

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



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Notes of Interest;

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.

The U.S. Navy Veterans Lung Cancer Advocate says, "We are appealing to the immediate family of all Navy veterans with recently diagnosed lung cancer to please call attorney Erik Karst of the law firm of Karst von Oiste anytime at 800-714-0303. A compensation claim for veteran with lung cancer might be in the hundreds of thousands of dollars and it will be based on the specifics of how, where and when the veteran was exposed to asbestos. As a rule - a Navy veteran whose primary exposure to asbestos was on a Navy ship, submarine or at a Navy shipyard may be eligible for compensation.

Did you know during Government shutdowns, veterans and survivors still receive ongoing benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and the Social Security Administration (SSA)? At the same time agency staff members aren't on hand to process new applications or claims, and national parks, monuments and Smithsonian museums are all among federal properties slated to be closed.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has announced the expansion of their Veterans Legacy Memorial (VLM) website, which now contains individual webpages for nearly 4.5 million veterans interred in national, state, territorial and tribal veterans cemeteries. The just-announced expansion added individual webpages for nearly 500,000 veterans interred in 93 state, territorial and tribal veterans cemeteries to the existing four million webpages for veterans interred in VA's 155 national cemeteries. The Veterans Legacy Memorial website lets anyone look up veterans interred in these cemeteries and see their service information, a map of the gravesite and, in many cases, a photograph of the gravestone. It also gives friends and family members the ability to contribute photos, stories, historical documents and pay respects.

Our disabled veterans are grossly under compensated and have been for generations. This is most especially true for our totally and permanently disabled veterans. Our disabled veterans have been asking Congress for fair and adequate compensation since the end of World War I in 1918. That was a 103 years ago. Where is it? In 2021 a totally disabled veteran with no dependents is compensated at the ridiculous rate of \$39,097.92 annually. The National Average Wage Index (NAWI) for 2019 was \$54,099.99 dollars per annum and the median income in 2019 was \$68,703! In 2020 the per capita gross domestic product of the USA was about \$62,000 a year, among the highest in the world. So why are our disabled veterans being compensated at such a miserly level? A big part of the problem is that they are only compensated for projected lost wages and not including a "loss of quality of life" payment.

As VA's oldest health care programs, the Domiciliary Care Programs continue to meet the needs of Veterans. They are known today as the Mental Health Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Programs, and they provide

intensive 24/7 services in a home-like residential setting for Veterans working toward recovery from mental health and substance use concerns who might also need support for housing, employment and other psychosocial needs. There are currently over 250 of these programs across the county. Providing trauma-informed, Veteran-centered care is a core tenet of the residential programs' guiding principles. Over 40 of these programs exclusively provide PTSD treatment and several others have separate tracks for PTSD treatment, too. VA has a broad continuum of PTSD care options. PTSD residential programs are just one of many treatment choices. PTSD residential programs and tracks provide gold standard, trauma-focused psychotherapies for PTSD. Although these effective therapies are available in traditional outpatient settings and by telehealth, some Veterans have found the additional professional and peer support as well as the highly structured environment offered by the residential programs to be important for their recovery.

Did you know the Department of Defense Annual Suicide Report shows a disturbing rise in cases among both active duty service members and Reservists? The Department of Defense report shows that suicides among active duty service members have been increasing from a rate of nearly 2 out of 100,000 members in 2018, to a rate of nearly 29 out of 100,000 in 2020. Meanwhile, suicides among Reserve and National Guard members are rising as well after falling in 2019. Rates among these military members are nearly 22 and 28 suicides out of 100,000 in 2020 respectively.

Did you know some veterans, spouses, and caregivers can receive Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine booster shots from VA? In line with recommendations from the FDA and CDC, only people who have already received a full series of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine at least six months ago have been authorized to receive a Pfizer booster shot.

Do you know the Top 10 Veterans Affairs (VA) disabilities veterans may want to consider claiming? Why? Because there is a high probability of first-time success if you claim any one of the disabilities in the top 10. If you aren't sure, check out the list. Tinnitus: An annoying and distracting ringing or buzzing sound perceived to be emanating from the ears, tinnitus can interfere with sleep and concentration. Although there is no "cure" tinnitus, some interventions can be quite helpful in diminishing its severity. Hearing loss: The same exposure to loud noises that damages the inner ear, giving rise to tinnitus, also leads to hearing loss. This condition is ubiquitous among veterans, who are typically exposed to gunfire, heavy equipment, jet engines and explosions. The "workup" for hearing loss includes formal audiometric testing. Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD): After every war or hostility, we see thousands of veterans who suffer psychic trauma, referred to in previous generations as "battle fatigue," or other terms. As perceived stigma against mental diagnoses in the military becomes less common, PTSD is emerging as a frequent diagnosis among veterans. Treatment may include counseling, group therapy or medications. Scars, general: The impact of scars is not just physical. Physical disfigurement may result in secondary depression, local skin and soft tissue pain, and damage to self-esteem. Limitation of flexion, knee: Internal derangements and other joint problems. Treatment options may include medications, local injections, physical therapy or surgery. Lumbosacral or cervical strain: Very common in veterans carrying heavy backpacks. Paralysis of the sciatic nerve: This represents a complication of low back injury, resulting in lancinating pain or weakness in buttocks and leg, due to nerve root compressions. Limitation of range of motion of the ankle: The ankle is a stable joint, relatively speaking, but still prone to injury in people jumping out of airplanes or running across irregular terrain. Migraine headaches: A condition diagnosed amongst veterans and is generally considered "service-connected," and migraine headaches are a common primary care diagnosis. Degenerative arthritis of the spine: This diagnosis dovetails with neck and low back pain, as well as sciatica.



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