

## **VFW SERVICE OFFICER NOTES FOR THE TEN-HUT NOVEMBER 2018**

### **'Net Worth' Increase in Regards to VA Pension Benefits**

“Net Worth” for veterans seeking to receive a VA Pension the Net Worth ceiling has been increased from \$80,000 to \$123,600. For you are interested and procedures for filing please make an appointment with Jerry or John at the Winona County Veterans Service Office (507.457.6455 or 507.457.6528). There are many rules and regulations that need to be followed – too lengthy for this announcement. There are numerous forms that are required to be completed. These forms can be downloaded online via [www.ebenefits.va.gov](http://www.ebenefits.va.gov).

### **Veteran's Treatment Court Improvement Act**

On September 17, President Trump signed into law the *Veterans Treatment Court Improvement Act of 2018* ([H.R. 2147](https://www.congress.gov/bills/115/2147)). The law requires the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to hire 50 additional Veteran Justice Outreach (VJO) specialists and place them at eligible VA medical centers (VAMCs) within one year of the bill's enactment. These VJO specialists will serve in Veterans Treatment Courts or other veteran-focused courts and will help to connect justice-involved veterans with various benefits and services offered by the VA.

This bill will help local criminal justice systems, especially counties, provide treatment alternatives to incarceration for veterans suffering from mental illness, substance use disorders or similar issues. Additionally, placement of VJO specialists will be prioritized for VAMCs that partner with a Veterans Treatment Court established after the bill's enactment or an existing veterans court that is not fully staffed with VJO specialists.

Veterans Treatment Courts offer veterans an alternative to the regular criminal justice process, providing a program geared toward addressing veteran-specific issues that may contribute to a veteran's criminal offense, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and substance abuse. The VA's [Veterans Justice Outreach \(VJO\) Program](https://www.va.gov/vjo/) was created in 2009 and currently funds 314 VJO specialists across the country who have served more than 180,000 justice-involved veterans since the program was created.

You can learn more about Veterans Treatment Courts and find various resources for counties interested in establishing or improving their own Veterans Treatment Courts at the [Justice for Vets](https://www.justiceforvets.org/) website. A representative from Justice for Vets are available to educate veterans on how these courts help address the unique needs of our justice-involved veterans and offer their assistance through [training](#) and [other resources](#).

### **Eligibility for Military OneSource Benefits Expanded**

The Department of Defense (DoD) announced it will extend eligibility for Military OneSource benefits from the current 180 days to 365 days after separation or retirement from military service. This is to ensure that all service members and families have access to comprehensive support as they transition to civilian life. This goes into effect immediately. The Military OneSource provides information, resources and support for active duty and Reserve Component members, as well as their families and survivors at no cost. Military OneSource is designed to

help service members and their families are mission-ready and able to thrive in both their military and post-military lives.

Military OneSource offers a wide range of services designed exclusively for the military community. Some of the services include help with relocation, tax support, financial planning and health and wellness coaching. Also offered are confidential non-medical counseling and specialty consultations for spouse employment, education, adoption, elder care and special needs care. Military OneSource services are accessible 24/7. Service members and family members can call Military OneSource at 800.342.9647 or go to [www.militaryonesource.mil](http://www.militaryonesource.mil). To explore the complete list of benefits available through the Department of Veterans Affairs, go to <https://explore.va.gov>.

### **Minneapolis VA Shows Improved Quality of Services**

Using an annual web-based report scorecard that measures, evaluates and benchmarks quality and efficiency at its medical centers, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently released data that showed significant improvements at the majority of its health care facilities.

The Minneapolis VA Health Care System (Minneapolis VA) was one of the facilities that made positive strides in the benchmarks and is striving to continue progress. Minneapolis VA improved 0.31 percent compared with the same period last year.

“Quality improvement is one of our core themes,” said Minneapolis VA Chief of Staff Kent Crossley, MD. “It takes a concerted effort by clinicians and management to bring about change.”

Specific areas of improvement included:

- Readmission Rates, including Cardiovascular, Neurology, and Medicine services.
- Wait Times – Primary Care, Mental Health, Specialty Care
- Same Day Appointments in Medical Home Primary Care
- Telephone / Call Center Access
- Ambulatory Care Sensitive Conditions (ACSC) Hospitalizations

Compared with data from the same period a year ago, the July 2018 release of VA’s Strategic Analytics for Improvement and Learning (SAIL) report showed 103 (71 percent) VA Medical Centers (VAMCs) have improved in overall quality — with the largest gains seen in areas where there were VA-wide improvement initiatives, such as mortality, length of stay and avoidable adverse events. Seven (5 percent) VAMCs had a small decrease in quality.

### **On-Base Shopping Privileges to Expand**

The *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019* includes a provision to open on-base commissary, exchange and MWR privileges to stateside Purple Heart recipients, former prisoners of war, and those with service-connected disabilities and their caregiver spouses. Once implemented on Jan. 1, 2020, the new beneficiaries will be allowed to use these facilities on the same basis as any service member, dependent or military retiree, although a new user fee might be created for this population to offset additional expansion expenses. The delay to enact is to

give the military services, exchange systems and Defense Commissary Agency time to ensure the launch is seamless. Gate access and shopping privileges will be based on the new VA-issued Veterans Health Identification Card (VHIC), which identifies the holder as having a service-connected disability. The DOD's electronic physical access control system, to be completed by Sept. 2019, will accept the VHIC to enable streamlined access to installations. The VFW will keep us posted.

### **Vote on Agent Orange Reform**

During the Vietnam War, veterans who served in the offshore waters of Vietnam drank, bathed in, and cooked with water contaminated by Agent Orange. They are now arbitrarily and unjustly denied benefits for illnesses associated with Agent Orange exposure. On July 25, 2018, the House of Representatives unanimously passed H.R. 299, the *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2018*. This bipartisan legislation would end the injustice of denying care and benefits to veterans who suffer from life-threatening health conditions.

H.R. 299 is now stalled in the Senate. The VFW needs your help to make sure this bill is passed before the end of the year. If the Senate fails to do so, the bill will die and may never be considered again.

**Take Action: Contact your Senators to demand that the Senate swiftly pass H.R. 299.** The Senate must not delay passage of this important bill while Blue Water Navy veterans sicken and die from diseases related to exposure to Agent Orange.

Now Is the Time to Call SVAC Chairman to Get Vote on Agent Orange Reform

The "Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act" (H.R.299) has stalled in the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee (SVAC). The bill already passed the House (382-0). Now is the time to call the SVAC Chairman Johnny Isakson (Ga.) to urge him to call a committee vote on this legislation, without amending it. (202) 224-3643

Tell the Senator that you believe Congress should recognize these veterans, who served off the coast of Vietnam and were exposed to Agent Orange herbicide. Suggest that the committee should authorize presumptive status for VA disability claims associated with this exposure.

### **Here are the new rates for military retiree dental coverage under new FEDVIP benefit**

Military retirees eligible for the new dental and vision coverage - as well as active duty families eligible for the new vision benefit - can start researching their options in earnest now, with the release of [new rates for 2019](#).

The enrollment period for coverage under the Federal Employee Dental and Vision Insurance Program, or FEDVIP, is Nov. 12 to Dec. 10, but the time to start comparisons is now, said Kathy Beasley, director of government relations, health affairs, for the Military Officers Association of America.

For retirees, the FEDVIP replaces the Tricare Retiree Dental Program, which ends Dec. 31. In order to have dental and vision coverage on Jan. 1, [retirees must sign up](#) during the enrollment

period. Active duty families are still eligible for dental coverage under Tricare, but if they want the new vision coverage, they must sign up during the enrollment period.

### **Update Your Contact Information Online**

Moving? Taking an extended vacation? New phone number? Simply want VA to reach you at a different address?

Whatever the reason may be, updating your contact information is now much easier. [Learn more.](#)

### **It's Time: Roll Up Your Sleeve**

Every fall, you're reminded it's time to get your flu shot. Flu season usually starts in October and peaks between December and February. The vaccine takes some time to kick in, which is why it always feels like everyone starts talking about flu shots as soon as summer ends. [Learn more.](#)

### **No Veteran Should Be Without a Place to Call Home**

VA is committed to ending homelessness among Veterans. Our focus is threefold:

- Conducting coordinated outreach to proactively seek out Veterans in need of assistance.
- Connecting homeless and at-risk Veterans with [housing solutions](#), [health care](#), [community employment services](#) and other required supports.
- Collaborating with federal, state and local agencies; employers; housing providers, faith-based and community nonprofits; and others to expand employment and affordable housing options for Veterans exiting homelessness.