

VFW SERVICE OFFICER NOTES FOR THE TEN-HUT DECEMBER 2020

Uninsured MN Residents can get free COVID-19 Tests

Did you get your COVID test yet? For your safety and the safety of others you should! **The tests are no cost!** The state will cover the cost of testing for individuals who apply and meet all the following conditions:

- You must be a resident of MN
- Be a U.S. citizen, U.S. national or lawfully present noncitizen with an immigration status that qualifies for Medical Assistance
- Provide a Social Security Number – unless an individual meets an exception for not having one
- Not be enrolled in any other health insurance

For details visit: www.mn.gov/dhs/health-care-coverage.

Financial Assistance for Veterans Impacted by COVID-19

Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) has had a tremendous response to the COVID-19 Disaster Relief and Special Needs Grants for Minnesota Veterans. We began accepting applications on Monday, April 6. We are striving to complete application processing as soon as possible.

Eligible applicants must be:

1. A Veteran or the surviving spouse of a deceased Veteran as defined by MN Statute 197.447;
2. A Minnesota Resident, and;
3. Negatively financial impacted by COVID-19.

It's easy to apply:

- Veterans can apply for the Disaster Relief Grant on our website.
- To apply for the Special Needs Grant, Veterans should work with their County Veterans Service Officer.

Applications will continue to be accepted until the \$6.2 million in funds are depleted. Veterans can apply through their County Veterans Service Officers or online at MinnesotaVeteran.org/COVIDRelief

COVID-19 Disaster Relief Grant application status

The MDVA team is working as quickly as possible to process the applications for the COVID-19 grants.

As applications are uploaded into our system, we send an email to applicants to confirm that step has been completed. If we need any additional information to support your application, we will email you. Thank you for your patience while the MDVA COVID-19 team works diligently to input and process the applications.

The current estimated processing time is approximately 8 business days.

Before You Send Holiday Invites

The holidays are usually a time when friends and families celebrate together. But during the coronavirus pandemic, there are new guidelines for safe gatherings. Follow the tips and valuable information at: <https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/web/myhealthvet/ss20201102-holiday-dinner>

Message from VA Health Care

Attention Veterans: If you think you have been exposed to COVID-19 and develop a fever and symptoms such as cough or difficulty breathing, or if you are feeling sick or ill with other symptoms, your first step is to CALL the VA Health Care System at:

- **Minneapolis:** 612-467-1100
- **Fargo:** 701-239-3700 extension 2319
- **St. Cloud:** 320-252-1670, or 800-247-1739
- **Sioux Falls:** 605-336-3230 or 605-336-5001

The medical staff will advise you on next steps based on your symptoms. In a medical emergency, call 911.

As we face this challenging time together, we know that some of our Veterans have experienced interruptions in employment resulting in health care coverage. We want those Veterans to know, VA is here. Please contact us at VA.gov, or call us at 1-877-222-VETS (8387). If you are a Veteran in need, or know a Veteran, please share with them.

COVID-19 K-12 Distance Learning Support Grant Available

MDVA is now offering a COVID-19 K-12 Distance Learning Support Grant to help mitigate the negative financial impact a family experiences by implementing their school district's distance learning or hybrid learning plans by providing a one-time grant.

Applicants for the COVID-19 K-12 Distance Learning Support Grant must demonstrate a negative financial impact on or after August 1, 2020. A closing date for the K-12 Distance Learning Support Grant will depend on the availability of funding, but not later than June 30, 2021.

More information is available at MinnesotaVeteran.org/COVIDRelief

Financial Freedom and Economic Stability

Do you want more banking options? Are you worried about scams? Do you travel? Are you a “Snowbird?” If you are in one of these categories you might want to enroll into this VA sponsored banking program.

The VA is teaming up with a consortium of military – and veteran – friendly financial institutions to offer veterans increased banking options, customer service, and education. The Veterans Benefits Banking Program (VBBP) offers VA beneficiaries the chance to deposit their funds directly into accounts provided by participating banks and credit unions.

No fees are attached when opening a new checking account through this program when veterans sign up to receive their benefits via direct deposit. For couples, joint banking accounts are available.

Information is available at: www.benefits.va.gov/banking. All institutions are part of the Association of Military Banks of America (AMBA). From there you can find an AMBA bank or credit union that best fits your needs.

ATTENTION: TRICARE Changes for Retired Military

Personnel who are not 65-years-old

If you and your family member(s) are 65-years-old and older you are eligible for TRICARE for Life (TFL). **If you are medically retired from the Armed Forces you, your spouse, and family members will not have to pay the TRICARE enrollment fee of \$12.50/month or \$25.00/month for family.**

For military retirees who have not yet reached age 65, you fall into category referred to as “Group A.” Group A is defined as retired military personnel who joined the Armed Services prior to 1 Jan 18, but have not reached 65-years-old.

Starting 1 Jan 21, if you **and/or other family members** have not reached 65-years of age you will pay \$12.50/month/individual or \$25.00/month for a family. Also, the catastrophic cap will increase from \$3,000 to \$3,500*.

This payment has to be made via allotment. Beneficiaries who fail to set up their TRICARE Select enrollment fee payment by Jan. 1, 2021 will be disenrolled from TRICARE Select due to non-payment. Those beneficiaries will have 180 days (originally 90 days) from their termination date to request reinstatement (01 Jun 21). If a beneficiary does not act, they will only be able to get care from a military hospital or clinic if space is available (i.e. all civilian healthcare costs will be their full responsibility). **The retired servicemember will bear full medical costs incurred for disenrolled beneficiaries.** Any questions in regard to this subject call Jerry Obieglo (Winona County Veterans Service Officer) at 507.457.6455. Also, call 866.773.0404 or go to: www.tricare.mil/costs.

Group A retirees enrollment is **not** automatic! The Defense Health Agency (DHA) is attempting to contact all affected military retirees; but some may fall through the cracks. The DHA is

granted a three-month reinstatement period for Group A beneficiaries who do not pay their enrollment fee by 1 Jan 21.

I encourage all Group A beneficiaries to visit:

<https://www.tricare.mil/Plans/Enroll/Select/EnrollmentFees> to get the details.

***NOTE:** Medically retired Group A beneficiaries and their families and survivors are exempt from the \$12.50 monthly charge and the catastrophic cap will remain at \$3,000.

TRICARE FOR LIFE (TFL) and Medicare Part D

I encourage you not to keep Medicare Part D (medications). TRICARE picks up the tab for your medication(s). Usually the cost is \$10.00/medication from Express Scripts. You have several options for ordering from Express Scripts. Your doctor can call in the initial prescription. For refills, Express Scripts has an auto-fill program, or you can reorder via the web or a toll-free call.

If you receive your medications locally, check with your pharmacy to ensure they are in the TRICARE network. Remember, Medicare is your primary payer and TRICARE is your secondary.

Calling All Veterans to Participate in the VA's All of US Research Program

All of US is a research program sponsored by the VA. The program's goal is to help researchers find ways to improve health care and cure diseases for current and future generations to come. This program is separate from the Million Veteran Program (MVP).

Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you decide not to participate will not affect you're VA healthcare.

Why Should I Join?

- Understand how genes, lifestyle, and environment influence health and wellbeing.
- Create new approaches to help people stay healthy, and develop better tests and treatments for those who are sick.
- Make new discoveries to advance precision medicine for Veterans and for all of us.

For more information and details call: 833.805.0426, email: allofus@va.gov, website: Veterans.JoinAllofUs.org.

Things Veterans should know about VA's new electronic health record

Since full implementation of VA's new EHR is expected to occur over a 10-year period ending in 2028, most Veterans will not see immediate changes to how they view their medical records online. VA will continue to support its current EHR systems, including My HealthVet, throughout the transition period to ensure there is no interruption to the accessibility and delivery of care. Veterans can expect to learn more as their local facilities prepare to migrate to the new EHR. Full details are available at: <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/80271/>

Find A Veteran, Post A Tribute

We all have loved ones we want to remember. The VA offers this fabulous feature that allows family, friends, and others to search the more than 3.7M Veterans interred in VA's National Cemeteries to post tributes, share photos, and view service information. Go to: https://www.vlm.cem.va.gov/?utm_source=Veterans%20Legacy%20Memorial&utm_campaign=cem

Fisher House is Supporting Veterans Every Day

Fisher House Foundation is here to take care of our greatest national treasure – our military, veterans, and their families.

Fisher House Foundation is a network of 90 comfort homes located near military and VA hospitals where military and veteran families can stay, free of charge, while their loved ones receive medical care.

A long-term stay in a hospital, often thousands of miles from home, can lead to unmanageable burdens and significant expenses for families. Since 1990, Fisher House has saved more than 400,000 families \$500 million.

Fisher House is grateful to those that help us with our mission of keeping military and veteran families together during a medical crisis. Learn more at: www.fisherhouse.org.

Vet's Good Deal

This note is for all those Do-It-Yourselfers out there. *Northern Tool + Equipment* gives veterans a 10% discount on all purchases.

Together We Served: National Veterans Roll of Honor

Do you ever wonder where or what happened to another veteran you served with? Yeah, there's all these unit reunions that are published in various veterans magazines, but maybe the unit you and a fellow veteran you served with doesn't/hasn't have/had a reunion. Well, here another resource. The VA has launched a website that perhaps you can find that person and reconnect. This feature is called "The Roll of Honor."

The Roll of Honor pays tribute to every Veteran who served, including those who have passed, with a summary profile of their military service. Veterans are welcome to take part, at no cost whatsoever.

Prolific Veteran Locator

With over 2 million Veterans represented on this Roll of Honor, Veterans can easily search for and find people they served with by entering their years of service at the top of the Roll of Honor

and conducting a simple name search. Contact can be made through our Administrators or by joining Together We Served via the free VA Join Channel at:

<https://join.togetherweserved.com/VA>

For more information on how Together We Served can help you find old service friends, visit our blog:

<https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/67464/together-served-website-help-find-old-friends/>.

Armed Forces Service Center at MSP Status Update

To ensure the health and safety of traveling military guests from around the world, volunteer workforce, and staff, the Armed Forces Service Center (AFSC), located at the Minneapolis/St. Paul Airport will remain temporarily shut down until further notice.

Similar to their counterparts at the USO, the AFSC will continue to evaluate conditions to safely reopen the military airport lounge.

The AFSC “troop greeters” have continued to assist the military during the shutdown with essential movements; recruits, arrival of the fallen and military charters. If you need the AFSC's assistance at MSP, please contact them at:

Website: mnafsc.org

Email: [afsc_msp at mnaafsc.org](mailto:afsc_msp@mnaafsc.org)

Phone: (612) 726-9155

Monument Honoring Women in the Military Unveiled

On Saturday, the Washington, D.C., area's first monument to honor women in the military was unveiled at the Women in Military Service for American Memorial in Arlington, Virginia. The Pledge, sculpted by Susan Bahary, is a bronze statue of a kneeling service woman in full combat gear, locking eyes with her working military dog, meant to honor the promise of loyalty made between a soldier and their combat dog in faithful allegiance to our country. Following the unveiling, Sgt. Britany Gavit stated, “I've been a dog handler for four years now, and to see a female statute for the first time, it feels great... She could be any one of us, in any rank of the military, and it's so significant.”

Women Veterans and VA Benefits

Women veterans are the fastest growing veteran demographic. A wide variety of VA benefits are available to eligible women veterans. These benefits include disability compensation, pension, education, and training, health care, home loans, insurance, vocational rehabilitation and employment, and burial. VA also has Center for Women Veterans, Women Veteran Coordinators, health care for women veterans, and benefits for survivors of military sexual

trauma. Learn how to get started with Women Veterans Health Services at:
<https://www.va.gov/women-veterans-health-services-quick-start-guide.pdf>.

Women Veterans Call Center can assist with further information through their online chat, text, or call 1.855.VA.WOMEN.