

## 1<sup>ST</sup> DISTRICT SERVICE OFFICER VA & R REPORT FOR NOVEMBER 2024



By Richard Strehlow 262-641-0977

### VA NEWS & INFORMATION:

Did you know veterans have a 11.4 percent cancer rate? A higher rate than the general population at 10 percent. The VA reports that the most frequently diagnosed cancers for veterans include prostate, lung, colorectal, melanoma and bladder.

Did you know veterans can obtain full disability by qualifying for individual unemployability (IU)? In order to receive IU benefits, a veteran must be unable to hold down a steady job as a result of their service-connected disabilities and they are unable to support themselves financially. In addition to that, they must also have at least one service-related disability rated at 60% or two service-related disabilities with a combined rating of 70%. Under IU stipulations, the amount of work and income a veteran can get is restricted. The amount a veteran can earn varies depending on the year; as the VA is constantly determining the number. A good rule of thumb to follow is the U.S. minimum poverty line (*as of 2023, the U.S. poverty line for a single-person household is about \$14,580 annually*). Anything earned under is typically alright and anything earned above the minimum poverty line is likely in violation of IU stipulations. In the event a veteran violates the restrictions the VA might try to reduce or terminate the individuals benefits.

Did you know living Medal of Honor recipients could get a significant pay increase in their pensions under a new bill recently introduced in the Senate? Under the Monetary Enhancement for Distinguished Active Legends, or MEDAL Act, the monthly pension for Medal of Honor recipients would jump from \$1,406.73 per month to \$8,333.33. That's an annual increase from about \$16,880 to \$100,000.

Did you know spouses of veterans who are rated 100% disabled or have Individual Unemployability (IU) status are eligible for a variety of benefits? Here are some of the key benefits:

1. Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC): This is a monthly benefit for surviving spouses if the veteran passes away due to a service-connected condition.
2. Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance (DEA, Chapter 35): This program provides education and training opportunities to eligible dependents of veterans.
3. CHAMPVA (Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs): This is a comprehensive health care program for eligible spouses and children of disabled veterans.
4. Commissary and Exchange Privileges: Spouses can shop at military commissaries and exchanges.
5. Property Tax Exemptions: Many states offer property tax exemptions for the primary residences of 100% disabled veterans and their surviving spouses.
6. VA Home Loan Program: Eligible surviving spouses can access VA home loan benefits, which include no down payment and competitive interest rates.
7. Educational Scholarships and Grants: Various states and programs offer educational scholarships and tuition grants to the spouses of 100% disabled veterans.
8. Burial Benefits: Spouses are eligible for burial benefits, including burial in a VA national cemetery, burial allowance, and transportation costs.

U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) announced that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has awarded more than \$4.2 million in retroactive benefits for over 100 veterans who were misdiagnosed at a Wisconsin VA Medical Center and subsequently denied compensation and benefits. Senator Baldwin successfully pushed the VA to re-examine veterans who were misdiagnosed for neurological conditions by a particular doctor at the Tomah VA Medical Center, Dr. Mary Jo Lanska, MD, and provide these impacted veterans new exams and earned benefits.

Did you know the most frequently reported disability associated with Agent Orange exposure among veterans is often related to conditions of combat? These health issues have been extensively documented and are recognized by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) as presumptive conditions linked to Agent Orange exposure. Understanding the impact of this disability is crucial for veterans seeking support and benefits.

Did you know the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers programs by which veterans can choose a specific caregiver that includes family members? One program is a self-directed care program currently available in 37 states. It is offered to veterans, of all ages, who are enrolled in the health care system of the VA. Veterans can choose not only the type of care and services needed, but also the person who will provide the care. This means that the veteran can hire a capable family member, including his or her spouse, sibling, grandchild, or child for compensation.

Historical reports from the Vietnam Conflict reveal a concerning prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), particularly gonorrhea and syphilis, among Army troops compared to their counterparts in other branches of the military. As a result, some veterans eligible for lifetime compensation for STDs.

Did you know the A1C test is a crucial tool in the diagnosis and management of diabetes? The A1C test provides a comprehensive overview of your average blood sugar levels over the past three months. For veterans, understanding the results of this test is vital, as it not only aids in diagnosing diabetes but also serves as a key indicator of how effectively you are managing your blood sugar. This knowledge empowers you to make informed decisions about your health. Regular A1C testing can help identify potential health challenges early, allowing for timely interventions and improved health outcomes.

Did you know it is crucial for veterans to consistently document their symptoms both during and after their service? Maintaining a detailed record can significantly aid in establishing a clear connection between your health issues and your military experiences. This documentation serves as essential evidence in navigating the complexities of veteran benefits and can greatly enhance the likelihood of receiving the support you rightfully deserve. Also, by carefully tracking your symptoms, you can better articulate your experiences and facilitate a more effective dialogue with healthcare providers and benefits administrators.

Did you know many veterans suffer from leishmaniasis? This is a disease caused by protozoan parasites of the *Leishmania* species, transmitted primarily through the bite of infected sandflies. It manifests in several forms: Cutaneous Leishmaniasis - Causes skin sores that can take a long time to heal, often leaving scars. This is the most common form. Visceral Leishmaniasis (also

known as kala-azar) - A more severe form that affects internal organs like the spleen and liver, leading to symptoms such as fever, weight loss, and anemia. If untreated, it can be fatal. Mucocutaneous Leishmaniasis - Involves lesions of the mucous membranes of the nose and mouth, which can lead to significant disfigurement. Leishmaniasis is prevalent in tropical and subtropical regions, and while it's not directly transmitted from person to person, it poses a risk to those living or working in endemic areas, specifically military service members. Treatment options vary based on the form of the disease and severity, but early diagnosis is crucial for effective management.

Did you know veterans with a rare lung disease could have an easier time collecting Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability benefits under proposed changes announced recently? Constrictive bronchiolitis, or CB, is one of the burn pit-related illnesses covered under the PACT Act, the sweeping law passed two years ago that aimed to make it easier for veterans with certain diseases linked to toxic exposure to get VA care and benefits.

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.

Did you know if you are considering filing a VA claim for disability compensation or VA pension, but will not be filing your VA claim before the end of any given month, it is imperative that you submit an Intent to File (ITF) to preserve your back pay? Filing an ITF can be accomplished by either calling (800-827-1000) or submitting a one page Intent to File VA Form. If you have an account setup with the va.gov website, you can also start a claim online. Simply starting a claim online will automatically notify the VA of your intent to file a claim.

Did you know Alaska, American, Hawaiian, JetBlue, and United Airlines all offer reduced fares for the military community through a partnership with WeSalute+ Southwest Airlines also offers lower fares not available to the public if you call ahead.

Did you know that shrapnel poisoning in veterans refers to the harmful effects caused by the fragmentation of explosive devices, which can leave behind metal debris that may infiltrate the body? This condition not only poses immediate physical health risks but can also lead to long-term complications, impacting the overall well-being of veterans.

## Symptoms

Understanding the symptoms of shrapnel poisoning is crucial for veterans who may have experienced exposure during their service. Shrapnel poisoning can manifest in various ways, including but not limited to:

- acute pain at the site of injury
- swelling
- Redness, and potential infection
- Fever
- Fatigue

- And in severe cases, neurological effects depending on the materials involved

Did you know one lesser-known fact about the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is that it not only provides health care and benefits to veterans, but it also operates the National Cemetery Administration, which manages over 150 national cemeteries? This includes the meticulous care and maintenance of these sites, ensuring that they honor the service and sacrifice of veterans and their families. The VA also offers burial benefits, which can include headstones, markers, and burial allowances, helping to ensure that veterans receive a dignified resting place.

Did you know one benefit that many veterans do not utilize often is the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) program, also known as Chapter 31 benefits? This program is designed to assist veterans with service-connected disabilities to prepare for, find, and maintain suitable employment. It also provides services for those who are unable to work due to their disabilities.

Did you know the Vietnam War led to a significant number of veterans receiving amputations due to the widespread use of landmines, artillery, and improvised explosive devices (IEDs)? Advances in medical care have also increased survival rates for severe injuries, resulting in more veterans living with amputations from this conflict. While the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have also seen a notable number of amputations, the Vietnam War remains particularly impactful in terms of sheer number

Veterans often face significant challenges when it comes to managing pain, navigating a complex landscape of treatments that can sometimes feel overwhelming. Many veterans have been prescribed a combination of medications, which, while intended to alleviate discomfort, can lead to serious side effects and even tragic outcomes. It's crucial for veterans and their families to understand the risks associated with these treatments, as well as the importance of making informed choices about their healthcare.

Did you know the number one disease associated with Agent Orange exposure is Vietnam Veterans' disease, particularly non-Hodgkin lymphoma? Other significant health issues linked to Agent Orange include various cancers, such as prostate cancer and respiratory cancers, as well as conditions like diabetes and ischemic heart disease. The U.S. government recognizes several diseases as being presumptively connected to Agent Orange exposure, providing veterans with access to benefits and healthcare for these conditions.



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