

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



By Richard Strehlow 262-641-0977

VA NEWS & INFORMATION:

- Did you know post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is one of the most common afflictions military service personnel incur while on active duty? Ongoing research to help treat PTSD makes slow progress each year. The latest potential breakthrough is combining ketamine and psychotherapy. While not without some drawbacks, initial results indicate it may have promise.
- If you are in the process of filing for disability benefits from The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), you will most likely be asked to complete a Compensation and Pension (C&P) examination.
- This exam is to determine if your disability is service connected, the level of your disability and if the condition should receive a rating increase or decrease.
- While the thought of another doctor's appointment may be daunting, it's important to remember that the C&P exam is an important part of your disability claims process.
- Did you know the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) offers support and services for family caregivers of eligible veterans who were seriously injured in the line of duty and meet other eligibility requirements? Services for eligible participants may include a financial stipend, access to health insurance, mental health counseling, caregiver training, and respite care. The PCAFC requires both the child and the veteran to apply together.
- Did you know if you are the biological child of a woman Vietnam War Veteran and you've been diagnosed with certain birth defects, you may qualify for the Children of Women Vietnam Veterans Health Care Benefits Program? These benefits may help pay for services needed to treat a covered birth defect and related medical conditions.
- Did you know the American Heart Association (AHA) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have partnered to create a new program to help more than 2 million veterans with atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease (ASCVD) manage their cholesterol and reduce their risk of heart attack and stroke? The program, called the Veterans Affairs Lipid Optimization Reimagined Quality Improvement (VALOR-QI), will be implemented in 50 VA medical centers. An estimated 30,000 veterans are expected to be treated over three years, focusing on those whose low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C) remains at or above 70 mg/dl despite standard care.
- Did you know to qualify for 100% VA disability benefits, a veteran must have a service-connected disability or combination of disabilities that result in total occupational and social impairment?
- Did you know you can still get VA disability benefits even if your service medical records are missing? Experienced VSOs and expert disability attorneys have many ways to prove your mental and physical disabilities are service-connected without your service medical records. For instance, lay statements, stressor letters, and pictures of veterans in combat zones have been used successfully to prove service connection.
- According to disability experts, Hill & Ponton, the following may be a few of the best ways to increase your disability rating.
 1. Seek treatment and obtain medical evidence to support the claim.
 2. Provide detailed documentation of all disabilities and how they affect daily living.
 3. Consider applying for secondary service connection for conditions related to existing disabilities.
 4. Request a reevaluation of a current rating.

5. File a Notice of Disagreement (NOD) if the veteran disagrees with the VA's decision.
6. File a claim for Individual Unemployability (IU) if the veteran is unable to maintain substantially gainful employment due to their service-connected disabilities.
7. Submit a claim for Special Monthly Compensation (SMC) if the veteran has severe disabilities, such as loss of use of a limb or blindness.
8. Appeal to the Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA) if the veteran disagrees with the Regional Office decision.
9. Hire a VA-accredited attorney or claims representative to help navigate the claims process.
10. Consider submitting a claim for increased rating due to the worsening of a service-connected disability.
11. Obtain a medical opinion from a private physician or specialist that supports the claim for a higher rating.
12. Seek assistance from a Veteran Service Organization (VSO) to file or appeal a claim.
13. Provide evidence of service connection for new or previously denied conditions.
14. Submit a Fully Developed Claim (FDC) if all the required evidence is available at the time of submission.
15. Request a Decision Review Officer (DRO) review if the veteran disagrees with the Regional Office decision.
16. Appeal to the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (CAVC) if the veteran disagrees with the BVA decision.
17. Consider submitting a claim for presumptive conditions related to exposure to Agent Orange or other toxic substances.
18. Apply for VA pension if the veteran has limited income and assets.
19. Request a hearing before the BVA or the Regional Office to present new evidence and arguments.

Did you know the VA has expanded the list of presumptive cancers for eligible Gulf War and post-9/11 Veterans? A presumptive condition means we assume (or “presume”) that your service caused your condition. Below are listed the most common types of cancers that VA now consider presumptive for eligible Veterans. If you have one of these cancers and had exposure to burn pits or served in a qualifying location, you may be eligible for benefits.

- Brain, head, neck, and nervous system cancers
- Kidney cancers
- Melanoma
- Reproductive cancers
- Gastrointestinal cancers
- Lymphomas
- Pancreatic cancers
- Respiratory cancers

Did you know the VA's 55-year-old rule states that disability compensation will not be awarded for disabilities that first appear in a veteran after they turn 55 years old, unless the disability is due to military service? This means that if you develop a disability after turning 55 that is not related to your military service, you may not be eligible for VA disability compensation.

Did you know research has not established a conclusive link between Agent Orange exposure and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)? However, some data suggests people with exposure to the chemical are more likely to receive a COPD diagnosis. Nonetheless, it is unclear whether the herbicide itself causes COPD.

Did you know it is important to bring any relevant medical records and documentation related to your disability, including your service medical records, medical treatment records, and any other supporting documents to your C & P exam? This can help the examiner better understand your medical history and condition.

Did you know any surviving spouses of military veterans that served from January 9, 1962 to July 31, 1980 in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Guam or American Samoa, or who sailed in the waters off of these territories can now qualify for certain VA benefits? In order to qualify for coverage, the individual must be a surviving spouse of a passed away veteran, and who were afflicted with medical conditions such as hypertension, monoclonal gammopathy, bladder cancer, parkinsonism, or hypothyroidism. This is for any surviving spouse that was previously denied coverage.