



Idaho Division of
**VETERANS
SERVICES**

*Caring for
America's
Heroes*

BULLETIN

**October
2019**

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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
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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**



FROM BILL'S DESK

I hope everyone enjoyed their summer activities and ready for the fall and the greatest time of the year - football season! Here are some of the things going on within the VA (thanks in large part to the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Veteran Services for passing on to me).

To continue the discussion of the Appeals Modernization Act, which went into effect on February 19, 2019, there are some considerations to keep in mind. If a claimant submits an Intent to File (to date protect for a future claim) and then files an 0995 Supplemental Claim Form, the VA will not grant any potential service connection or increase from that Intent to File. The effective date would be from the date the VA received the Supplemental Claim. In regard to submission of evidence, if additional evidence is submitted after a rating decision has been received and then the claimant requests a Higher Level of Review, the VA will either refuse to accept the request as a Higher Level of Review and place it in the Supplemental Claim Lane or they will disregard the evidence submitted. Along the same lines, if new evidence is submitted after a rating decision is received and then the claimant requests the Board of Veteran Appeals Lane (new Notice of Disagreement), the new evidence will be ignored by the Board of Veterans Appeals unless an evidence-only BVA Lane is chosen and the new evidence was received within 90 days of the election. Please remember, all Board of Veteran Appeals Lanes are considered "closed dockets," so they will not continue to entertain new evidence submitted as was done in the legacy appeals system.

As part of the Appeals Modernization Act, the Board of Veterans Appeals is beginning to use the Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) Telehealth platform to conduct hearings using a secure app or web link. This means veterans will soon be able to participate in a videoconference hearing with a Veterans Law Judge using their personal devices, such as computers, smart phones, and tablets instead of having to travel to a VA Regional Office or VHA facility. This will enable the Board to hold more hearings, as currently 8% of veterans do not attend their hearing due to travel related concerns. Once the pilot program is tested and proven to be effective and efficient, the Board of Veterans Appeals will expand this program.

As previously mentioned, the Blue Water Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 was signed into Law on June 25, 2019. While this legislation is different than the Federal Circuit Court of Appeals *Procopio v. Wilkie* decision, the VA has merged the two together while considering the Blue Water Vietnam Herbicide Presumptive claims. While claims are being accepted by the VA, and we urge all who may be eligible (including surviving spouses who may be eligible for Dependency Indemnity Compensation) to file the claims as soon as possible, the Secretary of the VA has ordered a stay on all of these claims until January 1, 2020. It is still uncertain what the effective dates of these claims will be once the stay has been lifted. As a reminder, this law now grants presumption of service connection for conditions related to Agent Orange exposure to veterans who were onboard vessels operating not more than 12 nautical miles seaward from the demarcation line of the waters of Vietnam and Cambodia as defined in Public Law 116-23, between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975, to veterans who served on or near the DMZ in Korea between September 1, 1967, and August 31, 1971, and grants spina bifida as a birth for children of certain Thailand service veterans.

The list of Urgent Care providers in support of the VA Mission Act is constantly being increased to support veterans throughout the country. The most current Urgent Care Providers can be found at vaurgentcarelocator.triwest.com/Locator/Care. As a reminder, in order to be eligible for the Urgent Care Program under the Mission Act, a veteran must be current in their enrollment at the VA Medical Center (current in their enrollment within the past 24 months). There are co-pays for the use of Urgent Care. Priority Groups 1-5 receive the first (3) visits free, and each additional visit is \$30 per visit afterwards. Priority Group 6 receives the first (3) visits free, as long as the visits are related to their special condition which warranted the Priority Group 6 status. If not, visits are \$30 for each visit. Priority Group 7-8 will be charged a \$30 fee for each visit. For all groups, flu shots are free.

On June 28, 2019, the VA released guidance that discusses the VA Home Loan Guaranty Funding Fee rules and regulations. A few key parts often overlooked are 1) any veteran receiving or entitled to receive VA compensation is waived from paying the VA Funding Fee, 2) a surviving spouse of any veteran (including a one who died during active military, naval, or air service) who died from a service-connected disability is also not required to pay a funding fee, 3) the VA can also waive the funding fee based on a pre-discharge review of existing medical evidence that results in the issuance of a memorandum rating, and 4) if a veteran had a compensation claim pending at the time of the loan closing, and that claim is granted with at least a 10% rating, the veteran can request a refund of the funding fee from the VA. Veterans who believe they were overcharged should contact the VA Regional Office with Loan Guaranty operations at (877) 827-3702.

The VA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) released a report founding that thousands of veterans may have been erroneously denied emergency room reimbursement dating back to 2016. In response, the Veterans Health Administration began reviewing affected reimbursement claims this past spring and sent letters to veterans who may have been affected, explaining their decision or providing information for veterans to have their claims for reimbursement reprocessed. If veterans have questions about their emergency room reimbursement claims, they should contact the VA at (877) 881-7618.

Starting in October 2019, the VA implemented a new policy restricting smoking by patients, visitors, volunteers, contractors, and vendors at its health care facilities. The smoke-free policy applies to cigarettes, cigars, pipes, any other

combustion of tobacco, and non-Federal Drug Administration approved electronic nicotine delivery systems, including but not limited to electronic or e-cigarettes, vape pens, or e-cigars.

The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) announced it has added four new Emblems of Belief to be used for placement on government headstones and markers. The 4 new emblems are African Methodist Episcopal (AME), Evangelical Lutheran Church, Universalist Cross, and Faith and Prayer. For more information about VA headstones and markers please visit www.cem.va.gov. As a reminder, for VA headstones/markers/columbarium niches, you may only use the approved symbols on the website. You cannot use military emblems, Masonic emblems, military awards, etc.

I hope everyone enjoys the fall weather and please let me know if you have any questions. Semper Fidelis.

IDAHO TO RECEIVE VA GRANT OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD 4TH STATE VETERANS HOME **News Release, August 23, 2019**

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The Idaho Division of Veterans Services (IDVS) has been notified Idaho will receive a grant opportunity in federal FY 2019 to establish a fourth State Veterans Home in Post Falls, Idaho. The other three State Veterans Homes are in Boise, Pocatello, and Lewiston. "The effort to build a fourth State Veterans Home in north Idaho is all about improving our veterans' quality of life by providing them a safe, home-like environment. They deserve our commitment to this project," Governor Brad Little said. "Thank you to the many partners who continue to press forward in making the Post Falls Veterans Home a reality, including the veterans groups, the Idaho Division of Veterans Services, federal government, businesses, locally elected leadership, and our state legislators."

The fourth State Veterans Home will be located on 7.3 acres of land donated in May 2019 by the Jacklin Land Company to the State of Idaho specifically for the establishment of a 4th Veterans Home. This property is adjacent to BioPol Laboratory and Buck Knives, and the new State Veterans Home will create a nice transition between this industrial zone to the west and the current residential housing directly to the east. Preliminary construction costs for the proposed fourth veterans home are estimated at \$49 million, with approximately \$31 million of that covered by the federal government. IDVS will use funds already set aside in the Veterans Recognition Funds to cover its 35% match and non-allowable costs, approximately \$18 million. IDVS' FY20 budget included spending authority for the grant.

Tracy Schaner, Deputy Chief Administrator of the Idaho Division of Veterans Services, provided the following statement. "This is a day that I've been looking forward to for a longtime now and I was absolutely elated when I received the official notification from our federal VA partners that Idaho is receiving a grant fund opportunity in federal fiscal year 2019. As a nation, we owe a debt of gratitude to our veterans who deserve the best care possible. This funding will provide our northern Idaho veterans with just that, and they deserve nothing less. We are sincerely grateful for the support received from the Kootenai County communities and their leaders who have all been instrumental in making this project a reality. These include but are not limited to former Post Falls Mayor Clay Larkin; former Vice President of Community 1st Bank and current Managing Member of Financial and Real Estate Consulting, LLC Len Crosby; former Senator Robert Nonini; CEO of Riverbend Commerce Park Tom Stoesser; and current Post Falls Mayor Ron Jacobson. Most notably, the appreciation and gratitude towards the Jacklin Family for their ongoing support, generosity, and philanthropy is nothing short of heartwarming. The Jacklin Land Company's generous donation of land will make a difference in the lives of so many of north Idaho's veterans and their families for decades to come."

The State Veterans Home Construction Grant Program is a more than 50-year-old partnership between the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and states to construct nursing home, domiciliary, and/or adult day health care facilities. The program is authorized in Title 38 United States Code (USC) Section 8131-8137 and regulated in Title 38 Code of Federal Regulation (CFR) Part 59. The VA may participate in up to 65% of the cost of construction or acquisition of state nursing homes or domiciliaries, or for renovations to existing state homes. Funding for the program has averaged \$94 million per fiscal year over the past five years. A state home is owned and operated by the state. The VA assures Congress that state homes provide quality care through inspections, audits, and reconciliation of records conducted by the state home program managers and the VA medical center of jurisdiction. Under a separate program, the VA also provides per diem payments to states for the care of eligible veterans in state homes. There are approximately 153 state veterans homes in 50 states and the commonwealth of Puerto Rico with over 30,000 total beds available to eligible veterans and spouses.

Marv Hagedorn, Chief Administrator of the Idaho Division of Veterans Services, praised the work of his team. "I am proud of the work team IDVS has done to secure this grant for the state of Idaho, and for northern Idaho's veterans. The work of my Deputy Chief Tracy Schaner and Financial Officer Debbie Spence particularly stand out."

VA MODIFIES SMOKE-FREE POLICIES AT HEALTH CARE FACILITIES

News Release, August 21, 2019

As part of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) commitment to a smoke-free health care environment for veterans, in October, the department extended its smoke-free policies to include employees at its health care facilities. This follows the department's June 10th announcement of a new policy restricting smoking by patients, visitors, volunteers, contractors, and vendors at its health care facilities. The integration of these two efforts guarantees a fully smoke-free environment for veterans. "This policy change is consistent with our mission to promote a healthy environment for patients, visitors, and employees at our facilities and is an important element of improving our health care system," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "It will reduce the harmful effects of smoking, including exposure to second and third-hand smoke, as well as increase safety and reduce fire hazards caused by smoking."

The VA has collaborated with key stakeholders to update and recertify the employee policy to be consistent with department's commitment to veterans and the community. Implementation of the employee smoke-free policy will be completed no later than January 2020 based on employee union-negotiated timelines. The Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) smoke-free policy applies to cigarettes, cigars, pipes, any other combustion of tobacco and non-Federal Drug Administration approved electronic nicotine delivery systems, including but not limited to electronic or e-cigarettes, vape pens or e-cigars.

To learn more about health risks associated with smoking, visit the Surgeon General's website at www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/reports-and-publications/tobacco/index.html or smokefree.gov. For additional information about the policy visit www.va.gov/health/smokefree.

FEDERAL AGENCIES PARTNER TO EXPAND EMPLOYMENT REINTEGRATION GRANTS FOR VETERANS

News Release, September 4, 2019

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) collaborated in August to successfully roll out the recently expanded Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP), which will help more than 18,000 homeless and at-risk veterans secure meaningful employment and stable housing. HVRP grants in excess of \$48 million were awarded to 149 community organizations, serving more veterans than ever before. "In order to stay securely housed, most Americans, including veterans, need employment to support themselves and their families," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "VA, DOL, USICH and our community partners are dedicated to helping homeless and at-risk veterans access job opportunities that aid them in exiting or avoiding homelessness."

The recent legislation expands program eligibility to include:

- Veterans who, upon enrollment in HVRP, were homeless at any point during the preceding 60 days, but have found housing.
- Veterans participating in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Program, Tribal HUD-VASH, or VA Supportive Services for Veteran Families programs.
- Veterans who are receiving assistance under the Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act of 1996.
- Veterans who are incarcerated or who are transitioning from incarceration.

Through HVRP, eligible veterans receive employment training, transportation, professional clothing, apprenticeship opportunities, on-the-job training, as well as job search and placement assistance. The VA can also help these veterans access medical care and permanent housing through a partnership with HUD. "The Department of Labor is proud to work with VA and USICH to help end veteran homelessness," said Acting Secretary of Labor Patrick Pizzella. "We must ensure that those who served our country have a country that helps serve them."

The collaborative effort between the VA, DOL, and USICH includes informational sessions and webinars for grant awardees, VA staff, and community partners to learn how to improve employment outcomes for eligible veterans using these programs. The grants were awarded to non-profit organizations nationwide, such as state and local workforce investment boards, tribal governments, and faith-based organizations. "This interagency collaboration will help ensure that veterans who are at risk, or who are currently or recently homeless, find employment success," said USICH Executive Director Matthew Doherty. "The expanded eligibility for the HVRP program supports nationwide efforts to help veterans move quickly into housing that becomes their springboard for achieving their goals for themselves and their families."

HVRP is the only federal program that focuses exclusively on the employment of veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Initially authorized under Section 738 of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, HVRP and its companion programs are currently authorized under Title 38 U.S.C. Sections 2021, 2021A, and 2023. Visit www.dol.gov/agencies/vets/programs/hvrp to learn more about HVRP. To learn more about VA Homeless Programs Office, visit www.va.gov/homeless.

VA COMPLETES HOME LOAN FUNDING FEE REFUND INITIATIVE

News Release, October 8, 2019

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently completed an aggressive initiative to process home loan funding fee refunds to veteran borrowers, issuing more than \$400 million in refunds. The refunds are the culmination of a multi-year internal review of millions of VA-backed home loans spanning almost two decades. “VA staff worked diligently throughout the summer reviewing 130,000 cases, which is an average of 16,000 loans reviewed per week,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “This effort included loans dating back nearly 20 years. Our administration prioritized fixing the problems and paid veterans what they were owed.”

The VA’s Loan Guaranty Service (LGY) program identified more than 130,000 loans where a refund was potentially due. While some funding fees charged were found to be attributable to clerical errors, most fees were charged correctly. The exception was for those veterans whose exemption status changed following the issuance of a disability rating after the closing of their loan. Letters were mailed notifying veterans who were eligible for a refund.

VA has made several program and systems changes to provide veterans and lenders with the most up-to-date information possible on a veteran’s funding fee exemption status. The changes include:

- Enhancements to veteran-focused communications to better inform about the loan funding fee and when it may be waived as part of the loan transaction.
- Policy guidance directing lenders to inquire about a veteran’s VA disability claim status during the loan underwriting process and obtain an updated Certificate of Eligibility no more than three days prior to loan closing if the veteran had a disability claim pending.
- System and procedural changes to ensure regular internal oversight activities swiftly identify veterans eligible for fee waivers and potential refund cases.

Veterans who believe that they are entitled to a refund of the VA funding fee are strongly encouraged.

VETERANS CAN NOW ENROLL IN THE VA’S MILLION VETERAN PROGRAM ONLINE

News Release, October 4, 2019

Veterans can now join the Million Veteran Program (MVP) online as part of the Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) effort to improve the lives of veterans through health care research and innovation. More than 775,000 veteran partners have already joined MVP, a national voluntary research initiative that helps the VA study how genes affect the health of veterans. “MVP has already resulted in a number of important scientific publications that increase our knowledge of conditions that affect veterans’ health, and we expect this resource to continue to prove its value over the coming years,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “VA is excited to announce the launch of MVP Online, which will make it even easier for veterans nationwide to take part in this landmark research effort.”

Veterans currently enrolled in VA care can use their existing VA credentials to securely log in to MVP Online to view their personalized dashboard and learn more about the program. To partner with MVP, veterans can use the online portal to complete the consent process, allow access to health records (for research purposes only), answer surveys about their health and lifestyle, and schedule an MVP visit at a participating VA site to provide a blood sample. The VA is currently piloting ways to make the MVP sample collection more convenient for veterans who do not live near a participating VA site.

MVP helps researchers better understand how genes affect health and illness, which may help prevent illnesses and improve treatments of disease. Research using MVP data is already a part of more than 30 VA projects, including efforts focused on understanding the role of genes in PTSD, diabetes, cancer, heart disease, and suicide. Significant research findings have already published in high-impact scientific journals. This research is helping the VA to better understand the role genes play in many common illnesses, especially those illnesses common among combat veterans.

MVP partners include veterans from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Guam. MVP also has the largest representation of minorities of any genomic cohort in the U.S. For more information about the Million Veteran Program, visit MVP Online at www.mvp.va.gov. For veterans not enrolled in VA care, the ability to join using MVP Online will be available in the near future. Until then, please call the MVP Info Center at (866) 441-6075 to learn more about how to join.

VA IMPROVES INFORMATION SHARING WITH COMMUNITY CARE PROVIDERS

News Release, September 30, 2019

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will implement new procedures by January 2020, for sharing medical information for veterans accessing health care in the community. The department is changing its procedures for electronic health information sharing in accordance with Section 132 of the VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act of 2018 (MISSION Act). “The MISSION Act gives veterans greater access to care, whether at VA facilities or in the community,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “We are providing seamless access to care, improving efficiency and helping to ensure veterans get the care they need, where and when they need it.” The change moves VA from an ‘opt-in’ to an ‘opt-out’ model of electronic health information sharing. Veterans will no longer be required to provide signed, written authorization for VA to release electronic health information to community providers for the purposes of receiving medical treatment.

VA shares health information with community providers using a secure and safe electronic system called the Veterans Health Information Exchange. This electronic exchange of information improves patient safety — particularly during emergency situations — and allows for improved care coordination for veterans receiving care in the community. Veterans who do not want their health information shared electronically can opt out by submitting VA Form 10-10164 (opt out of sharing) to the Release of Information Office at the nearest VA medical center now or at any time going forward. Veterans who previously opted out on VA Form 10-0484 prior to September 30th, do not need to submit new forms. However, veterans who restricted what information VA shared by submitting VA Form 10-0525 (restriction request) will need to opt out entirely by submitting Form 10-10164.

The VA is committed to protecting veteran privacy. Only community health care providers and organizations that have partnership agreements with the VA and are part of the VA’s approved, trusted network may receive VA health information. For information about VA’s health information exchange visit www.va.gov/vler.

VA RELEASES LAUNCHPAD APP TO STREAMLINE HEALTH CARE ACCESS FOR VETERANS AND CAREGIVERS

News Release, August 13, 2019

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently launched a new mobile application designed to save veterans and their caregivers time online. VA Launchpad for Veterans simplifies and organizes several existing tools and resources into one convenient location to help manage health care needs. “VA has developed dozens of apps for veterans to take charge of their health care,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “VA Launchpad makes it easier to have these important tools available at your fingertips.”

VA Launchpad arranges all of the VA’s apps into five categories for veterans: health management, health care team communication, vital health information sharing, mental health improvement, and quality of life improvement. The new app enables veterans to access all the features with a single secure login. The app also includes many mental health care and personal improvement tools for individuals who are not enrolled in VA health care services. These tools are free and do not require secure logins to use. VA Launchpad for Veterans is available for download in the Apple App Store and Google Play. To access the VA’s secure apps within VA Launchpad, users must be a VA patient and have one of the following accounts: Premium My HealtheVet, DS Logon Level 2 (Premium), or ID.me.

VA LAUNCHES VETERANS LEGACY MEMORIAL TO HONOR DECEASED VETERANS ONLINE

News Release, August 23, 2019

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) launched the Veterans Legacy Memorial (VLM), August 14th, the country's first digital platform dedicated entirely to the preservation of the memory of the 3.7 million veterans interred in VA national cemeteries. Each veteran will have their own memorial page on the VLM, a secure, web-based platform that creates a perpetual memorial extending beyond the physical border of the national cemetery. “Veterans Legacy Memorial ensures “no veteran ever dies” by honoring the legacy of our nation’s veterans, not just in our cemeteries, but in a new and innovative digital setting,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “It enhances the onsite national cemetery experience and extends the experience to those who otherwise are unable to physically visit the cemetery.”

NCA, in conjunction with VA's Office of Information and Technology, built the architecture for the site starting with the information contained on every veteran's headstone. In the initial rollout, the public will be able to search the site for veterans, find out where they are buried, and read the basic details of their lives and service. Future capabilities may be expanded to allow families, survivors, fellow veterans, and others to add historic photos and share memories to a deceased veteran’s memorial page. Such capabilities will include provisions that allows NCA to manage the site in a manner that maintains the same level of decorum our customers experience in our national cemeteries. For more information about the Veterans Legacy Memorial, visit www.va.gov/remember, or contact Dr. Bryce Carpenter, Program Manager, at bryce.carpenter@va.gov.

VA PROVIDES VETERANS FLEEING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WITH HOUSING AND SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

News Release, October 1, 2019

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) reminds veterans nationwide that the VA’s Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) and Grant and Per Diem (GPD) provide housing and other services for veterans experiencing domestic violence and intimate partner violence. Additionally, in observance of National Domestic Violence Awareness Month, the VA’s Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program will gather with internal and external national partners in October to help promote the department’s mission to foster healthy relationships and safety. “VA recognizes the impact domestic violence has on veterans and their families and is committed to raising awareness about this serious problem,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “We want to remind veterans in these tough situations they are not alone, and that VA is here to help them access safe, stable housing and supportive services.”

Veterans losing their housing because they are fleeing domestic violence are eligible for SSVF rapid rehousing, which is an intervention designed to help homeless veterans and their families quickly access permanent housing. The GPD program provides housing and supportive services to help homeless veterans achieve residential stability, increase their skill levels and incomes, and achieve greater self-determination.

In 2017, Public Law 114-315 expanded eligibility for participation in the SSVF and GPD programs by broadening the definition of homeless to include any individual or family fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking — or other situations making it dangerous to remain in the home — which include situations that jeopardize the health and safety of children. Eligible veterans must have no other residence and lack both the resources and support networks to obtain other permanent housing.

VA ACHIEVES HISTORIC GOAL DELIVERING MORE THAN 90,000 APPEALS DECISIONS IN FY 2019

News Release, September 11, 2019

On September 10th, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) exceeded its goal, three weeks ahead of schedule, to deliver 90,050 appeals decisions regarding disability benefits and services to veterans in fiscal year 2019, approximately 9,000 more decisions than the previous year. The Board of Veterans' Appeals (Board) also hit a record, by providing more than 21,000 hearings in FY 2019, 5,000 more hearings than past year. “The Board of Veterans' Appeals provided thousands of veterans with critical, life-changing appellate decisions,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “The Board surpassed its goal for delivering results to veterans and their families for the second year in a row. This reflects VA’s continued commitment to providing excellent customer service to veterans. VA is committed to reducing the backlog of legacy appeals and ensuring that veterans receive the benefits they deserve.”

This achievement in surpassing last year’s number of decisions comes while the VA concurrently implemented the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017. The act offers veterans choice and control over their appeals and provides for a more timely and transparent process. To aid in achieving this historic goal, the Board focused on hiring attorneys and judges, reorganized its structure, instituted various training, and implemented modern technology changes. Utilizing modern technologies is one way the Board continues to adapt to the changing needs of the veteran population. For more information about the Board and its progress on appeals modernization, visit www.bva.va.gov.

VA AND HEALTH CARE LEADERS CREATE A NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION TASK FORCE

News Release, October 1, 2019

The President’s Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End the National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS) task force hosted a health care leadership meeting at the White House to bring together leaders across the health care industry to discuss their role in changing the culture around mental health, substance misuse, and addiction. The VA recognizes it must work with communities, faith-based and tribal organizations, private and public partners, as well as state, local, and federal government agencies to achieve this goal. “Collaboration with major healthcare delivery systems is an integral part of VA’s public health approach to suicide prevention,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Suicide prevention and alleviating emotional pain and suffering requires an all-hands on deck comprehensive approach. The work of the PREVENTS task force, like this meeting, moves us closer to solving the problems that lead to veteran suicide.”

The VA and the White House Domestic Policy Council established the PREVENTS task force in June via Executive Order signed by President Trump in March. The interagency task force is charged with implementing a roadmap for veteran suicide prevention at the national and community levels by March 2020.

VA STRENGTHENS CAREGIVER SUPPORT PROGRAM

News Release, September 25, 2019

On September 25th, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced actions to strengthen the Caregiver Support Program and establish a timeline for expanding the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) in accordance with section 161 of the VA MISSION Act of 2018 (MISSION Act). Under the MISSION Act, the VA will expand the PCAFC to eligible veterans from all eras using a phased approach. Currently, the program is only available to eligible veterans seriously injured in the line of duty on or after September 11, 2001. Prior to expanding, the VA must upgrade its information technology (IT) system and implement other improvements to strengthen the program. “Caregivers play a critical role in the health and well-being of some of our most vulnerable veterans,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Under the MISSION Act, we are strengthening and expanding our program to positively impact the lives of veterans and deliver the best customer experience to them and their caregivers.”

In December 2018, the VA suspended certain discharges from the program due to ongoing concerns about inconsistent application of eligibility requirements at VA medical centers. Since then, the VA has held listening sessions with caregivers and other stakeholders, developed or amended 14 standard operating procedures to clarify program requirements for VA staff, increased oversight in each Veterans Integrated Service Network, provided training and education to staff and caregivers, and is boosting operational capacity with the hiring of more than 680 staff. To modernize its caregiver IT system, the VA is adopting a three-phased approach and will deploy a new system based on a commercial off the shelf product called Caregiver Record Management Application (CARMA) beginning in October 2019. The VA will deploy phase two in January 2020 to centralize and automate stipend payment calculations and expects to deploy phase three in the summer of 2020, which will enable caregivers to apply for benefits online. The VA will then perform testing and verify that the system has full functionality before expanding the program as required under the MISSION Act.

The expansion will occur in two phases, beginning in the summer of 2020 or once the Secretary has certified that the new IT system is fully implemented. In the first phase, PCAFC will be expanded to eligible veterans who incurred or aggravated a serious injury in the line of duty on or before May 7, 1975. The final phase of the expansion will begin two years later, and will expand PCAFC to eligible veterans who incurred or aggravated a serious injury in the line of duty after May 7, 1975, through September 10, 2001. Additionally, the VA has gathered input and is developing regulatory changes to streamline the program and provide more clarity for veterans and their family caregivers. The VA will publish a proposed rule for public comment prior to issuing final regulations.

The VA is also working across the department to ensure caregivers have a positive experience through program improvements and initiatives to include:

- Providing home and community-based care alternatives through the Choose Home Initiative at 21 VA medical centers.
- Establishing the Center for Excellence for Veteran and Caregiver Research named after Senator Elizabeth Dole.
- Expanding telehealth services to enable veterans and their caregivers to get care in the comfort of their homes.
- Delivering valuable programs for caregivers such as peer support mentoring, a Caregiver Support Line, self-care courses and educational programs to help caregivers succeed.

Caregivers play a critical role in enabling veterans to maintain their highest level of independence and remain in their homes and communities for as long as possible. The VA leads the nation in providing unprecedented benefits and services to caregivers. The MISSION Act strengthens the VA’s ability to serve as a trusted partner in the care of our nation’s most vulnerable veterans. To learn more about the many support services available for caregivers of Veterans, visit www.caregiver.va.gov or call the Caregiver Support Line at (855) 260-3274.

GO GREEN AND 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 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. 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

October 13	U.S. Navy established, 1775
October 14	Columbus Day Star Spangled Banner adopted as National Anthem, 1931
October 19	Revolutionary War ends, 1781
November 3	Daylight-saving time ends, set clocks back one hour
November 8	Election Day
November 10	U.S. Marine Corps established, 1775
November 11	Veteran's Day (<i>see history below</i>)
November 19	Lincoln gives Gettysburg Address, 1863
November 28	Thanksgiving Day
December 7	Pearl Harbor bombed, 1941
December 14	Army-Navy Football Game, Philadelphia, PA, 2:00 p.m. EST
December 16	Boston Tea Party, 1773
December 25	Christmas Day

CONVENTION SCHEDULES

American Legion

- Mid-Winter To be announced
- State To be announced
- National..... August 28-September 3, 2020, Louisville, KY

AMVETS

- National..... August 18-22, 2020, Springfield, IL, KY

Disabled American Veterans

- Mid-Winter October 24-26, 2019, Mountain Home, ID
- State April 22-25, 2020, Coeur d'Alene, ID
- National..... July 31-August 4, 2020, Dallas, TX

Marine Corps League

- National..... August 8-15, 2020, Daytona Beach, FL

Military Order of the Purple Heart

- National..... July 27-31, 2020, Charleston, WV

Veterans of Foreign Wars

- Mid Winter January 9-12, 2020, Boise, ID
- State June 16-19, 2020, Boise, ID
- National..... July 18-23, 2019, Reno, NV

Vietnam Veterans of America

- National..... To be announced

THE HISTORY OF VETERANS' DAY

Formerly Armistice Day, Veterans' Day is a holiday observed annually in the United States in honor of all those, living and dead, who served with the U.S. armed forces in wartime.

Some states observe the holiday on November 11th and others on the fourth Monday of October. Armistice Day, the forerunner of Veterans' Day, was proclaimed in 1919 to commemorate the termination (at 11:00 a.m. on November 11, 1918) World War I. On the first anniversary of the truce, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson issued a proclamation eulogizing fallen Allied soldiers and referring to November 11th as Armistice Day. It became a holiday in the United States, France, Great Britain, and Canada.

The holiday acquired its present name and broadened significance in the United States in 1954. In Canada it is known as Remembrance Day, and in Great Britain, it is known as Remembrance Sunday.

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.

