

# BULLETIN July 2021

# STATE OF IDAHO

**BRAD LITTLE, GOVERNOR** 

# VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION

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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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If you've not already done so, please volunteer to receive the bulletin via email by emailing listserv.admin@veterans.idaho.gov



#### FROM BILL'S DESK

## 

I hope everyone is enjoying their summer activities and staying cool with the high temperatures! Here are some ongoing things 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.

Lonnie Stephens, the Administrative Assistant for our Post Falls Office since November 2015, left to pursue other opportunities. We wish Lonnie the best of luck with his future endeavors! Our new Administrative Assistant replacing Lonnie is Amy Birge who started with us on.

I want to make folks aware the Boise VA Regional Office remains open to the public despite the ongoing construction of the second floor. The VA Medical Centers continue to offer Covid-19 vaccinations to all age groups of veterans, as well as to spouses and caregivers of enrolled veterans. Call your local VA Medical Center to setup an appointment for the vaccine if you are interested. As a reminder, the VA's Debt Management Center will resume recouping debts owed to the VA on September 30, 2021.

As of March 29, 2021, the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) in St. Louis, MO has implemented further expansion of their onsite workforce. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they have been operating at a reduced capacity and as of March 29, 2021, have increased their on-site staffing to 25% of the workforce. While they continue to increase on-site staffing, they are still servicing requests associated with medical treatments, burials, and homeless veterans seeking admittance to a homeless shelter. Please refrain from submitting non-emergency requests such as replacement medals, administrative corrections, or records research until we return to pre-COVID staffing levels.

On May 27, 2021, the VA released a Press Release regarding claims for benefits based on toxic exposures. In the release, the VA announced their plans to automatically review herbicide-related claims for bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, and Parkinsonism, as these conditions have now been added to the list of diseases presumptively associated with herbicides as part of the William M. Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 (Public Law 116-283) (NDAA). Vietnam veterans and their survivors who previously filed for and were denied benefits for one of these three new presumptive conditions will have their cases automatically reviewed without any action needed on their part and if benefits are granted, the VA will apply the provisions of the court orders related to Nehmer v. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, which may result in an earlier date for entitlement to benefits. As part of this review, the VA also plans to send letters to impacted veterans and survivors. If a veteran has not previously filed a claim for one of these three conditions and would now qualify for service connection under these new regulations, a new claim for these conditions needs to be filed.

Also included in the announcement is information about recent studies relating to particulate matter exposures, resulting in a recommendation to consider creating new presumptions of service connection for respiratory conditions, which may include asthma, rhinitis, and sinusitis, for veterans who served in the Southwest Asia Theater of Operations during the Persian Gulf War and/or after September 19, 2001, or in Afghanistan and Uzbekistan during the Persian Gulf War. While claims for these conditions can be filed, remember that the presumptions have not been approved as of yet.

Effective April 1, 2021, the VA will no longer count the use of Veterans Readiness & Employment benefits (chapter 31) against the 48-month limit on GI Bill education benefits such as the Post-9/11 GI Bill. However, please be aware that the use of GI Bill education benefits will continue to count against the 48-month limit on VR&E benefits. The VA has started to process impacted claims and enrollments with this update and effected veterans will receive a notification letter outlining whether additional GI Bill entitlement is available. Though the VA is processing claims and enrollments automatically with no action needed by the veteran, if veterans have any questions due to this issue, they contact the Education Call Center at (888) 442-4551. Additional information about GI Bill benefits can be found at www.benefits.va.gov/gibill or gibill.custhelp.va.gov/app/answers/list.

The National Park Service in partnership with Operation Live Well would like to thank military personnel and their families for their service and invite them to enjoy their national parks. Since Veterans Day 2020, Gold Star Families and US military veterans are eligible to receive free access to more than 2,000 federal recreation areas, including national parks, wildlife refuges, and forests. The free access program is a way to thank America's veterans and Gold Star Families for their support of our country and to encourage them to explore recreational opportunities on their public lands and waters. The Interagency Annual Military Pass has been expanded to include both veterans and Gold Star Families. On November 11, 2020, agencies began issuing Interagency Military Passes to veterans and Gold Star Families upon request and with proof of eligibility as described below. The entrance fee waiver does not cover expanded amenity or user fees for activities such as camping, transportation, special recreation permits, reservation fees, or special tours. For more information visiti store.usgs.gov/faq#US-Military.

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. 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. To file a claim, you must call the FEMA COVID-19 Funeral Assistance Helpline at (844) 684-6333. More information can be found at www.fema.gov/disasters/coronavirus/economic/funeral-assistance.

As a reminder, we will not be conducting the Annual County and Post Service Officer Training Conference this year. However, mark your calendars, as next year's training is scheduled for August 3, 4, and 5, 2022.

If there are any questions, please feel free to contact our offices and have a fun and safe summer!

# GOVERNOR LITTLE APPOINTS NEW ADMINISTRATOR

Press Release, April 19, 2021

# 

Governor Brad Little announced on April 19th that he appointed Mark Tschampl as Chief Administrator at the Idaho Division of Veterans Services. "As a veteran himself, I have the utmost confidence Mark will serve and support those who have served our country," Governor Little said. "His career experience in the military and leadership roles in numerous civilian positions will prove to be extremely valuable in his new role."

Tschampl was a Commander in the U.S. Air Force, Security Forces, serving from 1998 to 2005. He spent eight years as the director of the Health and Wellness Center on Mountain Home Air Force Base and has been working as a bureau chief within the Family and Community Services Division at the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare. He received his Master's in Health and Human Performance from Iowa State University.

"It is my greatest honor to be appointed by Governor Little as the Chief Administrator of the Idaho Division of Veteran Services," Tschampl said. "As a combat veteran and member of a military family, no work is more important to me than serving those who have served our great nation!"

# LAW EXPANDS VETERAN HOUSING BENEFITS

Press Release, May 4, 2021

# 

May is National Moving Month and many veterans may find themselves moving to a new address as they take advantage of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) expanded home loan program, which now includes additional benefits for eligible borrowers. The VA is currently implementing Public Law 116-315 containing three key loan provisions for Vietnam War era veterans, eligible National Guard members, and service members, veterans, and certain surviving spouses with VA-guaranteed loans. "The law, known as the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 offers new and renewed homeownership possibilities," said Acting VA Under Secretary for Benefits Thomas Murphy. "These few changes can have a significant impact on our current homeowners, especially for those who were previously ineligible but now have the opportunity to use the benefits they have earned."

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, an estimated 35 million people will relocate this year, with most taking place between the start of the peak season for moving in May through September. It's possible that these numbers could increase with the following expansions to the program:

- Expanded criteria for eligibility among Vietnam Era veterans to those whose wartime service began on or after November 1, 1955. The previous start date to qualify for the VA home loan benefit as a Vietnam Era Veteran was February 28, 1961.
- Enhanced access to service members and some veterans of the National Guard. The new statutory authority extends eligibility to members of the National Guard who have been mobilized to perform full-time guard duty for at least 90 cumulative days, with 30 days of that service being consecutive.
- Service members, veterans, and certain survivors with VA-guaranteed home loans or VA direct loans whose
  residences have been substantially damaged or destroyed in an area that has been declared a major disaster by the
  President are now eligible to be charged a first time use funding fee on a VA-guaranteed loan rather than a subsequent
  use funding fee. The borrower's next VA-guaranteed loan must be for the repair of the damaged or destroyed
  residence or purchase or construction of a new home closed within three years of the Presidential declaration of the
  disaster.

# VA SECRETARY'S STATEMENT ON EXTENSION OF MORATORIUMS ON FORECLOSURES & EVICTIONS Press Release, June 24, 2021

# 

As the nation emerges from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, an estimated millions of Americans remain in need of mortgage and rental assistance. To provide continued relief to the veteran and service member community, the Department of Veterans Affairs is extending by an additional month, the foreclosure and eviction moratoriums through July 31st.

Extending the COVID-19 moratoriums on foreclosures and evictions will allow households that may have fallen behind on their mortgages more time to recover. Ultimately the extension will help thousands of VA home loan borrowers stay in their homes and provide those hard-hit by the pandemic, the time needed to get back on a regular monthly mortgage payment schedule.

In addition to the multiple ways the VA already helps borrowers avoid foreclosure, the department is implementing a short-term mortgage repayment assistance program via the VA Partial Claim Payment program, to bring certain borrowers current on their mortgage as they resume regular mortgage payments. VAPCP will be available for COVID-19 impacted borrowers to help them remain in their home and continue to enjoy the benefits of homeownership.

Once the moratoriums end, the VA will take additional steps to prevent foreclosures on VA-backed mortgages until borrowers are reviewed for COVID-19 home retention options that are affordable.

The VA will announce additional steps in July to offer borrowers payment reduction options that will enable more homeowners to stay in their homes. Additionally, the VA will also continue to allow homeowners who have not taken advantage of forbearance to date to enter into COVID-related forbearance through September 30th of this year.

The VHA Homeless Programs Office offers a wide range of resources and services for veterans facing housing crises, having helped more than 850,000 veterans and their families exit homelessness or remain in stable housing since 2010. The VHA Homeless Programs Office Supportive Services for Veteran Families program gives homeless prevention assistance and has taken a proactive approach to reach veterans at risk of homelessness during the pandemic. The SSVF program's Shallow Subsidy intervention initiative will also assist by providing a modest subsidy for two years to extremely low-income veterans who are at risk of homelessness.

Veterans who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless can call or visit their local VA Medical Center or contact the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at (877) 424-3838 for help. The White House, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, and the Departments of Agriculture and Housing and Urban Development also have resources for homeowners and renters needing help.

# VA TO READJUDICATE VETERAN & SURVIVOR CLAIMS FOR POSSIBLE HERBICIDE EXPOSURE Press Release, May 14, 2021

#### 

Veterans who were previously denied service connection for an herbicide related presumptive condition due to lack of incountry Vietnam service will have their claims automatically readjudicated by the VA. The department began readjudicating claims in April for veterans who served in the offshore waters of the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam War, but were denied for one or more herbicide related conditions, on the basis that military service was not performed on the landmass of the Republic of Vietnam or on its inland waterways. "Readjudication means VA will review the evidence of record and provide replacement decisions in the cases of veterans who were previously denied service connection benefits," said Acting VA Under Secretary for Benefits Thomas Murphy. "We have the proper resources in place to meet the needs of our veteran community and will ensure all eligible veterans' and their survivors' claims are examined thoroughly and fairly."

The review also applies to eligible survivors of deceased Vietnam-era veterans and is part of the Veterans Benefits Administration's implementation of the November 5, 2020, U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California order in Nehmer vs. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, requiring the VA to readjudicate previously denied claims. The VA will determine if benefits for qualifying disabilities can now be paid retroactively to the date of previously denied claims. The court's decision requires automatic readjudication in such cases without requiring a new claim, and potentially paying benefits to the survivors or estates of deceased beneficiaries.

# VETERAN RAPID RETRAINING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (VRRAP)

The Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program (VRRAP) offers education and training for high-demand jobs to Veterans who are unemployed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. VRRAP covers education and training programs approved under the GI Bill and Veteran Employment Through Technology Education Courses (VET TEC) that lead to high-demand jobs. These include associate degrees, non-college degrees, and certificate programs. The Department of Labor determines what's considered a high-demand job for VRRAP.

If you're eligible for VRRAP, you can get up to 12 months of tuition and fees, and a monthly housing allowance based on Post-9/11 GI Bill rates. To be eligible for this program, you must meet all these requirements:

- At least 22 years old, but not older than 66, and
- Unemployed because of the Covid-19 pandemic, and
- Not rated as totally disabled because you cannot work, and
- Not enrolled in a federal or state jobs program.

At the time you apply for VRRAP, you cannot be eligible for any of these other benefits:

- Post 9/11 GI Bill
- Montgomery GI Bill
- Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E)
- Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance (DEA)
- Veterans' Educational Assistance Program (VEAP)

You can get VRRAP benefits if you were at one time eligible for the Post 9/11 GI Bill, but you've transferred all of your benefits to family members.

VRRAP will be available until December 11, 2022. We'll stop making payments on this date—or when we reach either the \$386 million funding limit or the 17,250 participant limit. For more information or to learn how to sign up, call 888-442-4551 or visit www.va.gov/education/other-va-education-benefits/veteran-rapid-retraining-assistance

# VA & SBA JOINTLY SUPPORT RESTAURANT RECOVERY Press Release, May 5, 2021

# 

The Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough and The Small Business Administration Administrator Isabella Guzman visited Compass Coffee, a local veteran-owned business in the nation's capital, May 5th, to show their joint support for SBA's recently announced Restaurant Revitalization Fund. The SBA-led RRF program is part of President Biden's \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan, and provides funding to help restaurants and other eligible businesses across America keep their doors open.

During the first 21 days, RRF will prioritize and fund applications received from eligible small businesses that are owned by veterans, women, and socially and economically disadvantaged individuals. "Entrepreneurship has been the bedrock of our nation and veterans continue to be major contributors in the restaurant industry," said Secretary McDonough. "Veterans are 45% more likely to be self-employed than non-veterans. Compass Coffee, is one of thousands of examples of how veterans take the skills, experience, talent, and leadership they've developed in our armed services and deliver them to Americans throughout our neighborhoods and communities."

Registration for the RRF began April 30th, and the portal to apply opened May 3rd, which began the 21-day priority registration period for eligible businesses. "Restaurants are the core of our neighborhoods and propel economic activity on main streets across the nation," said Administrator Guzman. "They are among the businesses that have been hardest hit and need support to survive this pandemic. We want restaurants to know that help is here." The SBA has focused on the marketplace realities of the country's food and beverage industry in designing the Restaurant Revitalization Fund to meet businesses where they are. This includes ensuring equity among veteran-owned businesses, some of which have suffered the most, so they can access this critical relief, recover and grow more resilient.

For assistance in preparing an RRF application, interested business owners may call 844-279-8898, visit www.sba.gov/restaurants, or contact their local SBA district office or resource partner by visiting www.sba.gov/local.

# VA, SALESFORCE JOIN FORCES TO HELP VETERANS & THEIR SPOUSES DEVELOP SKILLS FOR TECH JOBS Press Release, June 10, 2021

# 

The Department of Veterans Affairs is partnering with Salesforce Military to offer programs that will help veterans and their spouses develop skills and employment options in the tech-driven economy. The partnership will build on existing programs and add new ones, offering free technical skills training, career development, and veteran-specific resources in a variety of areas, including:

- VetSuccess on Campus
- Veterans Opportunity to Work
- Hiring our Heroes Fellowship
- The Trailhead Military Program

"Our military men and women are technologically savvy and the best trained in the world but translating those skills to the civilian workforce can be challenging. Finding positions in the technology field can be difficult for veterans and their spouses," said VA National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnerships Nurse Executive Tracy L. Weistreich, Ph.D. "This partnership will help change that by offering at-home training for great-paying jobs."

The program includes virtual, self-paced skills training and opportunities to take Salesforce certification exams at no cost. Salesforce will help program participants connect with potential employers. The initiative will also educate veterans and their spouses about VA benefits, vocational readiness programs, and other resources. "This partnership allows us to support the military community with high-demand technology expertise and offer assistance during career transitions," said Salesforce Chief Impact Officer and Executive Vice President of Corporate Relations Suzanne DiBianca. "Our combined efforts with VA will help veterans and military spouses land growing careers in the technology ecosystem."

# MOBIUS DELIVERS 1<sup>ST</sup> OF 50 IBOTS TO THE VA TO DETERMINE HOW MACHINES MAY HELP VETERANS Press Release, June 8, 2021

# 

The Department of Veterans Affairs accepted a donation of 50 iBOT Personal Mobility Devices from Mobius Mobility LLC, May 27th to help veterans with spinal cord injuries regain their autonomy. The iBOT PMD increases the user's mobility by allowing them to independently elevate, interact at eye-level, climb stairs, and cross various terrains.

As part of the "Operation Mobility Tour" kickoff, Acting VA Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs Carolyn Clancy, M.D. welcomed the first donation at the VA East Orange Medical Center from Dean Kamen, inventor of the iBOT PMD and president of DEKA Research and Development. An iBOT was donated to the center's Spinal Cord Injuries/Disorders Center as well as the first veteran recipient. "VA's New England Center for Innovation Excellence offers the innovation community a clinical trial partner, practical health care assistance and real-world patient input," Clancy said. "This allows VA to secure priority access to the latest life-saving medical treatment and high-tech devices for our veterans."

The iBOTs will be distributed to all 25 VA SCI/D clinics and another 24 iBOTs will be donated directly to veterans — as appropriately determined by the local SCI/D clinic — based on need, a clinical assessment, and prescription. "Our goal is to deliver the mobility and independence our disabled veterans deserve," Kamen said. "It's often said as a nation we are in debt to veterans for their service and sacrifice. The best way to repay this debt is to deliver advanced technology that enables them to live life on their own terms and to be as healthy and independent as possible."

#### 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 PDF 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 listserv.admin@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.

#### DATES TO REMEMBER

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July 2	U.S. Army Air Corps established, 1926
July 4	Independence Day

July 20 ......Neil Armstrong walks on the moon, 1969

July 27 ......Korean War Armistice Day, 1953 August 4......U.S. Coast Guard established, 1790

August 7.....Order of the Purple Heart established, 1782

August 14 ......Japan surrendered, ending WWII, 1945

September 6 .....Labor Day September 11 .....Patriot Day

September 14......Star Spangled Banner written by Francis Scott Key, 1814

September 17 .....POW/MIA Day

September 17.....VFW Ladies Auxiliary organized, 1914

U.S. Constitution approved, 1787

September 18......U.S. Air Force established, 1947

September 29 ...........Veteran of Foreign Wars (VFW) established, 1899

# 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

National.....July 31-August 5, 2021, Baltimore, MD

## Vietnam Veterans of America

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

# THE STAR SPANGLED BANNER, BY FRANCIS SCOTT KEY

# 

Oh, say can you see, by the dawn's early light, What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming? Whose broad stripes and bright stars, through the perilous fight, O'er the ramparts we watched, were so gallantly streaming? And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air, Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there. say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

On the shore, dimly seen through the mists of the deep, Where the foe's haughty host in dread silence reposes, What is that which the breeze, o'er the towering steep, it fitfully blows, half conceals, half discloses? Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam, In full glory reflected now shines on the stream: 'Tis the star-spangled banner! O long may it wave O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

And where is that band who so dauntingly swore That the havoc of war and the battle's confusion A home and a country should leave us no more? Their blood has wiped out their foul footstep's pollution. refuge could save the hireling and From the terror of flight, or the gloom of the grave: And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Oh! thus be it ever, when freemen shall Between their loved homes and the war's desolation! Blest with victory and peace, may the heaven-rescued land Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation. Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just, And this be our motto: "In God is our trust." And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

#### DAV VAN CONTACTS TO AND FROM VA MEDICAL CENTERS

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# **BOISE & SURROUNDING AREA TO BOISE VAMC**

All appointments for rides must be made 72 hours in advance.

For the schedule or an appointment, call Jim Rossette at the Boise VA Medical Center (208) 422-1000 ext. 7555.

## **LEWISTON & SURROUNDING AREA TO SPOKANE VAMC**

All appointments for rides must be made 72 hours in advance.

For the schedule or an appointment, call the DAV Transportation Office at the Spokane VA Medical Center (800) 325-7940.

#### LIBBY & SURROUNDING AREA TO SPOKANE VAMC

All appointments for rides must be made 72 hours in advance.

For the schedule or an appointment, Call the DAV Transportation Office at the Spokane VA Medical Center (800) 325-7940.

#### COEUR D'ALENE & SURROUNDING AREA TO SPOKANE VAMC

All appointments for rides must be made 72 hours in advance.

For the schedule or an appointment, Call the DAV Transportation Office at the Spokane VA Medical Center (800) 325-7940.

# **SANDPOINT & SURROUNDING AREA TO SPOKANE VAMC**

All appointments for rides must be made 72 hours in advance.

For the schedule or an appointment, call the DAV Transportation Office at the Spokane VA Medical Center (800) 325-7940.

# **LEWISTON TO WALLA WALLA VAMC**

**Thursdays:** Walla Walla VA Medical Center Van. 8:00 a.m. departure from the CBOC at 1630 23<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, Building 2. Arrives at Walla Walla at 10:00 a.m. Departs Walla Walla at 1:30 p.m. Arrives Lewiston at 3:30 p.m.

If your appointment runs past the departure time of 1:30, there is no alternative for returning to Lewiston.

# POCATELLO, IDAHO FALLS, & SURROUNDING ARE TO SALT LAKE CITY VAMC

All appointments for rides should be made 72 hours in advance.

For the schedule or an appointment, call the VTS/DAV Transportation Office at (800) 613-4012 ext. 2003 or 1027.

