

VFW SERVICE OFFICER NOTES FOR THE-HUT FEBRUARY 2017

Gulf War Illness Presumption: The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has recently announced that it will extend the date Gulf War veterans are able to apply for presumptive disability compensation to December 31, 2021. The compensation would extend over Gulf War Illness and other conditions associated with service in the 1991 war, such as chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, and functional gastrointestinal disorders. The presumptive period for these illnesses was set to expire on December 31, 2016. For information on research regarding the causes and effective treatments for Gulf War Illness, visit: <http://cdmrp.army.mil/GWIRP>.

Notice of Disagreement on your VA compensation claim:

I received my rating and it's wrong

“I received my rating and it's wrong” is a statement the VA call center agents hear every day. You may think that VA shouldn't have denied your claim, that you should have received a higher percentage, or that the effective date was wrong, but the odds are against it. That's not to say that VA never makes a mistake, but an overwhelming majority of the time VA makes the correct decision based on the evidence available. In fact, VA's issue-rating accuracy is 95 percent.

This high level of accuracy is in part because most of the decision-making is now automated. Medical information is input by the rater, and the rating for each issue is calculated and justification is provided.

So, if you aren't happy with your rating, first carefully read your notification letter and rating decision. These documents should explain issue-by-issue, why you received your rating, and what is needed for the next higher rating. It should also explain what the effective date is and why. If VA did not service connect your requested condition, the decision letter explains why the condition was not service connected.

If you have questions about your rating decision you can always go to your local Veterans Service Organization (VSO), sit down with a representative at your local VA office, or call the VA National Call Center at 800-827-1000. They can explain your rating so that you can decide what to do next.

Now You Can Follow the VA on Facebook: [Facebook](#) - Veterans of the Day, Top VA news & videos. This social media website gives you the most up-to-date and factual information. Check it out!

President Signs Walz-Led Measure to Honor Guard-Reserve Retirees into Law: Members of the Guard and Reserve components who have served honorably for at least 20 years are now recognized as veterans. On December 16, President Obama signed the Jeff Miller and Richard Blumenthal Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2016 into law. The legislation included a bipartisan Walz provision to extend the legal definition of “veteran” to Guard and Reserve members who served as least 20 years but have not been called up for federal active duty.

MyVA Improvements Announced: The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has recently announced an important update on the MyVA transformation. VA Secretary Robert McDonald's primary effort will be to transform the VA into the top customer service agency in the federal government. This third edition of the program's semi-annual report details progress the VA has made to improve trust, expedite health care appointments and disability claims, reduce veteran homelessness and other progress that provide veterans more services faster. To read the full report, visit: <http://www.va.gov/myva/docs/MyVA-3-0-v9-digital-11816.pdf>.

Minneapolis VA Offers Same Day Services for Veterans ‘When They Need It’: The Minneapolis VA Medical Center (VAMC) has announced “same day service” for Veterans when they need it in primary care and mental health clinics.

Same day service is part of a nationwide effort by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs called “MyVA Access,” which is designed to improve the Veteran experience and enhance patient satisfaction.

“When you contact us, we will either address your need that day or schedule appropriate follow up care, depending on the urgency,” said Minneapolis VA Director Patrick Kelly. “We may provide a face to face visit, return a phone call, arrange a telehealth or video care visit, respond by secure email, or schedule a future appointment.”

Ultimately, when Veterans require primary care assistance right away, during regular business hours, they are able to get services the same day or, if after hours, by the next day from the Minneapolis VAMC.

Additionally, if a Veteran is in crisis or has another need for care right away in mental health, he or she will receive immediate attention from a health care professional at the Minneapolis VAMC. For a Veteran new to mental health with a non-urgent need, he or she will receive an initial screening evaluation by the next calendar day.

The Minneapolis VAMC is able to provide same day service as a result of implementing best practices, adding staff and increasing space.

YMCA Waives Joiner’s Fee for Veterans and Families: Effective Nov. 1, all Minnesota YMCAs, a leading nonprofit dedicated to strengthening communities through youth development, healthy living and social responsibility, will waive the joiner’s fee (\$75.00 in Winona) for Veterans and their families. The monthly membership fee still applies.

The Minneapolis and St. Cloud VA Health Care Systems and the Minnesota Alliance of YMCAs recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that drops the enrollment fee and also allows the VA to use space at YMCA facilities for outreach events. The MOU is for a 28-month period.

The fee waiver applies to all Minnesota Veterans, including those who are not receiving VA benefits

To apply for YMCA membership, Veterans should go to their local YMCA and present their Veteran's Health Identification Card, a copy of their DD214 form or a military ID card.

A list of all Minnesota YMCA locations is available at: www.mn-y.org/locations.

The local outreach activities will depend on space availability at each YMCA. Outreach activities could include job fairs, town hall meetings and events related to employment, homelessness and healthy lifestyle programming.

The Minnesota partnership is an extension of a national level agreement announced in December 2015 by VA Secretary Robert McDonald that the VA and Y-USA had agreed to work together on a national level to improve Veterans' health.

One Phone Number Connects Vets to Many Services: As part of an effort under MyVA vision to provide Veterans with a seamless, unified Veteran Experience across the entire Department and throughout the entire country, VA is launching a new, national toll-free number 1-844-MyVA311 (698-2311) for Veterans and their families to use when they don't know what number to call.

Veterans who know the direct number to the VA facility they want to call should continue to use that number.

VA is also making improvements to the overall Veteran's experience contacting VA by:

- Increasing capacity to prevent blocked calls and reduce wait times;
- Connecting Veterans in crisis directly to the Veteran's Crisis Line Veterans;
- Connecting Veterans who may be homeless or at risk of homelessness to the Veterans Homeless Line; and
- Offering Veterans easy to follow options such as looking up a facility near them or connecting to a live agent; and

Implementing standard capabilities at all VA medical centers to offer callers access to Scheduling, Nurse Triage, Pharmacy, and a Medical Center Operator.