

VFW SERVICE OFFICER NOTES FOR THE TEN-HUT MARCH 2021

VA COVID-19 Debt Relief

Service members, veterans, and family members who have incurred VA debt and have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic have options for relief. Options available until October 2021 include temporary hardship suspension, deference of credit bureau reporting, and delayed referral of delinquent benefit overpayments to the Department of the Treasury. An additional option includes extended repayment plans. Also, here some important contact options and toll-free numbers:

- Compensation: 1.800.827.1000 from 7:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M., Monday through Friday
- Pension: 1.877.294.6380
- Education: 1.888.442.4551
- Loan Guaranty: Go to:
https://www.benefits.va.gov/HOMELOANS/contact_rlc_info.asp for regional phone numbers.
- Life Insurance: 1.800.669.8477
- Medical Copayments: 1.888.827.4817
- Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD): 1.800.829.4833
- Veterans Crisis Line: 1.800.273.8255 (Option 1)

VA Community Care Network (CCN) Urgent Care Overview

Here are a few brief points for Veterans who are eligible seek to use VA CCN urgent care providers. Details of CCN will be posted at the Post entrance and on www.wfwpost1287.org.

- 1) Prior to seeking urgent care, know if your provider(s) is/are in the VA network. This can be found at: www.va.gov/find-locations. Keep this information handy so you know whether your provider is in-network. **Both Gundersen and Winona Health are “in-network.”**
- 2) Are you eligible for the VA’s urgent care benefit? If you have your VA medical card, no problem. If you do not have a VA medical benefits card with you, call, 1.844.698.2311 or go to www.vacommunitycare.com =>click on “I am a Veteran tab.”

Reporting to Urgent Care for Service & Prescriptions

- 1) The Veteran should see signage and tells the provider he/she would like to use the VA urgent care benefit.
- 2) The urgent care provider will request to see your VA medical card. The provider will call the eligibility call center at: 1.888.901.6609.
- 3) The urgent care provider provides medical care. Prescribes medication as required*.
- 4) Urgent care provider sends medical documentation to the VA.
- 5) Urgent care provider submits claim to the appropriate place of service with revenue codes.

***NOTE:** Veteran may fill prescription if necessary, at a retail pharmacy without refills (usually a 14-day supply). Authorized pharmacies can be found at: www.va.gov/find-locations. **Note:** Hy-Vee, Winona Health, Gundersen, Walgreens, and CVS are “in-network.”

Urgent Care In Winona

The Gundersen Winona Campus & Winona Health are now VA Urgent Care authorized to work with the VA.

Veterans who have service-connected disabilities are authorized to use 3 Free Urgent Care visits per calendar year.

The 4th and additional Urgent Care visits will result in a \$30.00 co-pay no matter if the Veteran's service connection is 10% or 100%.

Prior to last week only Winona Health Urgent Care was in the VA-network.

The Many Angles in Getting a COVID Vaccination

Have you signed up for your vaccination yet? MEDICARE Part B covers the cost. Here are three ways you might want to consider:

Winona Health: Go to My Winona Health at <https://www.winonahealth.org/patient-information/my-winona-health/> and sign in or enroll as a new user. You will see a shaded box asking for your name, DOB, Phone #, and ask if you are a Winona Health Patient.

Gundersen: Go to <https://mychart.gundersenhealth.org/MyChart/Authentication/Login?> Establish an account or sign in. You will see some vertical tabs under the word, “Welcome.” Select COVID vaccine sign-up. You will have to check daily. The best time is each Monday.

MPLS VA: Call 507.252.0885 or 612.467.1100 and follow the prompts. Only the veteran can enter the hospital unless accompanied by a certified care giver.

WALMART: Available at our WALMART! www.walmart.com/COVIDvaccine. I have mine scheduled for tomorrow at 4:20 P.M.

MilTax and IRS Free File Available Now

MilTax, a department of Defense (DoD) program which offers free preparation and e-filing software for all military members and some veterans, with no income limits is now open. IRS Free File online is also currently available for Americans whose income for 2020 was \$72,000 and below. Learn more at: <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/financial-legal/tax-resource-center/miltax-military-tax-services>

You May Eligible for a VA Pension

If you are a retired or disabled veteran or surviving spouse, you may be eligible for the Veterans Pension and Survivors Pension benefit programs. Learn how you and your family can overcome financial challenges with supplemental income at: <https://www.va.gov/pension>.

CARES Act Home Loan Breakdown

If you have a federally backed loan (VA, FHA, USDA, etc.) and are having difficulty paying your mortgage due to the coronavirus pandemic, deadlines are approaching (1Apr21), to apply for CARES Act forbearance or foreclosure assistance. For additional information go to: <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/83661/borne-battle-bonus-episode-home-loan-forbearance-extended>

VA Certificate of Eligibility (COE) – Do You Have One?

Why is a COE important? VA loans are an exclusive and incredible benefit offered to service members and qualified veterans and their surviving spouses. COEs provide opportunities that you do not get with other loans – such as the ability to refinance your home up to 100% of its worth, plus no down payments on home purchases and more.

In order to take advantage of these benefits, however, you need to prove you are eligible with a COE.

How Do I Get a COE?

Apply online at: <https://www.va.gov/housing-assistance/home-loans/how-to-apply/> or print one out at: <https://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/vba-26-1880-are.pdf>

Finally: A COE never expires! Place your hardcopy in your safe place or safety deposit box.

Housing Help for Veterans

The VA offers three grant programs to help Veterans and service members with service-connected disabilities to buy, build, or modify a home to meet their needs and live a more independent lifestyle. Find out if your eligible for a disability housing grant and how to apply at: <https://www.va.gov/housing-assistance/disability-housing-grants>.

Some Very Helpful Information Recently Signed into Law

Update on Presumptive Agent Orange Diseases

Parkinsonism, Bladder Cancer, & Hypothyroidism are eligible and deemed service-connected for VA healthcare and compensation. The details are too lengthy to publish in these notes. You will find all the details on our website: <http://vfwpost1287.org>

Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvements Act of 2020

- Increase the timeframe of the Vietnam War Era of Military Service
- Lowering the age to 55-years-old at which a remarried surviving spouse of a Veteran may still receive Dependency Indemnity Compensation (DIC)
- Increase the federal government's special pensions for the surviving spouses of Medal of Honor recipients
- Allow National Guard and Reserve service members under Title 32 orders to count for VA Home Loan eligibility
- Specify circumstances under which a Service Member, including members of the National Guard and Reserves, is considered service-connected for a disability or death from COVID-19.
- Mandates that every VA facility have at least one women's health primary-care provider
- Expands the Advisory Committee on Women Veterans' mandate to include examining the effect of intimate partner violence on women veterans and creates a VA pilot program to care for survivors of intimate partner violence.

Where can I find details? <http://vfwpost1287.org>

Veterans Homes' Domiciliary Program Sees Success with Sobriety Support Program

More than one in 10 Veterans have been diagnosed with a substance use disorder – slightly higher than the general population, according to the National Institutes for Health. Combine that with mental health issues and dealing with the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and it would not be surprising to hear of Veterans struggling to maintain their sobriety. Learn more at: <https://mn.gov/mdva/blog/?id=1066-458102#/detail/appId/1/458176>

Lung Cancer: Are You at Risk?

With lung health being a concern, now is a great time to be screened for lung cancer. Take advantage of the screening that can help at an early stage when it is easier to treat. Learn more at: <https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/web/myhealthvet/ss20191104-lung-cancer-screening>

Quality of Live Among Women Veterans

There are some very pertinent articles relating to women veterans' mental and physical health issues. Visit: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33177335>

Emotional Support Animals Aboard Aircraft Limited to Canines

Do your travel plans include taking a support animal onboard a U.S. airlines carrier? In a rule change that could impact select veterans, the U.S. Department of Transportation announced that dogs – and no other species – will soon be the only service animals allowed on board U.S. flights. Find out more at: <https://www.transportation.gov/briefing-room/us-department-transportation-announces-final-rule-traveling-air-service-animals>

Hey, Speaking of Travel – Have You Ever Been to Hawaii?

Besides touring the *USS Arizona (BB-39)*, (battleship sunk by the Japanese surprise attack on December 7th, 1941), you can also tour a WW-II submarine, the *USS Bowfin (SS-287)* where it serves as a museum berthed at Pearl Harbor. Check out the details at: www.bowfin.org.

Veterans in Congress

According to the *The Hill* newspaper, the number of veterans who serve in the 117th Congress continues a decades-long downward trend. Less than 90-members of the new Congress will have served in the military, which is the lowest figure in recent years. During the 1970's, at least 70% of the lawmakers had served in the military, according to the Pew Research Center. Today, that number is less than 20 percent...

MN Senator Amy Klobuchar <http://www.klobuchar.senate.gov>

MN Senator Tina Smith <http://www.smith.senate.gov>

1st District Representative Jim Hagedorn <https://hagedorn.house.gov>