

## **VFW SERVICE OFFICER NOTES FOR THE TEN-HUT August 2019**

### **Blue Water Navy Frequently Asked Questions in Regards to Agent Orange Exposure**

I posted the Frequently Asked Questions of the Post bulletin board in the vestibule. These questions address specifics in regards to physical contact with Agent Orange, the effective dates for benefits for Blue Water Navy Veterans, those previously denied claims – resubmission, veterans who have died prior to the decision of their claim, and surviving spouse benefits. The Blue Water Navy Act will take effect on 1 January 2020. Veterans with questions about benefits or filing a claim can visit the VA Agent Orange website:

[www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/hazardous-materials-exposure/agent-orange/navy-coast-guard-ships-vietnam](http://www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/hazardous-materials-exposure/agent-orange/navy-coast-guard-ships-vietnam). Or you can call 800-827-1000.

### **Women Veterans Remain a Top Priority**

The National Commander of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) said, “Women veterans are the one of the fastest-growing populations, and we have to make sure we’re prepared to keep the promises we’ve made to all veterans.” In April, House Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman Mark Takano – who took the reins of the committee at the start of the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress – announced the establishment of a women veteran’s task force, to be led by Representative Julia Brownley, in an effort to help identify and eliminate difficulties women veterans face accessing benefits, programs and service. The goal is to, “... have a national presence and create a national dialogue where we can identify all the inequities faced by women veterans and determine how we can tackle them through legislation and other means.” Follow along with updates on women services provided by the VA and proposed legislation at: [www.DAVCAN.org](http://www.DAVCAN.org).

### **MN Property Tax Changes for Veterans with Service Connected Disabilities 70% or Greater, 100% Permanent and Total, and Surviving Spouses**

This is an excerpt from an email received by all county VSOs. This email is posted on the bulletin board at the entrance of the Post. If you believe you fit into this category schedule an appointment with one of our county VSOs. Their extensions are: 507.457.6455, or 507.457.6528. **What has changed?** (1) The Drop Dead Date for applications for veterans requesting a disability exclusion is 15 Dec 19. (2) Extensions for the surviving spouse of a 100% permanently and totally disabled veteran has been extended from 8 years to a lifetime benefit – effective this assessment year. (3) Spouses that are currently receiving the exclusion and new applicants will receive this lifetime exclusion. (4) No back dating allowed, e.g. property taxes for 2015, 2016, and 2017 cannot receive this exclusion. (5) If a spouse received the exclusion in assessment for year 2018, for taxes payable in 2019 and the exclusion was removed because 2018 was their eighth year in the program, the county should put the exclusion back on those properties for assessment year 2019. This is the only “backdating” that is allowed since the spouse is currently benefitting from the exclusion in the 2019 payable year.

### **VA overhauls religious and spiritual symbol policies to protect religious liberty**

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently revised its directives permitting religious literature, symbols and displays at VA facilities to protect religious liberty for Veterans and families while ensuring inclusivity and nondiscrimination.

The move aims to simplify and clarify the department's policies governing [religious symbols](#), and [spiritual and pastoral care](#), which have been interpreted inconsistently at various VA facilities in recent years, resulting in [unfortunate incidents](#) that interrupted certain [displays](#).

Effective July 3, these changes will help ensure that patrons within VA have access to religious literature and symbols at chapels as requested and protect representations of faith in publicly accessible displays at facilities throughout the department.

“We want to make sure that all of our Veterans and their families feel welcome at VA, no matter their religious beliefs. Protecting religious liberty is a key part of how we accomplish that goal,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “These important changes will bring simplicity and clarity to our policies governing religious and spiritual symbols, helping ensure we are consistently complying with the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution at thousands of facilities across the department.”

The new policies will:

- Allow the inclusion in appropriate circumstances of religious content in publicly accessible displays at VA facilities.
- Allow patients and their guests to request and be provided religious literature, symbols and sacred texts during visits to VA chapels and during their treatment at VA.
- Allow VA to accept donations of religious literature, cards and symbols at its facilities and distribute them to VA patrons under appropriate circumstances or to a patron who requests them.

The [U.S. Supreme Court](#) recently reaffirmed the important role religion plays in the lives of many Americans and its consistency with Constitutional principles. This includes the following values: a display that follows in the longstanding tradition of monuments, symbols and practices;

### **VA-Verizon partnership offers unlimited access to department's video telehealth service**

As a result of a partnership with Verizon, Veterans who are customers of the telecommunications company, as of June 27, will have unlimited access to the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs' (VA) [VA Video Connect](#) telehealth app.

Veterans will be able to access VA Video Connect, which uses the cameras on computers, smartphones or tablets, to let Veterans talk and interact with their VA care team over a live, encrypted video stream, anywhere across Verizon's nationwide 4G LTE network, without incurring data charges.

“VA's telehealth app for streaming live video sessions between patients and health care providers is another testament to our shared journey to fully integrated, seamless access to health care for our Veterans, no matter where they live,” VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said.

Accessing VA Video Connect is easy: For iOS devices, [VA Video Connect](#) is available at the Apple App Store; for all other devices, a telehealth session launches automatically after a Veteran user selects an emailed session.

“We’re proud to deepen our support of Veterans,” said Mike Maiorana, senior vice president, Public Sector, Verizon. “Regardless of whether they live in city centers or rural areas, Veterans should be able to access the VA’s telehealth resources.”

### **The Doctor Can See You Now... on Your Computer Screen**

You can now use the new [VA Video Connect App](#) to connect with your doctor using a secure video connection. The next time you need to see the doctor, instead of going into the clinic, why not just fire up your smartphone or computer? Using the camera on your phone, computer, or tablet, the VA Video Connect app gives you direct, real-time access to your health care team. If you are a Veteran who receives VA health care, has an internet connection, and an email account, you may be able to use this app for your next appointment.

### **VA’s Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry**

VA's Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry allows eligible Veterans and service members to document their exposures and report health concerns through an online questionnaire.

Eligible Veterans and service members include those who served in:

- Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn
- Djibouti, Africa on or after September 11, 2001
- Operations Desert Shield or Desert Storm
- Southwest Asia theater of operations on or after August 2, 1990

### **[Check your eligibility and sign up. What you Need to Know](#)**

- There's no cost to participate
- You should [schedule a free health exam](#) with a VA provider after completing the questionnaire
- Participation is not required for other VA benefits such as disability compensation
- Enrollment in VA health care is not required
- Answers should be based on your recollection of service, not on your military records
- Family members are not eligible to participate
- Your participation contributes to research on airborne hazards and health, which helps improve the quality of care for Veterans

### **Do You Want to Obtain a Veteran ID Card**

A Veteran ID Card (VIC) is a form of photo ID you can use to get discounts offered to Veterans at many stores, businesses, and restaurants. When you have this card, you won't need to carry around your military discharge papers or share sensitive personal

information to receive discounts. If you have a VIC, you don't need to request another type of photo ID card to prove you're a Veteran or to get retail or business discounts. You can apply online now.

[Learn more about how to apply for a VIC](#)

### **Veteran's designation on a state-issued driver's license or ID**

At this time, all 50 states and Puerto Rico offer a Veteran designation (an identifying mark) printed on state-issued driver's licenses or IDs. The type of Veteran designation may vary from state to state. If you have a Veteran's designation, you may be able to get discounts offered to Veterans at many stores, businesses, and restaurants. Most states ask you to provide a copy of your discharge papers (DD214 or other separation documents). Some states may require additional documents. Please check with your state's Department of Motor Vehicles about what you need to apply for a Veteran's designation for your state.

### **VA to Make Health Care Facilities Smoke Free**

Starting October 2019, VA will implement a new policy restricting smoking by patients, visitors, volunteers, contractors and vendors at its health care facilities. The smoke-free policy applies to cigarettes, cigars, pipes, any other combustion of tobacco and non-Federal Drug Administration approved electronic nicotine delivery systems, including but not limited to electronic or e-cigarettes, vape pens or e-cigars.

### **Every VA health care facility provides same-day mental health care - just show up or call**

In an effort to provide timely assistance for mental health care the VA has implemented same-day 24/7 access to emergency mental health care the top clinical priority for VA staff. Now, all 172 VA Medical Centers (VAMCs) provide same-day Mental Health Care services.

- Dial **1-800-273-8255** and **Press 1** to talk to someone.
- Send a text message to **838255** to connect with a VA responder.
- Start a confidential online chat session at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/Chat).
- Take a self-check quiz at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Quiz](https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/Quiz) to learn whether stress and depression might be affecting you.
- [Find a VA facility](#) near you, and just show up.
- Visit [MilitaryCrisisLine.net](https://www.militarycrisisline.net) if you are an active duty Service member, Guardsman, or Reservist.
- Connect through chat, text, or TTY if you are [deaf or hard of hearing](#).

Veterans have immediate access to mental health care through several resources from VA, however, they need your help too. Many people don't know how to support the Veteran in their life who is going through a difficult time. Sometimes a simple act of kindness can be the difference.

### **Every Day is Military Appreciation Day at the Minnesota State Fair**

Discounted admission prices for active military, retired military and veterans at the entrance gates (with valid documentation of military services): \$10 for active military, their spouses and kids; \$10 for retired military and their spouses; \$10 for military veterans and their spouses. Early Bird Specials are offered on Mighty Midway and Kidway rides & games until 1 p.m. Deals on merchandise and food for all fair guests. The fair runs from August 22<sup>nd</sup> to Labor Day 2<sup>nd</sup> of September.