Drug Take Back Day visit: [www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/drug\\_disposal/takeback](http://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/drug_disposal/takeback).

## **VA OFFERS CONTINUED DEBT RELIEF OPTIONS FOR VETERANS**

**Press Release, February 18, 2021**

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The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) reaffirms its commitment to extend debt relief for veterans through September 30<sup>th</sup>. The VA will continue suspension of collection on all veteran benefit overpayments and medical copayment debts incurred after April 1, 2020. The VA is suspending this debt collection to provide veterans continued financial relief due to the COVID-19 pandemic. "My top priority right now is to do everything in our power to help our veterans, caregivers, and their families get through this challenging COVID-19 pandemic," said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. "VA will continue to find ways to provide real relief to 2 million veterans and their families as we fight through this health crisis together."

To assist with making informed choices for their situation, the VA will notify veterans of the existence of their current debt and available expansive relief options. These options include making payments, extending repayment plans, waivers, compromises, and temporary hardship suspensions. Veterans and beneficiaries with questions regarding benefit overpayments can see frequently asked questions at [www.va.gov/debtman](http://www.va.gov/debtman). They can also go to [iris.custhelp.va.gov/app/ask](http://iris.custhelp.va.gov/app/ask) to submit requests or call (800) 827-0648. For questions about medical and pharmacy copayment debt, veterans can contact the Health Resource Center at (866) 400-1238.

## **VA PARTNERSHIP STREAMLINES VETERAN'S ACCESS TO CARE, HOUSING ASSISTANCE**

**Press Release, March 4, 2021**

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The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is partnering with customer relationship management company, Salesforce, to improve access to essential VA services and resources among homeless and at-risk veterans. The Status Query and Response System (SQUARES) is a VA web application first created in 2015 to provide external homeless service organizations with reliable and detailed information about veteran eligibility. Thanks in part to the VA and Salesforce collaboration, the updated and expanded version of SQUARES lets the VA partner organizations easily verify veterans' eligibility for VA homeless programs in real-time. "Providing safe and stable housing to our nation's veterans is a department priority," said VA Executive Director for the Homeless Programs Office Monica Diaz. "The use of SQUARES helps enhance access to VA care and services among veterans facing housing crises."

SQUARES has been vital during the COVID-19 pandemic in assisting food pantries, homeless service providers, state agencies, nonprofits, and other organizations in swiftly connecting vulnerable veterans to the VA's homeless prevention, rapid rehousing, and wraparound supportive services. "Providing the backbone for SQUARES demonstrates how the cloud helps the government move faster, extend its impact into the community and connect veterans who are experiencing homelessness to the benefits they earned while serving our country," said Dave Rey, president of Salesforce's global public sector. "More than 2,100 partner organizations — including state veteran agencies, state and local health and human services groups, and nonprofit homeless service providers — are already using SQUARES to provide better care to veterans across the country." The VA and Salesforce will convene virtual workshops to educate users about SQUARES and its features. The two will also create videos and case studies to educate registered users and potential new users on how to use the online tool.



## **VA & DEPARTMENT OF LABOR RELEASES HIGH DEMAND OCCUPATION LIST**

**Press Release, March 31, 2021**

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The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is preparing to launch the Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program (VRRAP) as part of its continued effort to support veterans seeking retraining and economic opportunities in response to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The VA, in partnership with the Department of Labor, published a list of high-demand occupations. The list is available at [benefits.va.gov/GIBILL/docs/vrrap-high-demand-occupation-list.pdf](https://benefits.va.gov/GIBILL/docs/vrrap-high-demand-occupation-list.pdf) and includes healthcare, education, media, engineering, and high tech opportunities.

The new program, part of the American Rescue Plan, will allow qualifying veterans between the ages of 22 and 67 to receive up to 12 months of tuition, fees, and monthly housing allowance payments, based on Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. The VA will provide further information soon on how veterans can apply for this program. The week of April 4<sup>th</sup>, the VA will release a participation agreement and begin to work with educational institutions interested in participating in VRRAP. The VA will require educational institutions to commit to a participation agreement that will outline VRRAP requirements and specify which training programs are covered under VRRAP. Once reviewed and approved by the VA, a comprehensive list of VRRAP educational institutions and programs will be published and made available.

For a program of education to qualify for VRRAP, it must be approved for GI Bill or VET TEC, not lead to a bachelors or graduate degree, and provide training for a high-demand occupation. The payment model for VRRAP tuition and fees (paid directly to the VRRAP education institution) is milestone based:

- 50% when the veteran begins the program;
- 25% when the veteran completes the program;
- 25% when the veteran finds employment in the field of study.

The program is limited to a maximum of 17,250 participants and up to \$386 million. If you are aware of any GI Bill Beneficiaries who require assistance, please have them contact the Education Call Center at (888) 442-4551 between 7 a.m. - 6 p.m. Central Time, Monday-Friday to speak with a representative.

## **VA EXTENDS EXISTING MORATORIUMS ON EVICTION & FORECLOSURES**

**Press Release, February 16, 2021**

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The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will extend the existing moratorium on evictions and foreclosures, as well as extend VA loan forbearance requests to June 30<sup>th</sup>, because of COVID-19. The current moratorium extensions for evictions and foreclosures were set to end March 31<sup>st</sup>. “We will do everything in our power to help veterans, their families, survivors, and our caregivers get through this pandemic,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “The department’s moratorium and forbearance extensions support President Biden’s January 22<sup>nd</sup> executive order to deliver economic relief to Americans amid the COVID-19 crisis by addressing economic hardships the veteran community faces, through no fault of its own, during the ongoing pandemic.” VA borrowers experiencing financial hardship due to COVID-19 can call (877) 827-3702 for additional information.

## **VA STRENGTHENS PTSD CLAIMS PROCESS TRAINING**

**Press Release, March 25, 2021**

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In March, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) started implementing steps to improve its posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) claims processing. During the next six months, the VA will provide training, guidance, and process updates to ensure claims processors better understand evidence gathering and stressor verification requirements for PTSD claims. “The updated training for employees is being incorporated and implemented immediately,” said VA Acting Under Secretary for Benefits Thomas Murphy. “I want to ensure our programs consistently evaluate all veterans effectively and fairly.”

The updated training was developed partly in response to a VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) internal review of approximately 118,000 claims completed during fiscal year 2019 involving veterans’ entitlement to service connection for PTSD. While most claims for service connection related to PTSD were accurately processed, OIG found claims processors did not follow all task-based procedures when deciding the claim. OIG reviewed a statistical sample of 150 claims and determined the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) claims processors inaccurately processed 24 of the 150 claims.

Part of the VA’s improvement is to assess the reorganization of procedural guidance to ensure claims processors make both accurate decisions and follow the required policies. This will include determining any necessary procedural manual changes for accurate processing of claims involving entitlement to veterans with service-connected PTSD.

## **VA FIGHTS BACK AGAINST PREDATORY CLAIMS-ASSISTANCE PRACTICES**

**Press Release, March 4, 2021**

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During National Consumer Protection Week, February 28<sup>th</sup> thru March 6<sup>th</sup>, the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) was raising public awareness about a tool to protect veterans and claimants from companies who may be targeting them or their potential benefits. The VA encourages veterans and their families filing benefits claims to review the department's Accreditation Search Index at [www.va.gov/ogc/apps/accreditation/index](http://www.va.gov/ogc/apps/accreditation/index). The index provides state-by-state contact information, as well as a downloadable list of Veterans Service Organization (VSO) representatives, attorneys, and claims agents who are ready to assist with preparing VA claims in an ethical and lawful manner. "VA cautions veterans and claimants of online offers to assist in the preparation of their benefit claims that sound too good to be true," said Acting Under Secretary for Benefits Thomas Murphy. "To help guard against fraud and scams, VA urges all veterans and claimants to first consult VA's Accreditation Search Index to protect themselves from predatory practices."

A business or individual who prepares, presents, or prosecutes VA benefit claims without proper recognition by the department is doing so contrary to law. All accredited representatives have been formally vetted to ensure they have good character and reputation along with being capable of providing competent representation for presenting to the VA. When assisting veterans, they must adhere to the VA's standards of professional conduct which expressly prohibit the charging of unlawful or unreasonable fees. Those found in violation risk having their VA accreditation suspended or cancelled. For more information on VA accredited representatives and their role, visit Accreditation & Discipline - Office of General Counsel at [www.va.gov/ogc/accreditation](http://www.va.gov/ogc/accreditation) to find information on VA-recognized VSOs and VA-accredited VSO representatives, attorneys and claims agents, fees for services and guidance on how to appoint and how to remove or change representation.

## **VA LAUNCHES PUBLIC GUIDANCE TO FURTHER PROTECT VETERANS' PERSONAL INFORMATION**

**Press Release, February 22, 2021**

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This February the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) launched Ethics Principles for Access to and Use of Veteran Data as part of ongoing efforts to protect veteran data. The new online resource outlines nine principles for communicating clear expectations on how veteran data is to be managed and viewed by veterans, staff, VA partners, and other stakeholders.

These principles reinforce the VA's standards of data privacy and protection maintained during the VA's distribution of nearly 2 million COVID-19 vaccinations to date, and other critical health care services during the coronavirus pandemic. "VA's principle-based ethics framework takes a proactive approach to data management and privacy by setting standards for our partners to follow," says Acting VA Under Secretary for Health Richard Stone, M.D. "VA is applying this framework to all data interoperability initiatives, including those tied to our COVID-19 response and modernization efforts."

Having clearly defined integrities for everyone who accesses or uses veteran data puts the VA at the forefront of organizational responsibility for ethical data practices. Veterans trust the VA to promote and respect their privacy, confidentiality, and autonomy within the services the department provides and supports. The department will continue to uphold that trust by remaining consistent with the VA's I-CARE values of integrity, commitment, advocacy, respect, and excellence to promote and ensure responsible practices whenever veteran data is accessed or used.

The ethics framework was developed by the Data Ethics Work Group established by the VA Interoperability Leadership team and the Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) National Center for Ethics in Health Care, along with input from veterans. The department is actively working to ensure all VA directives, policies and standards reflect these principles which the agency anticipates completing by the end of 2022.

## **GO GREEN AND GET THE BULLETIN VIA EMAIL**

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In our continual effort to reduce costs and lessen our "ecological footprint," the Office of Veterans Advocacy is again asking for your help. In order to reduce printing and mailing costs, as well as the amount of paper used, we are asking you to volunteer to receive the bulletin via email.

The bulletin will arrive in your in-box every quarter as a Word document, which will allow to you forward or print and disseminate as many copies as you like. In addition to receiving the quarterly bulletin, you will also receive our annual Veterans Resource Directory via email.

If you can help us with our goal of reducing costs and the saving paper, please email Jennel Binsky at [jennel.binsky@veterans.idaho.gov](mailto:jennel.binsky@veterans.idaho.gov). Thanks for your help with this most worthwhile endeavor! And don't forget you can always view and print the Bulletin and Resource Directory by visiting our website at [www.veterans.idaho.gov](http://www.veterans.idaho.gov).

## **VA PARTNERS WITH THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES TO VACCINATE NARA STAFF**

**Press Release, April 1, 2021**

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The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it has reached an agreement with the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) to assist in providing COVID-19 vaccines to NARA staff supporting VA claims processing. The VA will provide medical staff and enrollment specialists to administer the vaccine.

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) provided a separate allocation of vaccines to the National Archives to vaccinate its staff members. NARA employees will be scheduled appointments to get vaccines at an off-campus site. “The staff at NARA play a vital role in making sure veteran claims for compensation for service-related conditions are processed in a timely manner,” said Acting Under Secretary for Benefits Thomas Murphy. “By assisting their vaccination efforts, we can make significant progress in processing the backlog in claims, which has increased since March 2020 due to the pandemic.”

The VA requires medical evidence obtained from military personnel records to adjudicate veteran claims for compensation. Due to pandemic-related facility work restrictions, NARA has had limited onsite ability to process requests for military personnel records. These documents are only accessible through copies made available by NARA staff from their location in St. Louis, MO. Currently, there are more than 25,000 pending requests for personnel records.

In addition to its partnership with NARA, the VA also works with other agencies such as HHS and the Department of Homeland Security to administer their vaccine allocation to essential staff supporting critical missions. The VA’s nationwide footprint and vast network of medical professionals ensures the department can provide needed support to federal partners while delivering the quality care veterans expect from the VA.

## **VA MODERNIZED GI BILL PLATFORM SOON TO BE A CLICK AWAY, OFFERING STUDENTS EASIER ACCESS**

**Press Release, March 18, 2021**

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The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) awarded a contract in mid-March to transform the operations of the GI Bill to a digital platform, improving education benefits and customer service delivery to nearly one million students served each year. Referred to as the Digital GI Bill, this platform will enable the VA to call, email, text, and chat with GI Bill beneficiaries, grant the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) immediate access to beneficiary records and respond to questions from colleges and universities instantaneously. “We are in the beginning stage of implementing a multi-year, joint undertaking with select vendors working together to deliver a modern, integrated solution for our GI Bill students,” said Acting VA Under Secretary for benefits Thomas Murphy. “Throughout implementation, VA will seek feedback from students, schools and, partners to ensure we are meeting their needs effectively as they pursue their academic and vocational goals.”

The Digital GI Bill developed by Veterans Benefits Administration and the VA’s Office of Information and Technology (OIT) features:

- Improved customer and financial services, allowing for timely and accurate delivery of payments and real-time eligibility and benefit information.
- The ability for GI Bill students to engage with VA through electronic outreach, intake and upgraded communication tools for on-the-spot service.
- An end-to-end systems management perspective to ensure proper compliance and oversight of GI Bill programs, and the use of data and business intelligence tools to track, monitor and measure school and student outcomes.
- Support for new program and policy requirements to keep up with the ever-evolving changes within the academic community and job market.

The VA is using \$243 million received under the CARES Act to support the Digital GI Bill modernization overhaul.

# IDAHO'S INCOME TAX, PROPERTY TAX RELIEF APPLICATIONS DEADLINES EXTENDED TO MAY 17<sup>TH</sup>

## Press Release, March 25, 2021

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The Idaho State Tax Commission voted to extend the 2020 Idaho income tax filing and payment deadlines from April 15, 2021, to May 17, 2021, to match the federal extended deadline. The extension applies to all taxpayers subject to Idaho's individual income tax (i.e., individuals, trusts, and estates), regardless of the amount owed. Penalty and interest won't apply if taxpayers file their return and pay the income tax they owe by May 17<sup>th</sup>.

Governor Brad Little asked the Tax Commission to conduct a special meeting on extending the filing deadline. The Tax Commission's resolution also extended the deadline to apply for property tax relief programs from April 15<sup>th</sup> to May 17<sup>th</sup>. The programs include:

- Property Tax Reduction (circuit breaker)
- Property Tax Deferral
- 100% Service-Connected Disabled Veterans Benefit

E-filing your return remains the safest and easiest way to file. The software walks you through the steps and does the math for you. You also get confirmation that the state received your return.

If you are service connected by the VA at 100% or receiving Individual Unemployability, you must apply/reapply for the 2021 100% Service Connected Property Tax Benefit. You can print the letter from your VA.gov account, receive one from the Boise VA Regional Office's Public Contact Team, request one by calling the VA at 1-800-MyVA411 or 1-800-698-2411, or you can contact one of our State Veterans Service Office locations and we will submit the request to the VA.

## HISTORY OF THE STAR SPANGLED BANNER

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On March 3, 1931, U.S. President Herbert Hoover signed an act that officially made "The Star Spangled Banner" the national anthem for the United States. Before this time, the United States had been without any national anthem.

The words of "The Star Spangled Banner" were first written on September 14, 1814, by Francis Scott Key as a poem titled, "The Defense of Fort McHenry." Key, a lawyer and an amateur poet, was being detained on a British warship during the British naval bombardment of Baltimore's Fort McHenry during the War of 1812. When the bombardment subsided and Key witnessed that Fort McHenry was still flying its huge American flag, he began writing his poem. (Historical Note: This flag was truly huge! It measured 42 by 30 feet!) Key recommended that his poem be sung as a song to the popular British tune, "To Anacreon in Heaven." It soon became known as "The Star Spangled Banner."

"The Star Spangled Banner" was published in a number of newspapers at the time, but by the Civil War it had become one of the most popular patriotic songs of the United States. By the late 19th century, "The Star Spangled Banner" had become the official song of the U.S. military, but it wasn't until 1931 that the United States officially made "The Star Spangled Banner" the official national anthem of the country.

Interestingly, it was Robert L. Ripley of "Ripley's Believe It or Not!" that spurred the interest of the American people to demand "The Star Spangled Banner" to become the official national anthem. On November 3, 1929, Ripley ran a panel in his syndicated cartoon stating that "Believe It or Not, America has no national anthem." Americans were shocked and wrote five million letters to Congress demanding Congress proclaim a national anthem.

## DATES TO REMEMBER

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April 4 .....	Easter
April 6 .....	United States enters WWI, 1917
April 23 .....	United States Army Reserve birthday
May 9 .....	Mother's Day
May 14 .....	Women's Auxiliary Army Corps founded, 1942
May 20 .....	Armed Forces Day
May 31 .....	Memorial Day – <i>See the history of Memorial Day at the bottom of this page</i>
June 6 .....	D-Day – Invasion of Europe, 1944
June 14 .....	United States Army birthday
	Flag Day
June 20 .....	Father's Day
	Army Air Corps is created, 1941

## CONVENTION SCHEDULES – ALL DATES SUBJECT TO CHANGE

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### American Legion

- State ..... July 14-18, 2021, Burley, ID
- National..... August 27-September 2, 2021, Phoenix, AZ

### AMVETS

- National..... August 17-21, 2021, Greensboro, NC

### Disabled American Veterans

- State ..... May 5-8, 2021, Coeur d'Alene, ID
- National..... July 24-27, 2021, Reno, NV

### Marine Corps League

- National..... August 9-13, 2021, Springfield, IL

### Military Order of the Purple Heart

- National..... To be determined

### Veterans of Foreign Wars

- State ..... June 9-12, 2021, Burley, ID
- National..... July 31-August 5, 2021, Baltimore, MD

### Vietnam Veterans of America

- National..... August 10-14, 2021, Greensboro, NC

## THE HISTORY OF PRESIDENTS DAY

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Memorial Day, originally called Decoration Day, is a day to remember those who have died in our nation's service. After the Civil War many people in the North and South decorated graves of fallen soldiers with flowers.

In the Spring of 1866, Henry C. Welles, a druggist in the village of Waterloo, NY, suggested that the patriots who had died in the Civil War should be honored by decorating their graves. General John B. Murray, Seneca County Clerk, embraced the idea and a committee was formed to plan a day devoted to honoring the dead. Townspeople made wreaths, crosses and bouquets for each veteran's grave. The village was decorated with flags at half mast. On May 5 of that year, a processional was held to the town's cemeteries, led by veterans. The town observed this day of remembrance on May 5 of the following year as well.

Decoration Day was officially proclaimed on May 5, 1868 by General John Logan in his General Order No. 11, and was first observed officially on May 30, 1868. The South did not observe Decoration Day, preferring to honor their dead on separate days until after World War I. In 1882, the name was changed to Memorial Day, and soldiers who had died in other wars were also honored.

In 1971, Memorial Day was declared a national holiday to be held on the last Monday in May. Today, Memorial Day marks the unofficial beginning of the summer season in the United States. It is still a time to remember those who have passed on, whether in war or otherwise. It also is a time for families to get together for picnics, ball games, and other early summer activities.

