



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

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VA NEWS & INFORMATION:

Did you know most men diagnosed with prostate cancer won't die from it? Prostate cancer has about a 97% 5-year survival rate. Men ages 75 to 84 are more likely to die from it. The lifetime risk of dying of prostate cancer is about 2.5%.

Did you know in January 2023, VA launched a new life insurance program called Veterans Affairs Life Insurance (VALife), which provides guaranteed acceptance whole life insurance coverage to Veterans age 80 and under, with any level of service-connected disability? Some Veterans age 81 and older may also be eligible.

Did you know hearing loss is one of the most prevalent service-connected disabilities? Annually about 1 million veterans receive disability compensation for hearing loss and tinnitus. Veterans could be eligible for free or low-cost hearing health care (such as hearing aids) through VA Health Benefits. Also if your hearing loss is considered due to military service and is severe enough you could be granted monthly tax free payments from the VA

Did you know the Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) program, also known as the Chapter 31 program, was created to help eligible veterans overcome various hurdles that they faced? The Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program was created to support veterans by providing counseling, job training, rehabilitation services, and independent living assistance. With these resources, veterans can keep their employment and possibly also live independently.

Chapter 35 is a monthly stipend paid to the dependents of veterans who have died or been permanently disabled in the line of duty, while they are in school. It cannot be used in conjunction with a GI Bill or Fry Scholarship. Eligible individuals are veterans' and active duty service members' dependents, spouses, and surviving spouses who have been found eligible because of one of the following:

- The veteran's death was caused by the service-connected disability
- The veteran is rated for total and permanent service-connected disability
- The service member is Missing in Action (MIA)
- The service member is captured in the line of duty
- The service member is forcibly detained for longer than 90 days
- The service member who VA determines has a service-connected permanent and total disability that will result in a discharge from military service
- Participants include a dependent child between the ages of 14 to 31 and a spouse, or surviving spouse, who qualifies for the benefit

Did you know hearing loss is one of the easier disabilities to establish as service-connected? Similar to tinnitus, hearing loss is often linked to noise exposure during military service, and many veterans can qualify for compensation with sufficient documentation of their exposure to loud noises or events during service.

Gulf War veterans have reported a higher rate of unexplained health problems, including skin conditions like rashes. Some of these issues have been speculated to be linked to a combination of factors, including vaccines (anthrax, botulism toxoid, or others), environmental exposures, and stress. However, a direct causal link between vaccines and these skin problems has not been definitively established.

Did you know Agent Orange exposure can take decades to fully manifest? Not all of the associated health conditions are immediately obvious or linked to the exposure right away. Some veterans may think that if they didn't experience symptoms right after their military service, they aren't affected, but many Agent Orange-related health issues develop or worsen many years after exposure.

Did you know a U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report found that for three presumptive conditions linked to Agent Orange exposure—peripheral neuropathy, ischemic heart disease and chloracne—only 8% of initial claims were granted? Other presumptive conditions had significantly higher approval rates, highlighting the inconsistencies and challenges veterans face when seeking compensation.

In a remarkable leap forward for veterans, a newly launched app is revolutionizing the way they access their benefits, making the process not only simpler but also more efficient. This user-friendly application is designed with the needs of veterans in mind, providing a streamlined experience that demystifies the often complex world of benefits. With thousands of veterans already benefiting from this innovative tool, it's heartening to see technology step up to support those who have bravely served our country. It's a win-win situation, allowing veterans to focus more on their well-being and less on paperwork.

Did you know current data shows an average of 17.6 veteran suicides occur per day? Suicide remains the second-leading cause of death among veterans under 45 years old.

For Veterans who are blind or have low vision, daily tasks that were once easy—like cooking and using technology—can become difficult. VA's Blind TeleRehabilitation is here to meet the various needs and goals of Veterans with vision loss. The program provides Veterans with virtual assessment and training (such as cooking classes, self-care management and fall prevention), assistive technology and themed-support groups. A common myth is that Veterans need to be considered legally blind to receive rehabilitation care or that their vision loss must be a direct result of their service. This is not true. In fact, the program serves any Veteran enrolled in VA health care whose vision loss impacts their life. This includes vision loss after a brain injury or stroke, or aging-related eye conditions such as macular degeneration, cataracts or glaucoma. Veterans can be referred to Blind Telerehabilitation through their Visual Impairment Services Team (VIST) coordinator, VA primary care provider, social worker or optometrist. The first step of the program is for Veterans to complete an assessment about their condition, challenges and goals. Veterans then work with a blind rehabilitation specialist to address the barriers they face. For example, a Veteran can take a virtual class on setting up their smartphone with accessibility features. Additionally, the program can issue technology, such as head-mounted reading devices.

Did you know veterans with injuries to the spine (from combat or accidents) may suffer from nerve damage due to spinal cord trauma? This can lead to conditions like paralysis, loss of sensation, and weakness in limbs (depending on the location of the injury).

Did you know Tricare copays for many drugs will rise again in 2025 as part of a long-term plan to ratchet up patients' share of the costs through 2027? Congress ordered the series of rate hikes that began in 2018. The rates, which will go up as much as \$8 for a 30-day supply of drugs not on Tricare's coverage list, also known as "non-formulary," were published in a Defense Department reimbursement guide. Generic drugs and brand-name medication on the coverage list will also see price increases.

Following the passing of the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act, there are now three new conditions on the Agent Orange presumptive list. These conditions include:

- Bladder Cancer
- Hypothyroidism: A condition occurs when the thyroid doesn't produce enough hormones
- Parkinsonism: A condition with symptoms of Parkinson's Disease, including tremors, impaired speech, muscle stiffness, and slow movement

The addition of these conditions means that many more veterans will be eligible for VA disability benefits. If you filed a claim for one of these conditions in the past, the VA will automatically review your case to see if you're now eligible.

The latest additions to the Agent Orange presumptive list comes from Sec. 404 of the Honoring Our PACT Act (the short name being, "Fair Care for Vietnam Veterans Act") which lists two additional diseases that can be service connected.

- Hypertension
- Monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance

This is a huge win for any Vietnam War veteran or any other veteran suffering from Agent Orange exposure related symptoms.

According to Hill & Ponton, the following conditions may contribute to your tinnitus issues:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Meniere's disease
- Traumatic brain injuries (TBIs)
- Hearing loss
- Hypertension (high blood pressure)
- Head and neck conditions

For example, high blood pressure (hypertension) can aggravate tinnitus, as can head and neck conditions and traumatic brain injuries, or TBIs.

Tip: If you're already rated for one of these conditions, but not for tinnitus, it may make sense to put an additional VA disability claim for tinnitus as a secondary condition.

Insomnia is a common issue among veterans, often stemming from the psychological and emotional aftermath of their service. Many veterans experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which can manifest through intrusive thoughts, heightened anxiety, and

hypervigilance—making it incredibly difficult to relax and fall asleep. Additionally, feelings of depression are prevalent among veterans, further complicating their ability to achieve restorative sleep. The transition from military to civilian life can also introduce new stresses that disrupt established sleep patterns, leading to feelings of isolation, despair, and their inability to hold down gainful employment.

Gulf War Illness is a chronic multi-symptom illness affecting veterans who served in the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf War — but symptoms have also been reported in those who served in later conflicts in the region.

It's not psychological — it's a real, physical condition linked to exposures during deployment, such as:

- Pesticides and nerve agents
- Pyridostigmine bromide pills (used to protect against nerve gas)
- Oil well fire smoke
- Depleted uranium
- Environmental toxins & vaccines

The VA's introduction of a new therapy approach for PTSD represents a groundbreaking step forward in the journey toward healing veterans.

This promising therapy has the potential to significantly improve mental health and overall well-being, offering hope to those who have bravely served our country.

Did you know in addition to monthly disability payments, you may also be entitled to other benefits if you have a service-connected disability? This could include medical care, employment retraining, disability housing grants, fiduciary services, Aid & Attendance benefits, and more. A VA disability benefits lawyer or accredited Veterans Service Officer (VSO) can help you understand all the sources of support available to you.

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



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