



Office of Veterans Advocacy

BULLETIN

October 2022

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 Jennel Binsky at
jennel.binsky@veterans.idaho.gov**



The following illnesses are now presumptive:

- Asthma that was diagnosed after service
- Chronic bronchitis
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Chronic rhinitis
- Chronic sinusitis
- Constrictive bronchiolitis or obliterative bronchiolitis
- Emphysema
- Granulomatous disease
- Interstitial lung disease (ILD)
- Pleuritis
- Pulmonary fibrosis
- Sarcoidosis

If a veteran served in any of the following locations and during the following time periods, the VA concedes exposure to burn pits or other toxins, which is referred to as presumption of exposure.

On or after September 11, 2001, in any of the following locations:

- Afghanistan
- Djibouti
- Egypt
- Jordan
- Lebanon
- Syria
- Uzbekistan
- Yemen
- The airspace above any of these locations

On or after August 2, 1990, in any of the following locations:

- Bahrain
- Iraq
- Kuwait
- Oman
- Qatar
- Saudi Arabia
- Somalia
- The United Arab Emirates (UAE)
- The airspace above any of these location

Please note in regard to claims for PACT Act conditions (additional herbicide conditions, expanded locations, radiation exposure, burn pits, etc...). the VA will not begin deciding these claims until January 1, 2023. When they do begin rating these claims, special attention will be given to those with active cancers. The VA is aware this is going to create a backlog of claims, but have been hiring many new employees to help rate these claims as quickly as possible. The VA requests everyone file claims regarding these conditions/new locations as soon as possible. **DO NOT WAIT** to file the claims. With the addition of the new burn pit conditions, the previous requirement for asthma, sinusitis, and rhinitis of having to manifest within 10 years of leaving active duty has been removed. Please also note the new herbicide presumptive conditions/locations **will not** be given a Nehmer Ruling effective date. The effective date will be the date the new Act was signed into LAW, except for DIC Claims.

On October 1, 2022, the VA expanded health care eligibility for certain veterans as directed by the *PACT Act*. A one-year open enrollment period will be available for eligible Vietnam veterans, Gulf War veterans, and Post-9/11 veterans. Eligibility is based on dates and locations of service regardless of disability claim status. Once the open enrollment period has closed, veterans from these groups will be eligible for VA health care as part of a phased process depending on their discharge date. Enhanced enrollment eligibility has been extended from 5 years to 10 due to the PACT Act. New eligibility for enhanced enrollment has been made for veterans who served as follows.

On or after August 2, 1990:

- Iraq
- Kuwait
- Bahrain
- Oman
- Qatar
- Saudi
- Arabia
- Somalia (new)
- U.A.E.

On or after September 11, 2001:

- Afghanistan
- Djibouti
- Egypt (new)
- Jordan (new)
- Lebanon (new)
- Syria
- Yemen (new)
- Uzbekistan
- Any risk of exposure recorded in an exposure record tracking system, including ILER
- Any other location the VA Secretary determines appropriate
- Operations Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom, New Dawn, Freedom's Sentinel, Inherent Resolve, or Resolute Support Mission

Open Enhanced Enrollment begins October 1, 2022, through October 1, 2023. Permanent eligibility for VA care will be phased in over a 10-year period based on the discharge date for each veteran serving in one or more of the specified locations, or beginning October 1, 2032, for veterans who served in support of the listed operations but not in a specified location listed below:

- Beginning October 1, 2024, for veterans who were discharged between August 2, 1990, and September 11, 2001
- Beginning October 1, 2026, for veterans who were discharged between September 12, 2001, and December 31, 2006
- Beginning October 1, 2028, for veterans who were discharged between January 1, 2007, and December 31, 2012
- Beginning October 1, 2030, for veterans who were discharged between January 1, 2013, and December 31, 2018
- Beginning October 1, 2032, all others who participated in any of the covered contingency operations.

For more information on the PACT Act and VA benefits, please visit the VA's webpage for the PACT Act at www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits. If you have any additional questions, please direct them to your Regional Quality Assurance Specialist (RQAS).

If you watch television at all, you'll notice you're being assaulted around the clock by the Camp Lejeune Contaminated Water Commercials. A portion of the PACT Act approved the Camp Lejeune Justice Act in which veterans, family members, or contractors who lived or worked onboard Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, New River Air Station, Camp Johnson, Camp Geiger, or Stone Bay Rifle Range from August 1, 1953, until December 31, 1987, can file for compensation through the Department of the Navy/Department of Justice. The PACT Act is extremely vague on what conditions are actually approved under the Camp Lejeune Justice Act and many "assume" they are the same conditions the VA has recognized as presumptive to Camp Lejeune Contaminated Water Exposure, but the law does not specify. What is known is the law states there will be an offset of federal benefits already paid. While attending the VFW Service Officer Training at Annapolis, MD, we were told by a VA Employee at their Central Office that they have been advised by the Department of Justice that the VA will inform them of how much has already been paid to a veteran by the VA when they file one of the Camp Lejeune Justice Act claims. These commercials you're seeing make it seem like you must take action right now, as the attorney groups running these ads want your business. Most will receive 40% of any potential awards paid (and maybe legal fees as well). We were taught at training that you may want to wait for more details to come out before signing on to any potential claim with the Department of the Navy/Department for Justice, but that is completely up to the veteran. Along these same lines, if it is a spouse/family member/contractor who lived or worked on the Base, go ahead and file a claim through an attorney, as the VA is not going to provide any presumptive service connection unless you meet Veteran Status and are eligible to receive VA benefits. Be aware of scams, especially when it comes to Camp Lejeune Justice Act or PACT Act Claims!

The VA's Debt Management Center (DMC) reports that veterans who previously requested a hardship suspension through September 30, 2022, do not need to act. The DMC will automatically extend their hardship suspension until December 31, 2022. Veterans who are currently experiencing financial hardship can request a temporary hardship suspension until December 31, 2022. No paperwork is required. Relief options continue to be available, so veterans and beneficiaries should contact DMC if they experience difficulties making payments. The VA is resuming referring delinquent benefit debts to the Department of the Treasury in October 2022. Veterans can avoid referral by contacting the DMC for debt relief options, as the VA wants to work with veterans before their debt becomes delinquent. If a veteran does not pay or request relief within the timeframes listed in correspondence they receive, the VA may refer delinquent debts to the Department of the Treasury. The Treasury Department may add fees and interest to debts, keep all or part of federal or state payments to pay down the debt, refer veterans to private collection agencies, and/or garnish non-federal wages.

When watching television, if you are not being constantly bombarded by Camp Lejeune Contaminated Water commercials, you are beaten up by Medicare Advantage commercials, which makes for a great reminder...if you receive all of your healthcare through the VA Medical Care system, it is HIGHLY Recommended you take Medicare Part B when you become eligible. Most people are eligible for Medicare Part B when they turn 65 or two years after becoming eligible for Social Security Disability and a lot of people do not want to pay \$170.10 per month (\$164.90 per month for 2023) for the Medicare Part B Premium. If you are on Tricare or a family member on ChampVA, you MUST ACCEPT Medicare Part B when you become eligible for it or you will lose your Tricare or ChampVA coverage. Tricare becomes Tricare for Life when you are on Medicare Part B (Medicare Part B becomes the primary payer and Tricare for life becomes the Supplemental Insurance - the same for ChampVA). The reason you should take Medicare Part B even if you get your treatment at the VA, is if you have a medical emergency and are taken to a local hospital. If the VA determines the medical emergency was not a risk to life, limb, or eyesight, they may not pay for the medical bill. If you have Medicare Part B coverage, at least that will cover 80% of the medical bill. Along the same lines, if you use Tricare for your coverage and want dental or vision coverage, you must enroll in that coverage during Open Season through the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Program (FEDVIP). More information regarding that can be found at www.Benefeds.com/programs.

The VA was recently made aware of a recall on some Philips Respironics CPAP/BiPAP masks with magnetic closures due to safety concerns for patients with implanted medical devices. The magnets in the recalled masks may affect certain metallic medical devices or metallic objects in the body, presenting a potential risk. Masks with magnets made by other companies are not included in the recall. The VA has paused distribution of identified masks to any patients until updated warnings can be included with shipments. The magnetic closures for these masks can cause implanted medical devices to malfunction if they

are within 6 inches of implanted metallic medical devices. These implanted medical devices can include pacemakers, implantable cardioverter defibrillators, neurostimulators, magnetic metallic implants/electrodes/valves (placed in upper limbs, torso, or higher), cerebral spinal fluid shunts (e.g., ventriculo peritoneal shunt), embolic coils, magnetic denture attachments, certain magnetic metallic implants, and others. A list of devices that may be impacted is available on the FDA website. This issue impacts patients nationwide with an implanted device who wear these masks, including veterans, their partners, and other loved ones who are within close proximity. The VA is working to contact patients who have been issued an affected Philips Respironics mask and will provide plastic replacement clips or masks without magnets to impacted veterans. We encourage veterans who are concerned about using their masks with magnetic closures to contact their VA care team. While awaiting a replacement, the magnets can be removed and the Velcro strap will fit through the empty magnet space to secure the mask.

VA communication on this includes:

- Notifying clinical and public affairs staff members nationwide to facilitate communication directly to potentially impacted veterans and through social media.
- Sending email to veterans who have received a mask of any brand, with or without magnets, from the VA since 2018.
- When shipping resumes, include a warning label with each recalled mask shipment.
- Developing handout and electronic posters for use in VA clinics.
- Publishing blog for Vantage Point at news.va.gov/108910/philips-pap-masks-recalled.

If you have any additional questions, please contact your Regional Quality Assurance Specialist.

On October 24, 2022, approximately 15,000 community pharmacies including Walmart and Sam's Club are expected to leave the TRICARE retail pharmacy network. Any veterans impacted by this change need to transfer their prescriptions to an in-network pharmacy, otherwise they will have to pay the full cost of the medication up front and then submit a claim for partial reimbursement. Affected beneficiaries should have received a communication from Express Scripts notifying them of this change. Express Scripts is the TRICARE pharmacy contractor with oversight of home delivery, military pharmacy, and civilian contract facilities. Beneficiaries who need to find a new network pharmacy can search for one on the Express Scripts website at militaryrx.express-scripts.com/find-pharmacy or call Express Scripts at (877) 363-1303.

On October 1, 2022, the VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) expanded to include eligible veterans and family caregivers of all eras. Previously, the PCAFC was only available to eligible veterans who served on or after September 11, 2001, or before May 7, 1975. This expansion now opens the program to eligible veterans who served after May 7, 1975, and before September 11, 2001. In order to be considered for PCAFC, the veteran generally must have a VA service connected rating of 70% (singular or combined) and need personal care services requiring in-person personal care for a minimum of six continuous months based on any one of:

- The inability to perform an activity of daily living.
- A need for supervision or protection based on symptoms or residuals of neurological or other impairment or injury.
- A need for regular or extensive instruction or supervision without which the ability of the veteran to function in daily life would be seriously impaired.

On September 15, 2022, the VA submitted an interim final rule to the Federal Register extending Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) eligibility for legacy participants, legacy applicants, and their Family Caregivers until September 30, 2025. Prior to this rule change, eligibility was set to expire on September 30, 2022.

The VA announced it is delaying upcoming deployments of the Oracle Cerner electronic health record (EHR) until June 2023 to address challenges with the system and make sure it is functioning optimally. Once fully implemented, the EHR will connect VA medical facilities with the Department of Defense, the U.S. Coast Guard, and participating community care providers, allowing clinicians to easily access a veteran's full medical history in one location. The VA EHRM Integration Office manages deployment of the system.

On October 13, 2022, the VA announced effective immediately, certain survivors of LGBTQ+ veterans are eligible to apply for VA survivor benefits. This new policy affords survivor benefits eligibility to those who were unable to wed until the 2015 Obergefell v. Hodges Supreme Court decision, and who, therefore, were not married to their now-deceased veteran spouses for a long enough period to qualify for survivor benefits. The VA has addressed this issue by counting the duration of the marriage from when the surviving spouse can establish a "marriage-type" relationship to the veteran. Please note, these benefits are not retroactive, therefore any surviving spouses who apply in the next year will receive benefits backdated to October 11, 2022. A survivor who is now eligible for benefits under this policy change must submit the claim using a 21P-534EZ. Be sure to include evidence showing a marriage-type relationship along with the application. Possible types of evidence that would establish eligibility include, but are not limited to joint bank accounts, commitment ceremonies, adoptions, and/or the joint purchase of a home. The National Veterans Service has asked the VA for more details on how they intend to weigh evidence to sufficiently demonstrate a "marriage-type" arrangement. As the VFW awaits this formal clarification, we encourage you to rely on primary source documentation from claimants, such as bank statements, mortgage statements, or official state/municipal records that formally demonstrate the establishment of the relationship. For more information, you can view the VA News Release at news.va.gov/109836/va-closes-gap-survivor-benefits-lgbtq-survivors.

In September 2020, Congress passed legislation to create a three-digit national suicide hotline as an alternative to 911 for mental health emergencies. All telephone service providers were required to activate the code “988” for this service no later than July 16, 2022. As part of the new 988 rollout, the VA released a memo with information regarding this new program. The key points of the memo were:

- Once a veteran’s telephone service provider activates 988, they may use this option to access the Veterans Crisis Line by dialing “988” then pressing “1”.
- The current phone number, 800-273-TALK (8255) will remain active, and there are no plans to discontinue it.

The VA's Insurance Program is preparing to roll out a new benefit called the Veterans Affairs Life Insurance (VALife). This program will replace the Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance or Supplemental S-DVI. No new applications for Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance will be accepted after December 31, 2022. Those insured under S-DVI can keep their current coverage or switch to VALife. Veterans who are insured under S-DVI and elect to transfer their coverage to VALife can be insured under both programs during the initial two-year period after enrollment in VALife, if they apply between January 1, 2023, and December 31, 2021. Veterans who convert from S-DVI to VALife after December 31, 2025, cannot keep S-DVI during the VALife waiting period. So what is VALife?

- Veterans who have a service connected disability rating (0-100%) and are age 80 and under are eligible.
- Service-disabled Veterans who are 81 or older may qualify.
- Eliminated deadlines to apply (prior program had a strict-two year window).
- Coverage is available up to \$40,000 in \$10,000 increments.
- Offers a Cash Value component after 2 years.
- Can be an investment opportunity for veterans.
- Once locked, rates will never increase.

Remember, VALife opens for enrollment on January 1, 2023, and once enrolled, there is a two-year waiting period for coverage to begin.

The National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) has resumed normal operations as of March 7, 2022. To submit a request, visit the Archives website at www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our offices and have a fun and safe Fall Season...and Go Buckeyes!

VA PROGRAM OF COMPREHENSIVE ASSISTANCE FOR FAMILY CAREGIVERS EXPANDS

Press Release, October 1, 2022

The VA’s Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) is expanding to include eligible veterans and family caregivers of all eras. Previously, PCAFC was only available to eligible veterans who served on or after September 11, 2001. This expansion opens the program to eligible veterans of all eras, including those who served after May 7, 1975, and before September 11, 2001.

PCAFC provides caregivers of eligible veterans with resources, education, financial assistance, health insurance, beneficiary travel, peer support and more. The program is a cornerstone of VA health care, ensuring that veterans get the world-class care they deserve and that caregivers get the comprehensive support they need. “For the first time, eligible veterans of all service eras can participate in the VA’s Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers,” says Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs Donald Remy. “We recognize the critical role family caregivers play in caring for veterans, and through this expansion, we’re able to ensure that family caregivers of all eligible veterans have access to the comprehensive support they deserve.”

This is the second expansion of PCAFC, and it will expand access to the program for tens of thousands of veterans and their family caregivers. The first expansion of PCAFC began in October 2020, as part of implementation of the VA MISSION Act of 2018. PCAFC has added approximately 20,000 active veteran and family caregiver participants during the past two years.

Earlier this month, the VA announced an interim final rule that will extend PCAFC eligibility for legacy participants, legacy applicants, and their family caregivers, by three years to September 30, 2025. Legacy Participants or Legacy Applicants are veterans and their family caregivers who participated in PCAFC prior to October 1, 2020. Learn more about the PCAFC expansion and the VA’s Caregiver Support Program, reach out to a local CSP team or call the Caregiver Support Line at (855) 260-3274 Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. ET, and Saturday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. ET.

VA EXTENDS DELAY OF ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD DEPLOYMENT TO JUNE 2023

Press Release, October 13, 2022

The Department of Veterans Affairs announced it is delaying upcoming deployments of the Oracle Cerner electronic health record (EHR) until June 2023 to address challenges with the system and make sure it is functioning optimally for veterans and for VA health care personnel. This decision comes after Secretary Denis McDonough announced in July the VA would delay EHR deployments until January 2023 to ensure the system’s issues had been resolved. During the VA’s subsequent investigation at our current sites, several additional technical and system issues were identified – including challenges with performance, such as latency and slowness, problems with patient scheduling, referrals, medication management, and other types of medical orders.

Over the coming months, the VA will continue to work closely with Oracle Cerner to resolve issues with the system’s performance, maximize usability for VA health care providers, and ensure our nation’s veterans are served by an effective records system to support their healthcare. During this “assess & address” period, the VA will correct outstanding issues—especially those that may have patient safety implications—before restarting deployments at other VA medical centers. “Right now, the Oracle Cerner electronic health record system is not delivering for veterans or VA health care providers – and we are holding Oracle Cerner and ourselves accountable to get this right,” said Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs Donald Remy, who has oversight over the VA’s EHR program. “We are delaying all future deployments of the new EHR while we fully assess performance and address every concern. Veterans and clinicians deserve a seamless, modernized health record system, and we will not rest until they get it.”

While executing this “assess and address” plan, the VA will continue to focus on the five facilities where the new system has already been deployed to ensure every patient is getting the world-class health care they deserve. In addition to the system review, the VA is sending letters to every veteran who may have been impacted by these system challenges in some manner, asking that if they have experienced a delay in medications, appointments, referrals, or test results, to contact the VA through the call center or online. Once they reach out, these veterans can expect a member of their care team to follow up with them within five business days to resolve the issue.

The modernized EHR will replace the VA’s current Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture (VistA) to document and support all aspects of veteran health care. The VA remains committed to building an EHR solution that will link with the Department of Defense’s health record system to create a lifetime of seamless care for service members and veterans. For more information about VA’s overall EHR modernization effort, visit www.ehrm.va.gov.

VERIFICATION OF VETERAN-OWNED SMALL BUSINESSES WILL TRANSFER FROM THE VA TO THE SBA

Press Release, September 23, 2022

Effective January 1, 2023, all responsibilities for the verification of veteran-owned small businesses will transfer from the Department of Veterans Affairs to the Small Business Administration. Verification is a critical process that allows veteran-owned small businesses (VOSB) and service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses (SDVOSB) to access veteran-specific benefits, including certain government contracts and the purchase of surplus government property. This process establishes eligibility by confirming that VOSBs and SDVOSBs are, in fact, run by veterans.

To facilitate the transition to the SBA, the VA stopped taking applications for verification or reverification of VOSBs and SDVOSBs October 24, 2022. The department is reaching out to all veterans who may be impacted by this action to inform them of the VA’s October 24th application deadline. Until then, veterans can continue to apply for verification at VA’s Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization. “We value our partnership with the Small Business Administration in this effort,” said Executive Director of the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization Sharon Ridley. “VA will reach out to all impacted veterans to ensure a transparent, seamless transition of the verification process.”

This transition is part of a government-wide effort, mandated by the William H. Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act, to streamline and consolidate services offered to VOSBs and SDVOSBs under the SBA. The only VA function transitioning to the SBA is the responsibility for verification. The VA’s Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization will continue to advocate and provide education, training, and guidance to help VOSBs and SDVOSBs secure government contracts.

VA EXPANDS & EXTENDS HEALTH CARE ELIGIBILITY UNDER PACT ACT

Press Release, September 28, 2022

The Department of Veterans Affairs will expand and extend eligibility for VA health care for certain veterans of the Gulf Wars and post-9/11 era. This expansion will increase health care eligibility for hundreds of thousands of toxic-exposed veterans. Additionally, the VA has already expanded health care eligibility for certain veterans of the Vietnam War. More detailed information about this expansion can be found on VA.gov/PACT.

President Biden signed the bipartisan PACT Act into law August 10th, authorizing one of the largest expansions of VA health care and benefits in U.S. history. Veterans can go to VA.gov/PACT to apply for health care or learn more about what this bill means for them and their families. “This expansion will bring generations of new veterans into VA health care, and increase the health care benefits of many more, which will result in the one outcome that matters most: better health outcomes for veterans,” said Denis McDonough, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. “I highly encourage these veterans to apply now for the health care they’ve earned and deserve.”

Beginning on October 1st, Post-9/11 veterans who did not previously enroll in VA health care will have a 1-year window to enroll if they:

- Served on active duty in a theater of combat operations during a period of war after the Persian Gulf War, or
- Served in a combat against a hostile force during a period of hostilities after Nov. 11, 1998, and
- Were discharged or released from active service between Sept. 11, 2001, and Oct. 1, 2013.

Also on October 1st, veterans who served on active duty in a theater of combat operations during a period of war after the Persian Gulf War will be eligible for care. This includes veterans who, in connection with service during such period, received the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, Service Specific Expeditionary Medal, Combat Era Specific Expeditionary Medal, Campaign Specific Medal, or any other combat theater award established by federal statute or executive order.

Starting now, Vietnam-era veterans who served in the following locations and time periods are eligible for care: The Republic of Vietnam between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975; Thailand at any U.S. or Royal Thai base between January 9, 1962, and June 30, 1976; Laos between December 1, 1965, and September 30, 1969; Certain provinces in Cambodia between April 16, 1969, and April 30, 1969; Guam or American Samoa (or their territorial waters) between January 9, 1962, and July 31, 1980; Johnston Atoll (or on a ship that called there) between January 1, 1972, and September 30, 1977.

While the expansion of PACT Act-related health care eligibility is staggered over the coming years, the VA has made all conditions outlined in the PACT Act presumptive for benefits as of August 10th, the day President Biden signed the bill into law. Eligible veterans and survivors are encouraged to apply for those benefits now at VA.gov/PACT.

FRAUD ALERT – HELP STOP TESTING SCAMS

The VA Office of Inspector General asks you to report potential scams involving genetic tests not ordered by VA clinicians or medically necessary. VA clinicians should report:

- unsolicited faxes or calls from labs to certify genetic tests that were not ordered by the veterans’ VA or community providers,
- threats of legal action or pressure to sign lab orders on behalf of veterans, and
- lab information or a specialist’s notes purportedly sent on behalf of patients.

Veterans should report:

- offers of free or low-cost genetic testing from solicitors claiming VA affiliation;
- genetic or other test kits by mail not prescribed by an assigned VA physician;
- requests for personal, medical, and financial information for testing;
- explanation of benefits letters indicating VA was billed for testing not received;
- and offers of incentives or kickbacks for participating in genetic testing or convincing their VA or community providers to authorize it.

Bottom Line: Veterans’ genetic testing should result from a finding of need by their physicians. Submit a complaint by visiting www.va.gov/oig/hotline; by calling (800) 488-8244; or by writing to the VA Inspector General Hotline (553H) at 810 Vermont Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20420.

POST & COUNTY SERVICE OFFICERS, SAVE THE DATE!

Mark your calendars, Service Officers! The Idaho Division of Veterans Service's annual Service Officer Training Conference for 2023 has been scheduled for August 16-18, 2023. It will again be held at the Riverside Hotel in Boise. Look for official invitations the first week of June 2023.

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Beginning on October 1st, Post-9/11 veterans who did not previously enroll in VA health care will have a 1-year window to enroll if they:

- Served on active duty in a theater of combat operations during a period of war after the Persian Gulf War, or
- Served in a combat against a hostile force during a period of hostilities after Nov. 11, 1998, and
- Were discharged or released from active service between Sept. 11, 2001, and Oct. 1, 2013.

Also on October 1st, veterans who served on active duty in a theater of combat operations during a period of war after the Persian Gulf War will be eligible for care. This includes veterans who, in connection with service during such period, received the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, Service Specific Expeditionary Medal, Combat Era Specific Expeditionary Medal, Campaign Specific Medal, or any other combat theater award established by federal statute or executive order.

Starting now, Vietnam-era veterans who served in the following locations and time periods are eligible for care: The Republic of Vietnam between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975; Thailand at any U.S. or Royal Thai base between January 9, 1962, and June 30, 1976; Laos between December 1, 1965, and September 30, 1969; Certain provinces in Cambodia between April 16, 1969, and April 30, 1969; Guam or American Samoa (or their territorial waters) between January 9, 1962, and July 31, 1980; Johnston Atoll (or on a ship that called there) between January 1, 1972, and September 30, 1977.

While the expansion of PACT Act-related health care eligibility is staggered over the coming years, the VA has made all conditions outlined in the PACT Act presumptive for benefits as of August 10th, the day President Biden signed the bill into law. Eligible veterans and survivors are encouraged to apply for those benefits now at [VA.gov/PACT](https://www.va.gov/PACT).

VA WILL OFFER ABORTION COUNSELING & IN CERTAIN CASES, ABORTIONS

Press Release, September 2, 2022

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) submitted to the Federal Register an interim final rule allowing the VA to provide access to abortion counseling and — in certain cases — abortions to pregnant veterans and VA beneficiaries. Specifically, the VA will provide access to abortions when the life or health of the pregnant veteran would be endangered if the pregnancy were carried to term, or when the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest. VA beneficiaries enrolled in CHAMPVA will also have access to this care. These services will be authorized immediately after the interim final rule is published, and the rule will be available for public comment for 30 days thereafter. Once the rule is published, the VA will immediately prepare to provide these services in as many locations as possible. For more information about abortion services at the VA, visit [VA.gov/ReproductiveHealth](https://www.va.gov/ReproductiveHealth) and click on “Abortion Services.”

“This is a patient safety decision,” said Denis McDonough, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. “Pregnant veterans and VA beneficiaries deserve to have access to world-class reproductive care when they need it most. That’s what our nation owes them, and that’s what we at VA will deliver.” “VA will be able to offer abortion counseling and abortions to pregnant veterans and VA beneficiaries in cases of rape, incest, or when the life or health of the veteran would be endangered if the pregnancy were carried to term — in accordance with generally accepted standards of medical practice,” said Dr. Shereef Elnahal, VA’s Under Secretary for Health. “We came to this decision after listening to VA health care providers and veterans across the country, who sounded the alarm that abortion restrictions are creating a medical emergency for those we serve. Offering this care will save veterans’ health and lives, and there is nothing more important than that.”

Access to medically necessary abortions is essential for preserving the life and health of veterans and VA beneficiaries.

Restricting access to abortion care has well-documented adverse health consequences, including increased risk of loss of future fertility, significant morbidity, or death. Veterans are also at greater risk of experiencing pregnancy-related complications due to increased rates of chronic health conditions. Therefore, to protect the life and health of pregnant veterans and eligible beneficiaries, the VA determined that it was necessary to provide access to abortion counseling and — in some cases — abortions.

The determination of whether the “life and health of the pregnant veteran would be endangered if the pregnancy were carried to term” will be made on a case-by-case basis and will be the result of careful consultation between VA health care providers and the veterans they serve. In cases of rape or incest, self-reporting from a veteran or VA beneficiary will constitute sufficient evidence that an act of rape or incest occurred. The VA is taking steps to guarantee veterans and other VA beneficiaries abortion-related care anywhere in the country. VA employees, when working within the scope of their federal employment, may provide authorized services regardless of state restrictions.

The VA will also continue to provide access to a full range of reproductive health services, including fertility services, contraceptives including emergency contraceptives, life-saving treatment related to pregnancy, and much more. For information about all reproductive health services at VA, visit VA.gov/ReproductiveHealth.

GO GREEN & GET THE BULLETIN VIA EMAIL

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 sign up at veterans.idaho.gov/listserv or you can email listserv.admin@veterans.idaho.gov. And don't forget you can always view and print the Bulletin and Resource Directory by visiting our website at www.veterans.idaho.gov.

THE HISTORY OF ELECTION DAY

By federal law since 1792, the [U.S. Congress](#) permitted the states to conduct their presidential elections (or otherwise to choose their Electors) anytime in a 34 day period before the first Wednesday of December, which was the day set for the meeting of the Electors of the U.S. president and vice-president (the [Electoral College](#)), in their respective states. An election date in November was seen as useful because the harvest would have been completed (important in an agrarian society) and the winter storms would not yet have begun in earnest (a plus in the days before paved roads and snowplows). However, the problems borne of this arrangement were obvious and were intensified by improved communications via train and telegraph: the states that voted later could swell, diminish, or be influenced by a candidate's victories in the states that voted earlier. In close elections, the states that voted last might well determine the outcome.

A uniform date for choosing presidential Electors was instituted by the Congress in 1845. Many theories have been advanced as to why the Congress settled on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. The actual reasons, as shown in records of Congressional debate on the bill in December 1844, were fairly prosaic. The bill initially set the national day for choosing presidential Electors on “the first Tuesday in November,” in years divisible by four (1848, 1852, etc.). But it was pointed out that in some years the period between the first Tuesday in November and the first Wednesday in December (when the Electoral College met) would be more than 34 days, in violation of the existing Electoral College law. So, the bill was amended to move the national date for choosing presidential Electors forward to the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November, a date scheme already used in the state of New York.

As for the day of the week chosen, Sunday was ruled out because it was the [Sabbath](#). An election on Monday might require travel on Sunday, and so was also ruled out. Tuesday had no problem.

DAV VAN CONTACTS TO AND FROM VA MEDICAL CENTERS

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 23rd 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.

