

VFW SERVICE OFFICER NOTES FOR THE-HUT SEPTEMBER 2018

Save the Date!!! VA Veteran Stand Down at Winona's American Legion

A representative from the Tomah VA will be at Winona's American Legion, 302 E. Sarnia St. on Tuesday, September 25th. All veterans are encouraged to attend. The presentation covers numerous topics that all veterans should be interested in. The program starts at 1100 and will run to 1800. For more information call 507.457.6455 or 800.872.8662, Ext 64201. A poster is posted on the bulletin board at the post.

The Joint Retirees Appreciation Day, Sept. 22

The Joint Retirees Appreciation Day (JRAD) is a full day of information briefings organized and conducted through the efforts of the Navy and Air Force Retiree Activities Offices (RAO). It is the intent of the RAOs to provide the latest information delivered by the subject matter experts on such programs as TRICARE, VA benefits and support, elder legal issues and current legislative changes at the national and state level. This year JARAD will be conducted at Treasure Island Resort and Casino – Red Wing, MN. Pre-registration fee is \$19.00. Cost of registration at the door is \$25.00. The agenda will be posted on the bulletin board in the entry of the Post. It appears there are some very interesting subjects to be discussed. You can get the details of JRAD, register, and view the agenda by going to the following website:

<https://sites.google.com/site/metrojrad/home>

FTC Cracks Down on Fraudulent "Fake" Veterans Charities

Did you ever wonder what happens to donations given to supposedly "Veteran's Charities" stationed outside some of our local businesses? Well, the Federal Trade Commission recently launched Operation Donate with Honor, a federal-state education and enforcement initiative to combat fraudulent and deceptive charitable solicitations claiming to help veterans and military members. "Not only do fraudulent charities steal money from patriotic Americans, they also discourage contributors from donating to real veterans' charities," said Peter O'Rourke, VA's acting secretary. "The FTC's Operation Donate with Honor campaign will help educate citizens on how to identify organizations that misrepresent themselves as legitimate veterans' charities, and those who, by contrast, truly help our nation's heroes." The FTC has already filed more than **90 legal actions** against charities and fundraisers that lied about helping veterans and military service members or otherwise broke the law. [Learn more](#) about how to donate wisely and make your contributions count.

VA releases health care benefit application for Spanish-speaking Veterans

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released the Spanish version of the application for health benefits, as part of VA's effort to simplify and improve the health care enrollment process for Veterans.

The new language version implements the VA Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans' recommendation to provide Spanish versions of the application and instructions.

“Our Veteran population is made up of an increasingly diverse group of people,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Our nation appreciates the service and sacrifice of all Veterans, including Hispanic and Latino Veterans. And it’s our duty to expand the ways we communicate with all Veterans, so they’re properly informed about the benefits they’ve earned.”

According to the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, the number of living Veterans who identify as being Hispanic or Latino, as of Sept. 30, 2017, is nearly 1.5 million people. More than half a million Veterans already enrolled in the VA health care system self-identify as Hispanic or Latino.

The form is available at VA medical facilities and online at https://vaww.va.gov/vaforms/medical/pdf/10-10EZ_Spanish.pdf

Veterans can apply for VA health care benefits online at <https://www.vets.gov/health-care/apply/>; by telephone at 877-222-VETS (877-222-8387) between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. (EST) Monday through Friday; at a VA health care facility; or by completing a hard copy of the form and mailing it to Health Eligibility Center, 2957 Clairmont Road, Suite 200, Atlanta, GA 30329-1647.

Are You in Need of Prescription Eyewear?

You need to be in the VA Healthcare system. If your service connected disability is 10% or more make an appointment. You have two options: If you have a prescription from your local provider bring it to the optical department at your nearest or convenient VA facility. If you do not have a prescription make an appointment at your VA medical facility and the doctors will conduct an eye examination for you.

In either case, you will be fitted for proper fitting eyewear with a selection wide selection of frames – not the Birth Control Glasses (BCGs) we received while on active duty! Also, if you traveled to the facility in a Privately Owned Vehicle (POV), you will be reimbursed for travel.

Looking for an Easy, Modern Health Care Experience?

VA offers online scheduling, prescription refill, access to VA medical records through your phone, computer or tablet – and much more.

Veterans can access video appointments through [VA Video Connect](#) and health apps from [VA's App Store](#). Enrolled Veterans who use [My HealtheVet](#) can also request, schedule and cancel appointments online as well as communicate with care teams through Secure Messaging.

These online tools can improve your health and quickly connect you to your health care team.

Enrolling in VA health care lets you take advantage of these tools designed to make health care easier. Learn how to apply for VA health care and other VA benefits at [Explore.VA.gov](#).

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, VA just made updating your contact information much easier.

1. Login to [Vets.gov](https://www.vets.gov)
2. Click on your name at the top right.
3. Select profile.
4. Click on edit for anything you wish to change.
5. Make your edits, and click update

However, this won't work for all VA databases...yet.

- For education benefits: Call 1-888-GIBILL-1 (1-888-442-4551) Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (ET)
- For home loan benefits: Call 1-877-827-3702, Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. (ET)
- For Veterans' Mortgage Life Insurance: Call the VA Insurance Center (VAIC) at 1-800-669-8477, Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. (ET)
- For prescriptions: Call your health care team or your nearest VA medical center

This new feature is one part of an improved, personalized digital experience. But it's also making a big, data-driven impact.

More than 17 million Veterans have contact information of some kind housed in Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) data centers, and 12 million Veterans in Veterans Health Administration (VHA) data centers. This data wasn't always up-to-date, and the systems did not talk to each other. Previously, a Veteran could have a different address at both, making it difficult for the VA to keep in contact.

Now, once the contact information is updated in one data center, it will be synchronized with VA systems across the country, including major VBA and VHA data centers. In fact, since deploying this new capability, VA has updated, cleaned up, or authenticated more than 2.3 million address, ensuring Veterans are being contacted faster, and where they want to be.

Does VA have your updated contact information? Check now on [Vets.gov](https://www.vets.gov).

Hearing Loss Services for Enrolled Veterans – No Referral Needed

Almost half of all Americans over 65 have some form of hearing loss.

Hearing loss and tinnitus are **the most prevalent service-connected disabilities** of all compensation recipients among Veterans.

And it's not a recent problem. Auditory system disabilities (including hearing loss and tinnitus) are among the most common service-related disabilities **in every period of service since WWII**.

The most common type of hearing loss among Veterans is a high-frequency hearing loss that varies in severity from mild to profound. This type of hearing loss is generally caused by noise exposure, age or both.

What is tinnitus?

Tinnitus is the medical term for the **perception of sound in the ears or head when no external noise** is present.

The sound can be intermittent or constant, range in severity from mild to severe, and is often described as a ringing, roaring or humming sound.

Although the cause of tinnitus is unknown, there are likely sources that trigger or worsen tinnitus:

- Hearing loss
- Noise exposure
- Injury to head or neck
- Stress
- Excessive ear wax
- Ototoxicity – drug or chemical damage to the inner

Currently, there is no cure for tinnitus. However, there are treatment options. The most common include education, sound therapy (including hearing aids), and counseling/psychotherapy.

The most common treatment for hearing loss is hearing aids and/or cochlear implants. Audiologists work with Veterans and their families to improve communication by using advanced technologies and extensive counseling.

VA offers comprehensive care services to Veterans with hearing loss, tinnitus, and balance disorders. We are the largest employer of audiologists in the United States, employing over 1,300 audiologists.

Audiology TeleHealth

Through the use of Clinical Video Telehealth, over 70 medical centers currently provide care to 210 VA clinics by connecting patients with providers at the medical center. Services available through telehealth include hearing evaluations, hearing aid fittings and follow-ups, auditory rehabilitation and tinnitus management. The VA Audiology and Speech Pathology National Program Office is also exploring ways to provide services directly into the Veteran's home through computer technologies and mobile device applications.

Who is eligible for audiology care?

All Veterans enrolled in VA's health care system are eligible for comprehensive audiology diagnostic evaluations. Specific eligibility rules apply to hearing aid services. Ask your VA doctor for a hearing test if you have concerns about your hearing.

No need for a referral

According to Dr. Rachel McArdle, "Veterans who are enrolled and eligible for VA care can call their VA audiology clinic and ask to be scheduled to have their hearing tested. Additionally, they can always stop at the audiology clinic if they are already at the hospital or clinic for another appointment and ask to be scheduled." Dr. McArdle is the National Director of Audiology and Speech Pathology.

Avoiding VA benefits overpayments

Life happens. We are all guilty of procrastinating on paperwork or forgetting to update records. While most of the time there are no consequences, that is often not the case with VA benefits.

There are any number of life events that can result in an overpayment to the VA, and these can result in changes in the amount of benefits you are entitled to receive.

It is important to let VA know whenever there is a change that could impact your benefits. Not keeping these records current can result in an overpayment. When discovered, those funds will be owed to VA, and those can often result in a deduction of the monthly benefit amount until the debt is repaid.

Some common overpayment situations are:

- A Veteran receives care at a VA medical facility and fails to pay a required co-pay
- A Veteran fails to report that a school-age child has married
- A Veteran receiving education benefits drops out of school
- A Veteran or beneficiary is incarcerated and benefits are reduced or terminated for the period of incarceration
- The Vocational Rehabilitation program purchased a service or tools for a Veteran, who then dropped out of the program without a good reason
- A Veteran or beneficiary receiving an income-based pension doesn't report a change in income
- A Veteran's change in marital status without notifying VA
- Death of a dependent without notifying VA

In some situations, VA receives information from other federal agencies about changes that could impact your benefit. When this happens, a notice will be sent to the beneficiary explaining that a potential discrepancy was found, with a proposed reduction or discontinuance of benefits. Funds owed to VA are based on the date the event occurred, such as a change in dependents, which would have caused a reduction or discontinuation of benefits.

Beneficiaries who receive an indebtedness notice from VA stating that an overpayment has taken place have 60 days to submit a [Notice of Disagreement](#) with evidence stating why the overpayment information is incorrect. It is important to work with VA in this initial notification period before the debt moves to the next level.

After 60 days, if no response is received, the debt is turned over to the VA Debt Management Center for recovery. The center will notify the beneficiaries of the planned recovery method – either through a reduction in benefits, or a payment program. If the debt cannot be resolved, it will be turned over to the Department of the Treasury for forced collection.

In some cases, overpayments can be waived. Work with an accredited [Veterans Service Organization](#) representative to assist with the waiver process, or contact VA's Debt Management Center for a repayment plan at 800-827-0648. Intentional fraud will not be waived.

Veterans and other beneficiaries should check their [eBenefits](#) account to make sure the information is correct, and they should report any information that should be updated as soon as possible. This can either be done on the [eBenefits](#) web portal, or by calling 800-827-1000.

VA Opens another Veterans Crisis Line

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has opened its third Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) call center in Topeka, Kansas. The Topeka-based center was opened to support increased demand. VA has two other call centers located in Canandaigua, New York and Atlanta, Georgia. Since VA launched the VCL in 2007, the crisis line responders have answered more than 3.5 million calls. If you are in crisis, or know a veteran who is, call the Veterans Crisis Line for confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Call 800-273-8255 and press 1, or [chat online](#). You can also text to 838255.

Some Disabled Veterans are Owed IRS Refund

As a result of the enactment of FRA-supported legislation (Combat-Injured Veterans Tax Fairness Act passed in 2016-H.R.5015; P.L. 14-292) the Internal Revenue Service recently issued notice (IR-2018-148) advising certain veterans who receive disability payments from the Department of Veterans Affairs after January 17, 1991 and reported the payment as income should file an Amended U.S. Individual Income tax Return (Form 1040X) to claim a credit or refund of overpayment of taxes due to VA disability payments. IRS asks beneficiaries submitting Form 1040X to write "Veteran Disability Severance" on the top of the front page of the form. Forms must be submitted by regular mail with a copy of DoD letter informing beneficiary of eligibility of refund to:

Internal Revenue Service
333 W. Perishing Street, Stop 6503, P5
Kansas City, Mo. 64108

It is estimated to impact more than 14,000 veterans.

