

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



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Notes of Interest;

Did you know VA's pension benefit helps veterans, and their families cope with financial challenges by providing supplemental income? Currently, only 189,800 wartime veterans and 139,800 surviving spouses are using their needs-based pension benefits that are meant to ease the burden on them, their families and caregivers. It is paramount that all wartime veterans and their survivors are aware of their benefits. The following benefits are available through VA's Pension and Fiduciary Service for use in planning and preparing for the future.

- VA pension is payable to wartime veterans who are permanently and totally disabled due to non-service-connected disability, or who are age 65 years old or older, and who meet certain income and net worth limits.
- Special monthly compensation is an additional benefit for veterans in receipt of pension who are housebound, require the aid and attendance of another person to help them with daily activities (such as eating, bathing and dressing), have very limited eyesight or require nursing home care.
- For surviving spouses, there are two types of benefits P&F Service offers. Survivors Pension provides monthly payments to qualified surviving spouses and unmarried dependent children of wartime veterans who meet certain income and net worth limits. Special monthly pension is also available to surviving spouses who are housebound or require the aid and attendance of another person.
- Dependency and Indemnity Compensation is available to dependents and parents and generally is not based on income and assets (except the income limits apply to parents). DIC is a monthly monetary benefit paid to a surviving spouse, child or parent of a veteran who died from a service-related injury or illness, or when an active duty service member dies in the line of duty. Special monthly DIC is also available to surviving spouses who are housebound or require the aid and attendance of another person.
- A surviving spouse of a veteran who served on a Blue Water Navy vessel offshore of the Republic of Vietnam, or on another U.S. Navy or Coast Guard ship operating in the coastal waterways of Vietnam between January 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975, may be eligible for DIC benefits — even if they were previously denied.
- VA's funeral and burial benefits are available for both service-related and non-service-related deaths. New regulations allow a flat-rate burial and plot or interment allowance with decreased paperwork and maximum payment permitted by law.
- For those interested in burial benefits such as a Presidential Memorial Certificate, burial flag, headstone or marker, the National Cemetery Administration has information about pre-need eligibility.

Unfortunately, many vulnerable senior wartime veterans are targeted with misinformation. In many cases, this is because they are not fully aware of their benefits, which increases the chances of them being taken advantage of and/or defrauded.

VA encourages elderly wartime veterans and their family members to consult a VA-accredited representative if they want or need help filing a claim. They are reminded to beware of individuals or

companies that promise benefits or ask for money upfront, as only VA can make final determinations on eligibility.

Did you know the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers programs by which veterans can choose a specific caregiver that includes family members? One program is a self-directed care program currently available in 37 states. It is offered to veterans, of all ages, who are enrolled in the health care system of the VA. Veterans can choose not only the type of care and services needed, but also the person who will provide the care. This means that the veteran can hire a capable family member, including his or her spouse, sibling, grandchild, or child.

Did you know that 1 in 3 veterans don't know about the VA home loan program? Many more have no idea the VA will provide medical benefits after their discharge from active duty. Only 5% of active duty service members know about the existence of the Vet Center. Many veterans or soon-to-be veterans wrestle with these and other concerns.

Over the past year and a half, people across the nation, including Veterans, have confronted an unprecedented number of challenges as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Many have lost their jobs, affecting their ability to keep up with rent and other expenses. The recent ruling by the Supreme Court ended the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's temporary ban on evictions. It could lead to the eviction of millions of people who are behind on their rent. This situation could have a severe impact on many Veterans and their families. During this time of need, VA is ready to assist Veterans who are facing housing crises by directing them to programs operated by VA's Homeless Programs Office. These programs provide resources and supportive services to help Veterans avoid or overcome housing insecurity. Veterans can also look for emergency rental assistance through the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's Rental Assistance Finder.

Did you know when a veteran requests a hearing for an appeal of a compensation claim decision, the Board of Veterans Appeals must hold the hearing before deciding the appeal? Once the hearing is held, the veteran's appeal is placed on the Board's docket for a decision. So far this year [2021], with 20,000 hearings completed by August 2021, the Board is on pace to best its previous record, smashing its historical average of 16,000 annually.

Did you know the VA has agreed to presume certain disabilities are linked to exposure to toxic fumes from burn pits? The VA will now recognize asthma, rhinitis, and sinusitis as diseases presumed to be connected to veterans who served in specific countries at specific times.

Did you know Blue Water Vietnam veterans are getting their disability benefits paid out by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), but it might not be exactly how much each veteran deserves, according to a new watchdog report? The VA Inspector General's Office found that while department staff have done a good job at getting benefits flowing to newly eligible veterans covered by the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act two years ago, nearly half of the claims decisions investigators reviewed from 2020 were "inaccurate." The mistakes total an estimated \$37 million: about \$12 million in underpayments based on veterans eligibility and \$25 million more in excess payments to individuals.

Did you know most veterans have no idea they may be eligible for a non-service-connected pension from the VA? While most veterans are aware of service-connected disability compensation programs from the VA, many veterans are not aware of VA monthly pension benefits that are payable to wartime veterans who are permanently and totally disabled due to non-service-connected disability, or who are age 65 years-old or older and who meet certain income and net worth limits. Also, a veteran receiving a VA pension benefit who needs assistance for such things as eating, bathing and dressing or has very limited eyesight or

requires nursing home care may be eligible for aid and assistance benefits to help cover those assistance costs.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has extended the time limit for Gulf War veterans to claim presumptive disability for certain chronic illnesses related to their military service. The illnesses, commonly referred to as "Gulf War Syndrome," are considered "presumptive" by the VA, meaning veterans claiming a disability related to them are not required to prove they were caused by military service. While there is no time limit for claiming disability benefits from the VA in normal circumstances, some presumptive conditions do come with time restrictions. According to the Disabled Veterans Of America (DAV) Gulf War Syndrome affects approximately 200,000 veterans of the 650,000 service members who served in operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

Did you know since World War I, more than 142,000 Americans, including 85 women, have been captured and interned as POWs? Not included in this figure are nearly 93,000 Americans who were lost or never recovered.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced the expansion of disability benefits available to veterans who served in Southwest Asia. Gulf War and post-9/11 veterans are now able to receive presumption of service connection for conditions related to toxic exposures from their deployments. Veterans who deployed to the Southwest Asia theater may have been exposed to smoke from burn pits and unpaved roads, industrial air pollution, sand, dust, and exhaust from diesel and other internal combustion engines. Those who served in the Southwest Asia theater of operations beginning August 2, 1990, to the present; or Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Syria, or Djibouti beginning September 19, 2001, to the present are presumed to have been exposed to particulate matter. The Southwest Asia theater of operations refers to Iraq, Kuwait, 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. Veterans who believe they may be eligible for presumptive service connection due to asthma, rhinitis, or sinusitis that began within 10 years of their separation from service are encouraged to apply for disability benefits. Bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinson's due to Agent Orange exposure have now been added to the list of presumptive conditions. VA also announced it will presumptively pay disability benefits to veterans who served in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and southwest Asia who now suffer from asthma, sinusitis and rhinitis.



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