

VFW SERVICE OFFICER NOTES FOR THE TEN-HUT December 2017

NEW NEWS!!!!

What is the Fiduciary Program?

The purpose of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Fiduciary Program is to protect Veterans and beneficiaries who are unable to manage their VA benefits through the appointment and oversight of a fiduciary.

If you have been determined unable to manage your VA benefits, the VA will conduct a field examination to appoint a fiduciary to assist you.

For more information and details go to: <https://benefits.va.gov/fiduciary/beneficiary.asp>

VA prioritizes improving Veterans' access to pro bono legal services (Free Legal Services)

VA, together with the American Bar Association, The Veterans Consortium and National Law School Veterans Clinic Consortium, signed a memorandum of agreement today aimed at improving Veterans' access to free legal services.

Veterans often face stressful legal problems — such as eviction, foreclosure, child support, or drivers' license revocations — that can affect their ability to gain or maintain employment and housing or focus on medical treatment. In VA's annual *Community Homelessness Assessment and Local Education and Networking Groups Survey*, legal assistance repeatedly tops the list of homeless Veterans' unmet needs.

Currently, VA hosts at least 165 free legal clinics in its VA medical centers, community based outpatient clinics and Vet centers across the country by partnering with external, legal-service providers, such as local bar associations, legal-aid organizations and law school clinics.

More information on VA's coordination of legal services for Veterans at VA facilities may be found at <https://www.va.gov/OGC/LegalServices.asp>.

As the number of female veterans grows, options for services and support must evolve

The number of female veterans in the United States is growing, and as the oldest generation of men who served dies and more women move into combat roles newly opened to them, women will make up a larger portion of the veteran population in the years ahead.

Female veterans have some specific needs. They are, for example, more than three times more likely than male veterans to ever experience post-traumatic stress disorder and more than twice as likely to experience major depressive disorders, according to a study published in August by the National Center for Biotechnology Information, U.S. National Library of Medicine, analyzing self-reported data from 3,157 veterans. And they are much more likely to report experiencing military sexual trauma.

For further information go to: <http://www.pressherald.com/2017/11/10/looking-to-serve-women-who-serve/>

[VA mammogram guidelines: when, where and what they mean](#)

Increased access to breast screening

We have expanded access to on-site mammograms by 62 percent since 2010, which demonstrates our focus on improving access to breast screening and coordination of care. Additionally, some facilities offer mammograms to walk-in patients and same-day ultrasounds. **All eligible women Veterans have access to mammograms either on-site or through care in the community.**

VA has established a state-of-the-art information technology Breast Cancer Registry (BCR). The BCR integrates patient data to provide comprehensive, patient-specific information about breast cancer screening, test results, past and current breast cancer treatment, and population surveillance of breast care (both in the community and within the VA).

VA's performance measurements show that women Veterans are more likely to receive age-appropriate breast cancer screenings than women in private sector health care. In 2015, VA screened 86 percent of its women Veteran patients age 50-74, compared with the private sector at 73 percent. More details at: <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/42340/>

[Do You Know VA's Plans for Detecting Breast Cancer?](#)

VA recommends all women begin getting yearly mammograms by age 45, and every other year beginning at age 55. Women may also choose to start screening with yearly mammograms as early as age 40. If there is concern for risk factors, such as a family history of breast cancer, talk to a doctor about being tested earlier and more often. [Check out this infographic to learn more.](#)

[Army Seeks Veterans Who Participated in Chemical and Biological Agent Testing](#)

A recent class action lawsuit victory requires the U.S. Army to provide medical care to veterans who served as volunteers during research involving chemical and biological testing between 1942 and 1975. As many as 60,000 veterans volunteered for medical research in order to contribute to the advancement of the U.S. Biological and Chemical Programs. The Army will assist veterans in obtaining medical care through military medical treatment facilities, VA facilities, and private providers as appropriate. A notification letter has been mailed to veterans who were identified as possible participants in the medical program, but the Army is actively seeking others who may have been participants. You can get additional information and eligibility requirements [here](#) or by calling 1-800-984-8523.

[VA Launches Online Map for Wait Times](#)

VA recently launched a new website which gives veterans the ability to see average wait times for appointments at their VA medical facilities. The web tool has the capability to break down appointment times by a number of factors including first-time appointments, mental health, women's health and other specialty care. The new map also offers a comparison to local non-VA

wait times for 30 locations across the country, using data collected by Merritt Hawkins. Moving forward, VA will be partnering with Merritt Hawkins to get more non-VA facility wait times measured for comparison purposes. The website is updated on a weekly basis. [Click here to see wait times in your area.](#)

[Online Exchange Shopping Begins](#)

Beginning this weekend, millions of honorably discharged veterans will be permitted to shop online at all four military exchanges, but you still have to verify your eligibility with [VetVerify.org](#). On Veterans Day, eligible veterans will be able to shop online by logging on to the Army and Air Force Exchange Service, Navy Exchange, Marine Corps Exchange, and Coast Guard Exchange websites at, respectively, [shopmyexchange.com](#), [mynavyexchange.com](#), [mymcx.com](#) and [shopcgx.com](#). Military exchange shopping returns more than \$300 million annually to support on-base morale, welfare and recreation programs. [Verify your eligibility.](#)

[Vaccination](#)

Vaccination is the surest way to protect against getting the flu. Get your flu shot every year to protect yourself and help keep the flu from spreading to others.

[Who should get a flu shot?](#)

Everyone age 6 months and older who wants to reduce the risk of getting sick should get a flu shot.

Those more at risk of illness and complications from the flu include:

- People age 65 and older
- People with health problems such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease, chronic lung disease and other chronic illnesses or conditions
- Pregnant women
- Caregivers of infants or family members with health problems
- [Health Care Personnel \(HCP\)](#)

[Can my family get flu shots from VA?](#)

VA doesn't vaccinate family members of Veterans or VA staff. If they would like to get a flu shot, check the [flu shot locator](#) on Flu.gov.

Details at: <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/flu/vaccination/>

[Disabled Veterans May Qualify for Larger Disability Ratings](#)

The U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims issued an opinion in a recent case *Sharp v. Shulkin*, (No.16-1385) that could make it easier for veterans with injuries to the back, neck and joints to obtain higher disability ratings. Even in cases where veterans are already receiving

disability benefits for such injuries. This case reviewed the Department of Veterans Affairs' existing system for evaluating the origin and extent of a veteran's disability and clarified the responsibilities of Compensation and Pension (C&P) examiners and the Board of Veterans Appeals when giving an opinion on pain flare-ups caused by musculoskeletal disabilities. The court ultimately ruled the system was inadequate, because not all C&P examiners consider flare-ups and pain when determining what disability rating a veteran should receive.

[COLA for VA Approved](#)

The House and Senate approved the "Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act" (H.R.1329), sponsored by Rep. Mike Bost (Ill.), to **boost next year's veterans benefits by 2%**. This is the same cost-of-living-adjustment (COLA) increase as Social Security, and military retirement pay starting in December.

The move is a routine annual step by lawmakers. Under current law, annual cost-of-living increases are automatic for Social Security benefits, and military retirees, determined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) without intervention from Congress. Veteran's benefits, however, fall into a different category, one that requires lawmakers to approve a new adjustment every year.

President Trump is expected to sign the latest measure into law in the coming days.

[White House VA Complaint Line Gives Veterans Access](#)

During the 2016 Presidential election campaign Donald Trump promised to give veterans direct access to the White House. Veterans can express their concerns to the White House by calling [855-948-2311](tel:855-948-2311). The telephone line was opened in June with the limited hours of 0800-1700 Eastern Time, but it's now available 24/7. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will use the complaint line to collect data to improve service. Shipmates are encouraged to use the line to express their concerns or problems with the VA.

This line should not be confused with the VA Crisis Line. The Crisis Line is for veterans who have feelings of suicide or feelings of depression can call for help at [1-800-273-8255](tel:1-800-273-8255) and Press 1.

[Move Forward, Stay on Track this Winter](#)

VA has a free online mobile application (app) that can help you stay on track and manage your stress levels. It's called [Moving Forward](#) and it helps Veterans, Service members, caregivers, and family members meet their goals. The app includes quizzes, relaxation exercises, and tips on problem solving. It can help you balance school and family, deal with relationship problems, make decisions, cope with physical injuries, survive financial problems and more.

Get the App: The application is currently available for iOS devices--Download it now:

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/moving-forward/id804300239?mt=8>.

Online: A more in-depth Moving Forward program is available online or in-person. For more information, visit: <http://www.veterantraining.va.gov/movingforward/>.

VA Opposes Unemployability Cuts

The Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs Dr. David J. Shulkin dispatched a letter to all Veteran Service Organizations (VSO) stating the VA does not support termination of Individual Unemployability (IU) benefits. The letter further states, the VA is "committed to finding ways that empower disabled veterans through vocational rehabilitation and employment opportunities, when available."

The Trump Administration's proposed budget, released May 2017, proposed eliminating the IU benefit payments to disabled veterans age 62 or older. Under current policies, the IU program allows the VA to award payouts at the 100-percent disabled rate to veterans who cannot find work due to service-connected injuries, even if they are not deemed 100-percent disabled. The Administration has proposed stopping payouts once veterans are eligible for Social Security retirement benefits. This cut would impact more than 225,000 veterans currently receiving this benefit.

The Fleet Reserve Association (FRA) strongly opposes IU cuts. Use the [FRA Action Center](#) to voice your opinion.

[In the Spotlight ... State and Local Resources](#)

The Department of Veterans Affairs works closely with a state and local partners that also serve our nations Veterans; our [Office of Intergovernmental Affairs](#) (IGA) serves as the Department's liaison in all intergovernmental affairs matters and is the primary point of contact with federal, state, local, American Indian, and Native Alaskan Government officials. Find out more about some of those resources at the links below:

- Want to learn more about state-level benefits and programs? Find the link to your state or territory Veterans affairs office [here](#).
- Many states have a State Women Veteran Coordinator committed to facilitating the delivery of timely, quality benefits for women Veterans – for more information or to locate your state's coordinator, visit the website of [CWV partner](#) the [National Association of State Women Veteran Coordinators](#).
- There are over 2,400 County Veterans Services Officers in 29 states who can help with claims development and more; learn more at the [National Association of County Veterans Service Officers](#) website.
- VA's [Office of Tribal Government Relations](#) team works to strengthen and build closer relations between the VA, tribal governments and other key federal, state, private and non-profit partners in an effort to effectively and respectfully serve Veterans across Indian Country.
- Cities as diverse as [Houston, Texas](#); [Columbus, Ohio](#), and [New York, New York](#) have offices devoted to veterans affairs – use an internet search to determine whether yours does!

ASPIRE Center helps Veterans [get their life back](#)

[VA's Aspire Center](#), located in San Diego, California, is a 40-bed, 30,000 square-foot facility aimed at promoting recovery in Veterans returning from wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

How Active is My HealtheVet?

This is a pretty busy website. Every quarter we share our numbers with you. Check out the data on Secure Messages sent, the amount of registered My HealtheVet users, the number of refills requested, and more -- on the updated My HealtheVet usage page. [Learn More](#).