

## **VFW SERVICE OFFICER NOTES FOR THE TEN-HUT September 2019**

### **Here's how 3 million more people will get military shopping benefits**

About 3 million more people will soon be eligible to shop at [military stores](#), officials are working to make sure these new customers will have access to bases, and that the shelves will be stocked.

Starting Jan. 1, all service-connected disabled veterans, Purple Heart recipients, former prisoners of war and primary veteran caregivers will be eligible to shop at [commissaries](#) and exchanges, and officials from three federal agencies are preparing the way.

The newly eligible customers will also be able to use certain morale, welfare and recreation activities.

This benefit will also apply to the primary caregiver of wounded/injured veterans who are registered in the Department of Veterans Affairs caregiver program. Beginning in October, the VA will post a memo to [VA.gov](#) for caregivers, to be used for access at the front gate, along with driver's license or other authorized form of ID. The VA process will later transition to a caregiver-type ID card, which will have scanning swipe capability.

**These new customers will pay a fee for using a credit card at commissaries**, except for the military resale system's Military Star card. **The amount of the fee has not yet been determined**. By law, this expansion can't include extra costs associated with using credit cards in commissaries; the cost must be passed on to the customer. Except for the Military Star card, credit card companies charge transaction fees to retailers when customers use their credit cards. There will be a flag built into the system at commissaries so that when the card is swiped the fee will be charged. The fee applies only to new patrons using credit cards in commissaries, not to Medal of Honor recipients or others who were previously authorized to shop. New customers can avoid the fees by paying by cash, check or using the Military Star card. It only applies at the commissary, which is funded primarily by taxpayer dollars.

### **How VA Calculates Compensation Rates**

The amount of basic benefit paid ranges, depending on how disabled you are. VA makes a determination about the severity of your disability based on the evidence you submit as part of your claim, or that VA obtains from your military records. VA rates disability from 0% to 100% in 10% increments (e.g. 10%, 20%, 30% etc.). See the [Combined Ratings section](#) below for information about how VA calculates disability percentage for multiple disabilities.

You may be paid additional amounts, in certain instances, if:

- You have very severe disabilities or loss of limb(s)
- you have a spouse, child(ren), or dependent parent(s)
- you have a seriously disabled spouse

## Combined Ratings

If VA finds that a Veteran has multiple disabilities, VA uses the [Combined Ratings Table](#) below to calculate a combined disability rating. Disability ratings are not additive; meaning that if a Veteran has one disability rated 60% and a second disability 20%, the combined rating is not 80%. This is because subsequent disability ratings are applied to an already disabled Veteran, so the 20% disability is applied to a Veteran who is already 60% disabled. Below you will find the steps VA takes to combine ratings for more than one disability and examples using the [Combined Ratings Table](#) to illustrate how combined ratings are calculated.

1. The disabilities are first arranged in the exact order of their severity, beginning with the greatest disability and then combined with use of [Combined Ratings Table](#) below
2. The degree of one disability will be read in the left column and the degree of the other in the top row, whichever is appropriate
3. The figures appearing in the space where the column and row intersect will represent the combined value of the two
4. This combined value is rounded to the nearest 10%
5. If there are more than two disabilities, the combined value for the first two will be found as previously described for two disabilities
6. The exact combined value (without rounding yet), is combined with the degree of the third disability
7. This process continues for subsequent disabilities and the final number is rounded to the nearest 10%

### **The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is committed to providing seamless care for Veterans, including access to a comprehensive electronic health record (EHR).**

In May 2018, VA awarded Cerner a contract to replace their current EHR systems with the commercial-off-the-shelf solution - Cerner Millennium® - currently being deployed by the Department of Defense (DoD). The Electronic Health Record Modernization (EHRM) initiative will leverage an existing commercial solution to achieve interoperability within VA, with DoD, and with community care providers. A single interoperable solution across VA and DoD will facilitate the secure transfer of active duty service members' health data as they transition to Veteran status. Health records residing in a common solution will eliminate the reliance on multiple complex clinical interfaces and manual data entry. VA's new EHR solution will provide clinicians with quick and efficient access to the complete picture of Veteran health information, improving VA's delivery of health care to our Nation's Veterans.

### **In Case You Missed It!**

In May's issue of the VFW magazine, there was a very pertinent article titled [Military Funeral Honors Are Your Right As A Veteran](#). This piece describes the military honors a deceased veteran is entitled to. According to *Public Law 106-65*, which was approved in 1999, eligible veterans will receive a military funeral honors ceremony. This includes: (1) The folding and presentation of a U.S. burial flag, (2) The playing of "Taps, (3) The presence of a military funeral honors detail. In addition, the honors detail will consist of two or more uniformed

military persons, with at least one being a member of the veteran's parent service of the armed forces. These honors are provided at no cost to the surviving family. **IMPORTANT!** In order to receive these honors two conditions have to be met: (1) The family must tell the funeral director that their loved one wanted the honors, and (2) Provide a copy of the veteran's DD-214 (Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty). This document must show the deceased veteran received an honorable discharge. For more details see: <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials>.

### **Drivers Needed: DAV is looking for volunteer drivers to transport Veterans**

DAV needs more volunteer drivers in our county to meet the growing transportation need of Veterans. Without this program, many Veterans would not have access to the VA health care they've earned. DAV has donated a total of 3,517 vehicles nationwide to VA medical centers, and the VA has valued DAV hours of volunteer service at nearly \$34.7 million annually—making it an indispensable resource for Veterans and a cost-effective solution for the VA.

#### *How you can help*

If you want to give back to your community and to Veterans that served our country, and their families, and help them attend their health care appointments, volunteer to be a driver for DAV.

Interested applications call one of our County Veterans Service officers at: 507.457.6455 or 507.457.6528.

#### *Requirements*

- Pass a physical given by a VA Occupational Health provider.
- Have good judgement and ability to solve problems.
- Ability to remain calm under stressful conditions.
- Willing to do minor vehicle inspections for safety.
- Complete an annual VA-sponsored defensive driving class.
- Possess a valid state driver's license and clean driving record.
- Possess personal auto liability insurance.
- Keep DAV van clean inside and out for comfort.

#### *Duties*

Volunteer drivers:

- Report to Winona County Veterans Service Officers and DAV personnel.
- Drive Veterans to their health care appointments to VA health care systems
- Coordinate with Veteran passengers on where to meet and the time of their departure to their health care appointment.
- Return Veterans to their original pick up location after their health care appointment.

## **Download the Military Rewards App (This is AWESOME!!!!)**

This is totally COOL!!! Jerry Obieglo sent me this. I loaded this on my smart phone and was surprised of all the discounts in the Winona area. For example: Taco Bell and Subway have 15% discounts. ACE Hardware, Pizza Hut, Taco John's, and Dairy Queen have a 10% discounts on purchases. **My Military Rewards** is a phone app. created by a Veteran (Viet Nam - 101st Airborne) for veterans. We have one mission, to assist veterans and active duty and their families to identify merchants, across the country that offer discounts to our brothers and sisters. To date we have identified hundreds of thousands of locations throughout the country, that offer discounts, and the list is growing daily. The app is **free**. We never collect or sell your data. We don't ask for your name, or even ask you to login, it is totally **anonymous**. We want you to find the discounts in a way that is safe, private, and secure. Simply go to the App Store (Iphone) or Google Play (androids) search - **My Military Rewards** - and start enjoying your discounts. For additional information you can visit the website at [www.mymilitaryrewards.com](http://www.mymilitaryrewards.com). After all, you served with honor, you earned your rewards. If you have any questions please feel free to call at 609-703-2005. For details I posted a flyer on the Post bulletin board.

## **Veterans Will Be Reconsidered for Previously Denied Claims**

All veterans who were exposed to mustard gas and lewisite experimentations during World War II may finally be able to claim [Veterans Affairs \(VA\)](#) benefits and compensation for injuries or disabilities caused by exposure.

A provision in the GI Bill expansion revamped [VA](#) policy regarding benefits awarded for mustard gas exposure.

Mustard gas experiments were conducted on U.S. servicemen and remained classified until 1975. The military lifted an oath of secrecy for servicemen in the 1990s.

The new policy requires the [VA](#) to reconsider all denied claims for alleged full-body exposure to mustard gas and lewisite brought by World War II veterans who were stationed at 22 military locations. Under the new law, the burden of proof for those claims would fall on the VA, rather than veterans. The legislation also calls for reports on mustard gas testing and the [VA](#) response to testing to be issued by the secretaries of Defense and [Veterans Affairs](#).

## **VA Will Pay for Adoptions**

Not many veterans know that the [Department of Veterans Affairs \(VA\)](#) will cover the costs for in-vitro fertilization and adoptions for combat-wounded veterans struggling with infertility issues.

In 2016, former President Obama signed a bill that allows the VA to pay for the costs of infertility treatment issues for the next two years. The provision was authorized by U.S. Sen. Patty Murray (D-Washington), who said she is pushing to fund the new service permanently.

Also, the VA amended its regulation to provide reimbursement of qualifying adoption expenses incurred by veterans with a service-connected disability that results in infertility. Covered veterans may request reimbursement for qualifying adoption expenses incurred for adoption finalized after September 29, 2016.

### **Special Funding The Armed Forces Service Center (AFSC)**

The AFSC has been serving military personnel and their families, along with Purple Heart and Medal of Honor recipients, in Terminal 1 of the Minneapolis/St. Paul International Airport since November 22, 1970, seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

Legislation included \$100,000 in one-time funding to provide new furniture and improvements in the center to better serve members of the military, Veterans and their families.

It also provided \$150,000 in one-time funding for the **Minnesota Medal of Honor Memorial** on State Capitol grounds. Seventy-two Minnesotans have been awarded the Medal of Honor from the Civil War to the Vietnam conflict.

### **VA Extends Agent Orange Presumption to 'Blue Water Navy' Veterans**

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is preparing to process Agent Orange exposure claims for ['Blue Water Navy'](#) Veterans who served offshore of the Republic of Vietnam between Jan. 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975.

These Veterans may be eligible for presumption of herbicide exposure through [Public Law 116-23, Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019](#), which was signed into law June 25, 2019, and goes into effect Jan. 1, 2020. They may also qualify for a presumption of service connection if they have a disease that is recognized as being associated with herbicide exposure.

The bipartisan Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act gives VA until Jan. 1, 2020, to begin deciding Blue Water Navy related claims. By staying claims decisions until that date, VA is complying with the law that Congress wrote and passed.

Blue Water Navy Veterans are encouraged to submit disability compensation claims for conditions presumed to be related to Agent Orange exposure. **Veterans over age 85 or with life-threatening illnesses will have priority in claims processing!**

Veterans who previously were denied for an Agent Orange related presumptive condition can file a new claim based on the change in law. Eligible survivors of deceased Blue Water Navy Veterans also may benefit from the new law and may file claims for benefits based on the Veterans' service.

The new law affects Veterans who served on a vessel operating not more than *12 nautical miles seaward from the demarcation line of the waters of Vietnam and Cambodia, as defined in [Public Law 116-23](#)*. An estimated 420,000 to 560,000 Vietnam-era Veterans may be considered Blue Water Navy Veterans.

To qualify, under the new law, these Veterans must have a disease associated with herbicide exposure, as listed in [38 Code of Federal Regulations section 3.309\(e\)](#).

Agent Orange presumptive conditions are:

- AL amyloidosis
- Chloracne or similar acneform disease
- Chronic B-cell leukemias
- Diabetes mellitus Type 2
- Hodgkin lymphoma, formerly known as Hodgkin's disease
- Ischemic heart disease
- Multiple myeloma
- Non-Hodgkin lymphoma, formerly known as Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
- Parkinson's disease
- Peripheral neuropathy, early-onset
- Porphyria cutanea tarda
- Prostate cancer
- Respiratory cancers (lung, bronchus, larynx or trachea)
- Soft-tissue sarcoma (other than osteosarcoma, chondrosarcoma, Kaposi's sarcoma or mesothelioma).

For more information about Agent Orange exposure in Vietnam waters (Blue Water Navy Veterans), visit: <https://www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/hazardous-materials-exposure/agent-orange/navy-coast-guard-ships-vietnam/>.

Veterans seeking more information should contact their [Veterans Service Officer](#), call VA's toll-free number at 800-827-1000 or visit the VA Blue Water Navy Agent Orange [website](#).

**Women Veterans: Talk to your provider about cervical cancer. One of the most treatable cancers if found early.**

VA encourages you to talk to your primary care provider about cervical cancer testing because early detection can help save your life.

Cervical cancer was once the number one cause of cancer-related death in women. Due to increased screening, the number of cervical cancer deaths in the United States has dropped by more than 50% since the 1970s, according to the [American Cancer Society](#).

Cervical cancer is one of the most treatable cancers if found early. A Pap (Papanicolaou) test, also known as a Pap smear, looks for cancer and precancerous cervical cells. This test and screening for the human papillomavirus (HPV) testing, which is the cause of most cervical cancers, often leads to early detection. In addition to screening, there is also a vaccination to prevent HPV. It is most effective if administered during childhood or adolescence, but adults can benefit from it too.

## *Cervical Cancer*

These are some of the most helpful questions to ask during your next primary care visit:

- How often do I need a Pap or HPV test or both?
- If my test is abnormal, how will I be contacted?
- Should I receive the HPV vaccine?

Depending on your age and current cervical health, you can now be screened in three- to five-year increments. VA and the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) released new screening guidelines in 2018. You should connect with your primary care provider to better understand the new scheduled recommendations.

For women Veterans between the ages of 21 and 29, VA recommends:

- A Pap test every three years.

For women Veterans between the ages of 30 and 65, VA recommends one of three options:

- A Pap test alone every three years.
- Both the Pap and HPV tests every five years.
- An HPV test alone every five years.

You can speak to your VA provider about how to schedule a cervical cancer screening, your Pap and/or HPV test at your local VA facility.

To contact a Program Manager at a local VA facility for more information, call 1-855-VA-WOMEN (1-855-829-6636). Additionally, you can [chat online](#) via real-time messaging or visit [www.womenshealth.va.gov](http://www.womenshealth.va.gov).

### **Complete the VFW's Survey in Regards to Urgent Care Satisfaction**

Major provisions of the VFW-supported VA MISSION Act of 2018 were recently implemented, including the new Veterans Community Care Program and other improvements to the way VA delivers care to veterans. To gauge the effectiveness of changes and inform its advocacy, the VFW would like feedback on your experience receiving VA health care.

**Action Needed:** Help the VFW hold VA and Congress accountable for fulfilling their mission to veterans by taking a short survey regarding your preferences when receiving health care. To take the survey, visit: <https://www.research.net/r/StateOfVAHealth>.