

1ST DISTRICT SERVICE OFFICER VA & R REPORT FOR JANUARY 2025



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VA NEWS & INFORMATION:

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently added rare cancers to the presumptive disability list, marking a significant advancement for our veterans. This important addition stands to benefit a specific group of veterans who have faced the challenges posed by these conditions.

Veterans are often surprised to discover that they can still access valuable VA benefits even with a 0% disability rating. This information may be one of the VA's best-kept secrets, as it is not widely discussed within the veteran community. Moreover, many Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) seldom mention this possibility, leaving veterans unaware of the potential resources available to them. Understanding these benefits is crucial, as it empowers veterans to fully leverage the support they have earned through their service.

Did you know Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) are a group of chemicals with significant persistence in the environment and serious disease-causing effects for humans? In fact, PFAS withstand degradation to such an extent that they are also known as forever chemicals and can only be removed from the water and soil through specific and costly methods. In the U.S. PFAS have been used since the 1950s, with more stringent legislation for safe disposal and production adopted only recently in light of decades of evidence that links these chemicals with serious health effects.

Did you know the National Cemeteries Preservation and Protection Act of 2022 allowed the VA to establish sections of graveyards in National Cemeteries for "green burials?" For a burial to be considered "green" by the VA, the body may be cremated or buried, but preparations must be free of chemicals or embalming fluids and the urn or casket must be biodegradable or securely wrapped in a biodegradable shroud. The National Cemetery Administration has always accepted naturally prepared remains or those in biodegradable containers for burial in national cemeteries, but a new pilot program will let veterans and their families select a final resting place tailored for their wishes.

Did you know the VA is launching a new outreach campaign to encourage all eligible veterans to enroll in VA health care? This campaign will include text messages and emails directly to veterans, public service announcements, paid advertising, and events. VA is launching this campaign after reports of concerns from veterans about health issues. Veterans are concerned about mental health challenges and thoughts of suicide potentially related to repeated blasts

and head trauma (low-level artillery blasts, IEDs, missile launches, heavy fire, and more). Since the first reporting about these concerns, VA researchers have been urgently studying this matter to learn more about the potential health impacts of blast exposure on veterans.

Did you know the Dependency Indemnity Compensation (DIC) provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is a crucial benefit for the spouses, children, and sometimes parents of veterans who have passed away? This benefit aims to provide financial support to families who face significant challenges after losing their loved one. DIC is a tax-free monthly benefit that can greatly ease the burden of financial instability during a difficult period.

Did you know the VA recently announced an overhaul of its family caregiver program that expands eligibility for some veterans but also institutes new eligibility requirements that will affect the thousands of veterans already enrolled? VA will expand access to include as many as 3,000 veterans who currently don't meet the eligibility criteria but the VA considers unemployable. Caregivers will benefit from increased financial support, allowing them to dedicate more time and resources to caring for veterans. Additionally, the expansion of eligibility criteria means that more families can access the support they need, ensuring that no veteran is left behind.

A new report released from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services highlights the dangers faced by so many on military installations and for decades aboard U.S. military war crafts. It now officially lists Trichloroethylene, or TCE, as a human carcinogen. TCE is a primary pollutant at installations such as Camp Lejeune and other military Superfund Sites, and is known to be a primary driver for exposure-related acute leukemia.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has announced a significant reduction in insurance rates, which will take effect in Spring 2025, marking a pivotal moment for veterans. This change not only lowers costs but also expands eligibility for many veterans, empowering them to access essential coverage that supports their health and well-being. By ensuring that more veterans can benefit from these important resources, the VA aligns with its mission to provide comprehensive support to those who have served our country.

Jungle rot, also known as tropical ulcer or tinea pedis, can have significant detrimental effects on veterans who experience it, particularly veterans who may have encountered it during service. In the short term, symptoms often include painful skin lesions, itching, and inflammation, which can lead to discomfort and hinder daily activities. If left untreated, these infections can progress and result in complications such as secondary bacterial infections or even systemic infections, which may require hospitalization. Long-term effects can include chronic skin issues, scarring, and potential psychological impacts such as anxiety or depression related to ongoing health concerns. Awareness and education about jungle rot are crucial for veterans, as understanding these effects can lead to timely intervention and improved health outcomes. According to recent studies, approximately 10-15% of veterans who served in tropical environments report experiencing some form of jungle

rot, highlighting the need for comprehensive resources and support to address this health issue.



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