

1ST DISTRICT SERVICE OFFICER VA & R REPORT FOR SEPTEMBER 2021



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Notes of Interest;

Did you know VA will pay burial allowances up to \$2,000 if the veteran's death is service-connected? In such cases, the person who bore the veteran's burial expenses may claim reimbursement from VA. In some cases, VA will pay the cost of transporting the remains of a veteran whose death was service-connected to the nearest National Cemetery with available gravesites. There is no time limit for filing reimbursement claims in service-connected cases.

Did you know VA will pay \$300 burial and funeral allowances for veterans who, at the time of death, were entitled to receive pension or compensation or would have been entitled if they were not receiving military retirement pay? Eligibility also may be established when death occurs in a VA facility, a VA-contracted nursing home or State Veterans nursing home. In cases in which the veteran's death was not service-connected, claims must be filed within two years after burial or cremation.

Did you know the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides a free burial flag to drape the casket or urn of deceased veterans who served honorably? The flag is often given to the next of kin as a keepsake after a funeral service. A flag can be issued to a funeral director or anyone else who certifies the eligibility of the deceased veteran. To streamline the process of getting a Burial Flag, applications should be completed as soon as possible and submitted to the post office.

Did you know VA provides pensions to low-income surviving spouses and unmarried children of deceased veterans with wartime service? Eligibility depends upon spouse not remarrying and children must be under 18, or under age 23 if attending a VA-approved school, or have become permanently incapable of self-support because of disability before age 18. A surviving spouse may be entitled to a higher income limit if living in a nursing home, in need of the aid and attendance of another person or permanently housebound.

Did you know honorably discharged veterans who are members of a state retirement system can now purchase service credit for up to three years of military service performed, thanks to a bill sponsored by Senator William Larkin (Cornwall-on-Hudson) and co-sponsored by Senator Simcha Felder (Brooklyn)? The new law is one of nine recent measures pushed by the Senate to provide important benefits and recognition to veterans and their families.

Did you know many veterans suffer from restless leg syndrome, but remain non-service-connected for the syndrome? Restless leg syndrome is the urge to move the legs, usually accompanied by or in response to uncomfortable and unpleasant sensations in the legs. Some doctors may confuse restless leg syndrome with peripheral neuropathy or radiculopathy.

Many things can affect the ability to fall asleep and stay asleep. Our sleep patterns can change as we age and not everybody requires the same amount of sleep. Some people may sleep through the night, but they do not feel refreshed when they wake up. Sometimes after several nights of poor sleep, people may begin to worry or feel anxious anticipating another night of struggle. Acupressure, along with your other medical care, may be useful to support your sleep.

On any given night in America, there are approximately 37,000 Veterans who go to sleep without a home, with one out of ten of them living in Los Angeles County. VA leadership is committed to ending the crisis of Veteran homelessness through a housing-first model. On July 19 and 20, VA Chief of Staff Tanya Bradsher visited the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System's (VAGLAHS) West Los Angeles campus to reaffirm that commitment. "Ending Veteran homelessness is a top priority for VA," said Bradsher. "We're joining together with community groups, local officials, oversight boards and Veterans themselves to drive progress on this issue here in LA. Successes achieved here and lessons learned help inform VA's Veteran homelessness programs across the nation.

Did you know veterans who are enrolled in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care system may be eligible to receive free hearing aids, glasses or contact lenses? These "sensorineural aids" are provided at no charge to veterans who are determined to need the devices, even if the veteran is not "service-connected" for hearing or vision impairment. Such services are considered part of the preventative care package for all veterans enrolled in VA health care system who meet certain eligibility criteria. For some veterans, there may be a \$50 co-pay depending on the veteran's enrollment priority group status. There is no co-pay for the devices or the batteries, nor are there any charges for visits for the purpose of adjusting, repairing or modifying hearing aids and/or glasses.

The VA wants to reduce the number of benzodiazepines (BZDs) prescriptions from community providers to Veterans, especially seniors aged 65 older. Benzodiazepines are a class of drug used to treat certain conditions, such as anxiety, with medications like Xanax and Ativan. Risk of these medications for older adults include falls, confusion, or contributing to lethal overdoses. This reduction is part of the Psychotropic Drug Safety Initiative, which began in 2013. "It would be wrong to say, 'No one should be on benzodiazepines.'" However, you want to minimize use as much as possible, in particular for older adults because of the risks," said Dr. Donovan Maust. From 2013 to 2017, one study noted that BZD prescribing in VA to older Veterans was cut in half.

The VA has made improvements to cognitive screening for Veteran patients with symptoms of cognitive deficits. The multidisciplinary approach's aim is to assist with diagnosis and early access to resources, medication, treatment and decision making. This allows for life planning and involvement in health care decisions. According to the Alzheimer's Association, early diagnosis can improve the overall outcome of disease progression and allows for treatment of reversible types of dementia while improving quality of life for others. Once symptoms are recognized, clinical staff can perform the screening to capture these patients early in the disease process.

Military veterans who say they were sickened by lingering amounts of the herbicide Agent Orange aboard repurposed airplanes after the Vietnam War now have some strong scientific support for their claims. A new study has found that veterans who were exposed to aircraft that had previously sprayed Agent Orange over Vietnam during the war may have been exposed to dioxin levels above Department of Defense (DoD) standards for maximum permissible exposure to poisonous chemicals.

The Department of Veterans Affairs on Monday created a fast-track to disability compensation for certain veterans who developed asthma, rhinitis or sinusitis because of their exposure to burn pits during overseas deployments. The VA announced it will now process disability claims for those conditions on a presumptive basis, which lowers the amount of evidence that veterans must provide in order to receive benefits. The change applies to veterans who served from Aug. 2, 1990, to now in the Southwest Asia theater of operations, which includes Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the neutral zone between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the

United Arab Emirates, Oman, the Gulf of Aden, the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, the Red Sea and the airspace above these locations. It also applies to veterans who served in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Syria or Djibouti from Sept. 19, 2001, to now. To qualify, the conditions must have manifested within 10 years

U.S. Representatives Marie Newman (D-IL-03) and María Elvira Salazar's (R-FL-27) introduced new legislation to provide federal benefits to veterans who served in or near the Panama Canal Zone and may have been exposed to deadly tactical herbicide. Also known as Agent Purple or Agent Orange, the tactical herbicide was used by the military in this area during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Under the Panama Canal Zone Veterans Act, veterans who served in or near the Panama Canal Zone would be granted presumptive herbicide exposure status, meaning they could receive federal benefits and disability compensation from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA). The Bill would expand presumptive coverage to these veterans, similar to the coverage for those who served in Vietnam, along the Korean DMZ and on the base perimeters in Thailand.



Please **Remember.....** ***That all gave some, but many gave all!***