

1ST DISTRICT SERVICE OFFICER VA & R REPORT FOR APRIL 2023



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Did you know as a veteran enrolled in VA health care, you can now receive the new toxic exposure screening at VA medical centers and clinics across the country? If you're not enrolled but meet eligibility requirements to enroll, you will have an opportunity to receive the screening after you enroll. During your screening, you'll be asked if you believe you experienced toxic exposures during your military service. If you answer yes, you may be connected to support and resources, including a review by your primary care team or provider.

Did you know memorial and burial benefits are rarely used by veterans compared with other VA benefits? Currently, only 15% of veterans who die each year are interred in a VA national cemetery (an additional 5% are interred in a VA-funded state, territorial or tribal cemetery). The best way a veteran can take advantage of this benefit is to make his or her preferences known to their family, and then apply in advance to determine eligibility through the National Cemetery Administration's pre-need program.

U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-Wisconsin) announced that her bipartisan Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach Act passed the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. The legislation would expand and support County Veterans Service Officers (CVSO), the community-based employees who work directly with veterans to inform them of eligibility for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) programs and services, file pension and compensation claims, and help them enroll in job, housing, disability, and education benefits. Out of the estimated 19 million veterans in the United States, only a small fraction utilize the care and benefits they are entitled to.

Far too often you might hear a veteran comment, "It is too much trouble to apply for disability benefits" or "Is it really worth it?" The facts are it can have a tremendous impact on you and your family. For instance, with just a 10% rating a veteran is entitled to the following:

- No cost health care and prescription medications for service connected disabilities
- Travel allowance for scheduled appointments for care at a VA medical facility or VA authorized health care facility
- Waiver of VA funding fee for home loan
- 10-point veteran preference in federal hiring
- Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment (with a serious employment handicap)
- Burial and plot allowance
- Commissary and Exchange Privileges
- Use of commissaries, exchanges and morale, welfare and recreation (MWR) retail facilities, in-person and online.
- \$165.92/month tax free for life for 10% service connected disability

Did you know veterans can now access their disability benefit claim decisions on VA.gov, instead of waiting for a mailed copy to be delivered? To access decision letters, veterans can simply log in to VA.gov and check the status of their claim.

Air Force Global Strike Command is launching a new study of cancer risks among Airmen and Guardians who worked near intercontinental ballistic missiles and is developing new resources for current and former service members and their families.

In January 2023, a presentation detailing cancers among missileers who served at Malmstrom Air Force Base, Montana, was posted on Facebook, triggering concern across the missile community and others who have served at Malmstrom, Warren Air Force Base, Wyoming, and Minot Air Force Base, North Dakota. The presentation indicated that at least nine service members from Malmstrom had been diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

The new study will draw on active duty service members' medical data, the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) cancer and mortality data, and public cancer registers.

Airmen and Guardians are advised to standby for the results.

For many veterans, aging, along with changes in their physical health makeup, declining health, and severe income adjustments, makes them eligible for many benefits they previously didn't qualify for when they were younger. Surprisingly, to many veterans when they become aware of grants, scholarships, and free monetary compensation, they are shocked! The shock transitions to acceptance that they are eligible to receive all sorts of compensation.

MDD is a disabling mental health condition characterized by feelings of sadness or despair, loss of interest in activities, changes in appetite, sleep and energy, and feelings of guilt or worthlessness. MDD can lead to trouble functioning at work or at home, and can contribute to suicidal thoughts. MDD is one of the most common conditions treated in Outpatient Mental Health, and unfortunately, some Veterans do not improve adequately with standard treatments (medications and psychotherapy). MDD that does not resolve with standard treatment is called treatment resistant MDD (trMDD).

Did you know when a veteran makes a claim for disability benefits, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) needs to inform them of any information and evidence that will help their claim be successful? This means the VA must explain what evidence they require you to obtain on your own, and likewise, what evidence the VA will obtain on their own. If the VA determines that a claim is not complete enough to be processed, they then have a **duty to notify** you what is needed in order for that claim to become complete. On the other hand, if the VA determines that a claim is complete enough to process, they then must notify you of what information would be helpful to support your claim.

Did you know the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program was made permanent? The program provides employment and job training for homeless veterans, expands the Vet Center eligibility for mental health services, and sets money aside for suicide prevention efforts and traumatic brain injury (TBI) and PTSD research.

Did you know the following conditions are now presumptive due to the new PACT Act?

- 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

In addition to the above conditions, two Vietnam-era Agent Orange presumptive conditions were also added:

- High blood pressure (also called hypertension)
- Monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance (MGUS)

These are on top of other conditions that include certain types of cancers, type 2 diabetes, and other illnesses. In addition to Agent Orange exposure additions, the VA highlights different kinds of exposure to hazardous chemicals and materials like asbestos, mustard gas, radiation, and more.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has agreed to cover a new biologic treatment for some veteran patients with Alzheimer's disease, according to an announcement Monday from the manufacturer.

The VA will cover Leqembi, a monoclonal antibody therapy made by pharmaceutical companies Eisai and Biogen, for veterans in the disease's early stages, making the department the first and largest health program in the country to endorse the treatment. The Food and Drug Administration granted accelerated approval for Leqembi, also known as lecanemab, in January after research showed that the medication, administered intravenously every two weeks, slowed physical and mental decline in some patients with early Alzheimer's by as much as 27%.

Did you know Agent Orange has been associated with nerve damage? Dioxin, an ingredient in Agent Orange has been linked to a range of health problems, including nerve damage. Dioxin can cause damage to the nerves by interfering with the normal functioning of the nervous system. Also, dioxin exposure can cause changes in the structure and function of the brain, which can lead to cognitive impairment and other neurological problems

Remember..... That all gave some, but many gave all!

