



VA St. Louis Health Care System
Jefferson Barracks Campus
1 Jefferson Barracks Dr.
St. Louis, MO 63125

Media Advisory

For further information, email: stlpao@va.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 5, 2024

All Veterans exposed to toxins and other hazards during military service – at home or abroad – are now eligible for VA health care

ST. LOUIS — Today, VA announced that all Veterans who were exposed to toxins and other hazards while serving in the military – at home or abroad – are now eligible to enroll directly in VA health care. This means that all Veterans who served in the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Global War on Terror, or any other combat zone after 9/11 are eligible to enroll in VA health care without first applying for VA benefits. Additionally, Veterans who never deployed but were exposed to toxins or hazards during active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training in the United States are eligible to enroll.

As [directed by President Biden](#), this expansion of VA health care eliminates the phased-in approach called for by the PACT Act – meaning that millions of Veterans are becoming eligible for VA health care up to eight years earlier than written into law. This is a critical step forward because Veterans who are enrolled in VA health care are proven to have better health outcomes than non-enrolled Veterans, and VA hospitals have dramatically outperformed non-VA hospitals in [overall quality ratings](#) and [patient satisfaction ratings](#). Additionally, VA health care is often [more affordable](#) than non-VA health care for Veterans.

VA encourages all eligible Veterans to visit [VA.gov/PACT](https://va.gov/PACT) or call 1-800-MYVA411 to learn more and apply for VA health care today. Since President Biden signed the PACT Act into law on August 10, 2022, more than 4400 area Veterans have enrolled for care in the VA St. Louis Health Care System.

“Today, we’re making millions of Veterans eligible for VA health care years earlier than called for by the PACT Act,” said VA Under Secretary for Health Shereef Elnahal, M.D. “With this expansion, VA can care for all Veterans who served in the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Global War on Terror, or any other combat zone after 9/11. We can also care for Veterans who never deployed but were exposed to toxins or hazards while training or on active duty here at home – by working with chemicals, pesticides, lead, asbestos, certain paints, nuclear weapons, x-rays, and more. We want to bring all these Veterans to VA for the care they’ve earned and deserve.”

In addition to expanding access to VA care, this decision makes it quicker and easier for millions of Veterans to enroll. Many Veterans believe they must apply for [VA disability compensation benefits](#) to become eligible for VA health care, but this is incorrect. With this expansion and other authorities, millions of eligible Veterans can now enroll directly in VA care – without any need to first apply for VA benefits.

-more-

This expansion covers many Veterans who never deployed as a part of a conflict but were exposed to toxins or hazards while serving in the U.S. Specifically, under this expansion of care, any Veteran who participated in a toxic exposure risk activity (TERA) – at home or abroad – is eligible for VA health care. VA has determined that Veterans who were exposed to one or more of the following hazards or conditions during active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training participated in a TERA:

- air pollutants (burn pits, sand, dust, particulates, oil well fires, sulfur fires); chemicals (pesticides, herbicides, depleted uranium with embedded shrapnel, contaminated water);
- occupational hazards (asbestos, industrial solvents, lead, paints including chemical agent resistant coating, firefighting foams);
- radiation (nuclear weapons handling, maintenance and detonation, radioactive material, calibration and measurement sources, X-rays, radiation from military occupational exposure);
- warfare agents (nerve agents, chemical and biological weapons);
- and more.

VA will use all available information to determine if Veterans participated in a TERA, including military records and service connection.

This expansion of care covers Vietnam Veterans, Gulf War Veterans, Iraq War Veterans, Afghanistan War Veterans, Veterans who deployed in support of contingency operations for the Global War on Terror (Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Freedom's Sentinel, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn, Operation Inherent Resolve, and Resolute Support Mission), [and more](#).

VA is executing a nationwide campaign to ensure that as many Veterans as possible enroll. To date, VA's PACT Act outreach campaign has included more than 2,500 events nationwide, [\\$13 million in paid advertising](#), 88,000 earned media clips, more than 400 million emails and letters to Veterans, VA's first-ever text messaging campaign, the creation of a [one-stop-shop PACT Act website](#), and more. The PACT Act is the largest outreach campaign in VA history, which has one goal: ensure that all Veterans – and their survivors – get the health care and benefits they deserve.

"If you're a Veteran who may have been exposed to toxins or hazards while serving our country, at home or abroad, we want you to come to us for the health care you deserve," said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. "VA is proven to be the best, most affordable health care in America for Veterans – and once you're in, you have access for life. So don't wait, enroll today."

For more information about how the PACT Act is helping Veterans and their survivors, visit VA's [PACT Act Dashboard](#). For information on eligibility and to apply for care or benefits, visit [VA.gov/PACT](#) or call 1-800-MYVA411.

###

The VA St. Louis Healthcare System is Joint Commission accredited and serves over 70,000 Veterans across Missouri and Illinois. The Healthcare System has a 4 out of 5-star rating from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. It is a two division, dual-affiliated care facility with locations in midtown St. Louis (John Cochran Div.) and South St. Louis County (Jefferson Barracks Div.). Additionally, there are annexes located in midtown on Washington Avenue and Forest Park Southeast neighborhood on Manchester Avenue. Outpatient clinics are in Shiloh, IL, North St. Louis County, St. Charles County, and Washington, Mo. For more information, visit www.stlouis.va.gov. Connect with us on Facebook and <https://www.flickr.com/people/vastl/>