

1ST DISTRICT SERVICE OFFICER VA & R REPORT FOR JANUARY 2022



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Notes of Interest;

Did you know HUD-VASH is a collaborative program between HUD and VA that combines HUD housing vouchers with VA supportive services to help veterans who are homeless and their families find and sustain permanent housing? Through public housing authorities, HUD provides rental assistance vouchers for privately owned housing to veterans who are eligible for VA health care services and are experiencing homelessness.

Did you know the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides benefits to survivors and dependents of veterans who have passed, even in tragic cases of suicide? According to VA regulations, the surviving spouse may be eligible for benefits if VA can connect the suicide to a service-connected illness or injury.

The Agent Orange Act of 1991 went into effect for the purpose of researching the diseases and birth defects found in exposed veterans' children, to find out what they were and to add them to the list of VA-covered conditions. The act began a review of conditions in 1994 and was originally scheduled to run until 2001, but was later extended to October 1, 2014. Every few years, more conditions are being added to the VA's list.

If you are a child of an exposed veteran, you are encouraged to file a claim with the VA so that your voice can start being heard. You will need to provide the years your father was in Vietnam and his social security number. If your father has passed away and his death was linked to Agent Orange exposure, make sure you state that information.

In 2022, veterans who receive Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability compensation will see a sizable increase in their VA compensation checks.

VA disability compensation is a monthly tax-free monetary benefit paid to veterans due to their service-connected disabilities; it compensates veterans for their decreased quality of life or adverse effects on their ability to work.

If you were in active duty military service during certain periods of time, it's possible to add to your monthly social security benefit. According to the Social Security Administration (SSA), if you had military service earnings for active duty (including duty for military training) from 1957 through 2001, you may have extra Social Security wage credits added to your earnings record. These extra earnings credits may help you qualify for Social Security or increase the amount of your Social Security benefit. The extra amount you are eligible for depends on when you served. Here's how the SSA credits the extra earnings on your record:

- **From 1957 through 1977:** You are credited with \$300 in additional earnings for each calendar quarter in which you received active duty basic pay.
- **From 1978 through 2001:** For every \$300 in active duty basic pay, you are credited with an additional \$100 in earnings, up to a maximum of \$1,200 a year.

According to the VA, urgent care is for non-life-threatening illnesses or injuries, such as strep throat, pink eye or a strained muscle. Emergency care is for an injury, illness or symptom so severe that a prudent layperson reasonably believes that delay in seeking immediate medical attention would be hazardous to life or health. Such life-threatening major illnesses or injuries could include severe chest pain, seizures, loss of awareness,

heavy uncontrollable breathing or severe burns. For emergency care, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away. **Please note that VA can only pay for a veteran's emergency care under certain conditions.**

Did you know President Joe Biden signed four veterans reform Bills into law on November 30, 2021? Biden called the changes part of the country's "sacred obligation" to care for military members and their families even after their service.

The Bills signed into law are:

1. The Protecting Moms Who Served Act — invests \$15 million in new maternity care coordination programs at VA facilities. The move requires VA officials to address gaps in care for veteran mothers as well as studies into prenatal and postpartum health.
2. The Hire Veteran Health Heroes Act will require VA leaders to work with Defense Department officials in helping separating troops with health care skills who apply for open medical jobs in veterans hospitals.
3. The Colonel John M. McHugh Tuition Fairness for Survivors Act will guarantee that children and spouses of veterans who die from service-connected injuries will get in-state tuition rates. The change is expected to affect about 150,000 surviving dependents, potentially saving them tens of thousands in higher education expenses each year.
4. The final measure will require the Government Accountability office to investigate potential disparities in VA benefit awards based on race and ethnicity. Past studies have indicated that minorities may receive lesser benefits or face additional obstacles to disability payouts.

Did you know the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Airborne Hazards and Burn Pit Registry assists veterans who become exposed to airborne hazards while deployed overseas? The registry collects, studies, and publishes data about these environmental hazards. Veterans can also receive an evaluation of their potential exposure and can learn what to expect going forward. However, the initiative isn't a part of the regular disability claims process. Instead, veterans can discuss their health risks with a competent healthcare provider knowledgeable about environmental hazards. This unique service is available to veterans deployed in Southwest Asia theaters of military action on or after September 11, 2001. The service is also available to veterans deployed in Afghanistan and Djibouti during the same time frame. The specific regions include the ground, bodies of water, and airspace of Afghanistan, Djibouti, Bahrain, Gulf of Oman, Gulf of Arden, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, and waters of the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Arabian Sea.

Did you know the VA recently reported plans to study evidence about service connection for the development of rare respiratory cancers and other conditions among veterans, as well as to accelerate its efforts to track and review medical evidence for veterans, according to news announced last month? In addition, the VA announced a few months ago its addition of three presumptive conditions - asthma, rhinitis and sinusitis - related to particulate matter exposure for veterans seeking service-connected disability benefits. Far too many veterans believe they have to be accepted in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical healthcare system to acquire an income (compensation) for a service-connected disability. Simply put, this is not true for any veteran who served Honorably in the Armed Forces. All veterans can submit appropriate VA form(s) that will result in a medical evaluation that may determine the amount of disability compensation. The evaluations conducted by the VA or QTC will determine if there is a service-connected disability. Assuming a service-connected disability has been establishment by the VA, service-connection disability compensation will begin, and the veteran will be automatically set up in the VA medical system and will receive free treatment for the service-connected disability.

Did you know the CDC has new guidelines to help you understand what's safe to do now, and what hasn't changed? What's changed after you've been vaccinated with a booster shot?

If you've been fully vaccinated:

- You can gather indoors with fully vaccinated people without wearing a mask.
- You can visit friends and family from one other household who all live together without masks unless any of those people or anyone they live with has an increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19.
- If you're exposed to COVID-19, only get tested if you have symptoms.
- If you live in a group setting and are around someone who has COVID-19, you should still stay away from others for 14 days and get tested, even if you don't have symptoms.

Did you know veterans and their families are at a higher risk for mental health strain? Also, of the 11% - 20% of veterans who have been diagnosed with PTSD, just a mere 9% have recovered, according to a survey by digital therapeutic service Freespira. And, it's not from a lack of trying: veterans listed transportation challenges and finding nearby providers with PTSD experience as the main barriers to accessing healthcare services.

Did you know President Biden signed an executive order December 13, 2021, to allow Americans to renew their passports online, eliminating the need for physical documents and paper checks to be sent through the mail?

Did you know VA claims for mesothelioma and other asbestos diseases include health care and monthly disability compensation? Veterans exposed to asbestos during military service are entitled to these benefits but must file a claim to receive them. These benefits are important because veterans have an elevated risk of developing an asbestos-related illness.

In response to the growing number of infections from the highly contagious Delta and Omicron variants of the coronavirus, the VA is following advice from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that says everyone should wear a mask indoors in parts of the country with substantial or high levels of virus transmission. This includes people who are fully vaccinated and for those who received the booster shot.

Mask policies at different VA locations:

- **VA health care facilities:** Anyone who enters VA hospitals, clinics or Vet Centers must wear a mask that covers their mouth and nose. Staff will instruct fully vaccinated people on whether it's safe to remove their mask during a visit.
- **Indoors at other VA locations:** Visitors will be asked to wear a mask in locations where there is a substantial or high level of transmission. VA staff will explain each location's policy upon arrival.
- **Outdoors at VA national cemetery:** Only those who are not fully vaccinated are asked to wear a cloth mask and follow distancing guidelines.

Beginning December 15, 2021, the TRICARE's retail pharmacy network will change. Some community and retail chain pharmacies will be leaving the network, which includes Walmart and Sam's Club pharmacies. Also on December 15, 2021, CVS will be joining the TRICARE retail pharmacy network. Using one of the departing community pharmacies or Walmart and Sam's Club pharmacies on or after December 15, 2021 will result in out-of-network copayments. And, should you fill your prescriptions at CVS pharmacies before December 15, 2021, you'll pay non-network pharmacy copayments. If you're impacted by this network change, you should have received an email and/or a letter, which directs you to www.esrx.com/findpharmacy to help you find an in-network pharmacy in your area. This search tool will be updated on December 15, 2021, and will include the CVS pharmacies. There are several options you can take to ensure in-network copayments. You can:

- **Transfer your prescription to a new community or retail pharmacy** by calling your doctor or current pharmacy to start the transfer, or by showing the new pharmacy your prescription label.
- **Transfer you prescription to your local military treatment facility (MTF) pharmacy** by calling your doctor or current pharmacy to start the transfer, or by showing the MTF pharmacy your prescription label.
- **Switch to home delivery via Express Scripts** by going to www.militaryrx.express-scripts.com or by calling **1-877-363-1303**

According to Crystal A. Davis, who is a correspondent for the website Legal Desire, “The unusual method of calculating subsequent disabilities makes it difficult to earn a 100% disability rating. However, it’s possible to earn a 100% disability rating if you apply to the program known as Total Disability for Individual Unemployability. The program is designed for those veterans who can’t maintain any kind of gainful employment. You need to have one disability rating of 60% or higher, another rating of 40% or higher, and a combined rating of 70% or higher. Occasionally, the VA grants TDIU disability to veterans who don’t meet the specific disability rating requirements.”



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