



Idaho Division of **VETERANS SERVICES**

*Caring for
America's
Heroes*

The Office of Veterans Advocacy Bulletin October 2023



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To be connected to a VA Suicide prevention and mental health professional, call the toll-free National Suicide Prevention Hotline, and indicate you are a veteran.

Call or Text **988** or **(800) 273-8255**

ALL EMPLOYMENT ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES ARE ADMINISTERED IN A NON-DISCRIMINATORY MANNER IN CONFORMANCE WITH FEDERAL AND STATE EEO AND CIVIL RIGHTS LAWS



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*If you've not already done so, please volunteer to receive the bulletin via email
by emailing Tiffany Barrett at
tiffany.barrett@veterans.idaho.gov*



process the delayed requests. They will ensure that all underpaid Veterans receive the full backdated benefits they deserve, and that no Veterans are negatively impacted by our error. The VA will also contact all affected Veterans by mail to advise them of the error and assure them that their previously submitted claims will be addressed. In total, over 574,000 Veterans have filed a VA Form 686c or VA Form 21-674 (through VA.gov, eBenefits, and other corresponding systems) to update their dependency status since 2011 – resulting in over 749,000 total electronic submissions. Of those dependency updates, VA is reviewing the claims of an estimated 56,000 Veterans to ensure that the proper adjustments to benefits have been made. These reviews could result in either no action (in cases where VA has already updated the dependency status) or adjustments to monthly benefits payments. Reviews are ongoing to determine the exact number of impacted Veterans, and this estimated number could rise or fall as a result. While the VA first began investigating this issue in August 2021, the full scope and urgency of the problem wasn't understood across VA until August 2023. The delay in understanding and fixing this issue is unacceptable, and they are working around the clock to ensure that it does not happen again. The VA says it deeply apologizes to these Veterans for the delay in processing their claims, and they will ensure they receive the benefits they've earned as quickly as possible.

What is VA doing to inform Veterans of the issue? The VA is working urgently to identify the exact number of impacted Veterans and directly contact them by mail. To ensure that Veterans are informed, they have also notified Veterans Service Organizations, Congressional leaders, and State Directors of Veterans Affairs about this issue. They are also updating the VA Hotline and VA Technical Support call center to make sure that any Veterans who call us get the information and support they need. Telephone assistance is available Monday through Friday, 8:00am to 9:00pm EST by calling 1-800-827-1000.

On September 30, 2023, the Art Institute closed the doors to eight campuses affecting many veterans who were enrolled in courses at those locations. Please see the below notification that was sent by VA to over 400 impacted veterans across the Art Institute's eight (8) locations.

Dear GI Bill® Student,

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) was made aware that the following Art Institute campuses closed effective September 30, 2023:

- Miami International University of Art & Design
- The Art Institute of Atlanta
- The Art Institute of Austin, a branch of The Art Institute of Houston
- The Art Institute of Dallas, a branch of Miami International University of Art & Design
- The Art Institute of Houston
- The Art Institute of San Antonio, a branch of The Art Institute of Houston
- The Art Institute of Tampa, a branch of Miami International University of Art & Design
- The Art Institute of Virginia Beach, a branch of The Art Institute of Atlanta

We understand the extremely difficult situation a school closure may cause Veterans and their families, and we wish to assist you as much as possible in continuing your educational goals. If you are considering a transfer to another school to prevent or minimize interruptions in your education benefits, please know that some schools may offer to waive certain admissions fees, and accept credits earned at Art Institutes. VA has resources to support students to choose another school at: <https://www.va.gov/education/choosing-a-school/> or <https://www.va.gov/education/gi-bill-comparison-tool/>.

In certain circumstances, when a closure or withdrawal action is made, students may be eligible for restoration of entitlement of their GI Bill benefits. VA will make determinations on a student-by-student basis based on specific eligibility factors outlined in the law ([38 U.S.C. § 3699](#)). You can learn more about restoration of entitlement at <https://www.benefits.va.gov/GIBILL/Restoration.asp>.

Where can I find help?

Please see some additional resources that may assist you:

- Student Veterans of America (<http://studentveterans.org/>) has a network of over 1,400 student chapters at colleges and universities and their staff can provide answers to your questions.
- Reach out to Veterans of Foreign Wars (<https://www.vfw.org>). They offer emergency assistance grants to students affected by school closures.

- Free lawyers and advice are available for students from Veterans Education Success. Visit their website at <http://veteranseducationsuccess.org/> or email directly, help@VeteransEducationSuccess.org.
- If a school closes, the Department of Education's Federal Student Aid has a dedicated page. Visit [Has Your School Closed? Here's What to Do. | Federal Student Aid](#) for more information. Please see Federal Student Aid's update for Art Institutes students - <https://studentaid.gov/sites/default/files/ai.pdf>
- The American Legion (<https://www.legion.org/serviceofficers>) has service officers in every state that can provide answers to questions about education benefits, Federal student loans and credit transferability.
- The State Approving Agencies (<https://nasaa-vetseducation.com/nasaa-contacts/>) are working with schools to identify those that will accept transfers.

VA remains focused on the Veterans who have honorably served, as well as their eligible dependents. VA is contacting all affected Art Institutes students via email to inform them of this action and the options available to them. We are committed to working closely with all students to ensure that you are properly protected and have minimal disruptions to your future educational plans.

If you have any questions, or are experiencing difficulties, please contact VA's Education Call Center at 1-888-442-4551 between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. Central Time, Monday through Friday. Alternatively, you may submit questions through the Ask VA (AVA) system. If you don't already have a VA login account, you will need to set one up to use AVA: <https://ask.va.gov/>.

On September 26, 2023, the VA Central Office discovered a recent error in CHAMPVA's computer system which resulted in CHAMPVA beneficiaries paying incorrect out of pocket expenses. As a result of the system error, some CHAMPVA beneficiaries were overcharged while others were potentially undercharged. The VA has fixed the system error they and are monitoring the system closely to ensure that the issue does not reoccur. VA has identified over 6,000 families who were overcharged and VA is in the process of reimbursing those families by the end of the calendar year. VA is working to identify beneficiaries who were undercharged and evaluating potential funds owed to VA. The VA will explore all debt relief options if families are identified as owing funds to VA as a result correcting this system error.

If anyone wants to file a Camp Lejeune Justice Act Claim/Lawsuit, it must be submitted before August 10, 2024.

The Department of Justice is proposing to move Camp Lejeune Contaminated Water claims (lawsuits) move quickly by establishing set payout amounts depending what conditions a Veteran/Family Member has and how long they were actually at Camp Lejeune. To be able to explain this in more detail, I am adding the following information by Ronald V. Miller of The Lawsuit Information Center, Miller & Zois LLC that explains the proposal:

"With the large number of pending Camp Lejeune Contaminated Water claims, the government has introduced a [settlement program](#), offering compensation of up to \$450,000 to individuals, including Camp Lejeune veterans, who claim they were harmed by contaminated water at the North Carolina Marine base. Whether this is a good idea or not is debatable, but it may be an attractive option in a minority of these claims depending on the facts of the case. So what is this about? The government needs to reduce the total number of claims to something more manageable so they dangle a quick settlement to knock back the numbers. To some extent, it will work. This initiative aims to resolve potentially hundreds of thousands of claims more swiftly, as over 93,000 claims have already been filed, and some affected veterans have expressed frustration with the slow claims process. This will speed up the process and get your money faster... if you are willing to take what may be much less than your case is likely worth. Under the plan, eligible claimants will receive settlements based on their specific illnesses and the duration of their stay at the base, covering various conditions like cancer, kidney disease, and Parkinson's.

For example, a veteran with over five years at the base who developed kidney cancer could receive \$450,000. As a practical matter, few were there for more than five years. So someone who spent less than a year there and later

suffered from kidney cancer would also receive \$150,000. If the person was at Lejeune between one year and five years, it would be \$300,000.

- For a Tier 2 case, the top goes down to \$400,000, the ceiling goes to \$100,000, and that midlevel (1-5 years) would be \$250,000.
- Wrongful death claims would receive an additional \$100,000.
- These are the tiers eligible for this toxic water settlement:

Disease	Qualifying Injury
Kidney Cancer	Tier 1
Liver Cancer	Tier 1
Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma	Tier 1
Leukemias	Tier 1
Bladder Cancer	Tier 1
Multiple Myeloma	Tier 2
Parkinson's Disease	Tier 2
Kidney Disease / End Stage Renal Disease	Tier 2
Systemic Sclerosis / Systemic Scleroderma	Tier 2

Does it make sense to dump all Tier 1 and Tier 2 cases into two big pots like this? No. The DOJ does not think this is anything but rough and quick justice. So this plan does not aim to make distinctions in the severity of various illnesses. The biggest reason is time. Evaluating the severity of an illness involves a thorough and time-consuming process, and the government is willing to skip this part for those who want a Camp Lejeune settlement more quickly. So the government reasons that assigning varying values to different illness types based on severity is too time-consuming during the initial administrative claim phase. They are not wrong, this will likely be much faster for people who want to settle now... but they cannot expect most victims to take a smaller compensation payout than they deserve. That is our initial take on this whole thing. We are happy with the effort at progress, but the settlement calculations are just too low for most victims."

If there are any questions, please feel free to contact our offices and enjoy the Fall Weather and Activities. I want to wish all of our Marines and Navy Corpsmen and Happy 247th Birthday and I wish Everyone a Happy Veterans Day. I thank ALL of you for your Service!

Semper Fidelis,

Bill Heyob

Bill Heyob
SgtMajor/USMC (Retired)
Bureau Chief/State Veteran Service Officer
Office of Veterans Advocacy
Idaho Division of Veterans Services



VA PACT ACT

PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD

SEPTEMBER 29, 2023

ISSUE SEVENTEEN
Published Bi-weekly on Fridays



In this VA PACT Act Performance Dashboard, we are demonstrating our commitment to transparency by sharing with all stakeholders—internal to VA and externally—key performance metrics and data we are using to assess our success in implementing the PACT Act.

If you, a Veteran, family member, or survivor would like more information about the PACT Act and your VA benefits, please start here:



VA.GOV
ask.va.gov



CALL
1-800-MyVA411
24/7/365



WALK-IN
[VA.gov/find/locations](https://va.gov/find/locations)



VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATION
[VA.gov/disability/get-help-filing-claim](https://va.gov/disability/get-help-filing-claim)



NEW HEALTH CARE & BENEFITS MAP
[Download Map Here](#)

Help spread the word—download [PACT Act Outreach Materials!](#)



Highlight

The weekly enrollment for the PACT Act One-Year Special Eligibility Combat Veterans cohort has increased by 119% from 8,573 to 18,800 from August 15 to September 24. This greatly exceeds the previous enrollment pace of 8,573 Veterans over 10 months from 10/1/2022–08/14/2023. This drastic increase coincides with an expanded communications and outreach campaign which began on August 15. We encourage you to keep sharing [VA.gov/PACT](https://va.gov/PACT) with your communities and networks.



Making a Difference Through the PACT Act

In 2015, Mr. Brad Majercin, a U.S. Navy Veteran who served during the Vietnam Era and deployed to Guam, filed a disability claim for hearing loss. At the time, he received a 10% rating. Unfortunately, at the age of 45, Brad was diagnosed with Prostate Cancer—a presumptive condition linked to his service in Guam. In April 2022, Brad learned that Guam would be an eligible presumptive location under the PACT Act. He filed a new claim for service connection and, in February 2023, was rated 100% disabled. This was life-changing for Brad and his family, and he encourages other Veterans to apply for the care and benefits they deserve.

VA IS EXPANDING CARE AND BENEFITS FOR VETERANS AND SURVIVORS



The PACT Act is perhaps the largest health care and benefits expansion in VA history. In this section, we are measuring the overall impact of the PACT Act in terms of its expansion of health care and benefits.

Expanding Benefits



535,557

Total Veterans/Survivors with Completed PACT Act Related Claims
(08/10/2022–09/23/2023)



524,809

Total Veterans with Completed PACT Act Related Claims



10,765

Total Survivors with Completed PACT Act Related Claims



153.1

Average Days for PACT Act Related Claim Completion
(09/23/2023)



47.6%

PACT Act Related Claims Completed <= 125 days
(09/23/2023)



458,480

Total PACT Act Claims Approved
(08/10/2022–09/23/2023)



77.6%

Approval Rate for PACT Act Related Claims
(09/23/2023)

Expanding Care



172,766

New Enrollees in the PACT Act Planning Population
(08/10/2022–09/24/2023)



Total New VHA Enrollees: (through 09/24/2023)

AUG 2021–SEPTEMBER 2022

329,258

AUG 2022–SEPTEMBER 2023

401,639

+72,381

100,000 200,000 300,000 400,000 500,000



91%

VA Health Care 90-Day Trust Score
(06/11/2023–09/24/2023)



UPCOMING OUTREACH CALENDAR

September 29

PACT Act Open Enrollment Session
Alhambra, CA

[VIEW EVENT](#)

September 30

Warrior Alliance and VA PACT Act Claims Filing
Augusta, GA

[VIEW EVENT](#)

September 30

PACT Act Open Enrollment Session
Burbank, CA

[VIEW EVENT](#)

October 14

Veteran Resource Enrollment Event
Nashville, MI

[VIEW EVENT](#)

November 08

Cookeville VA PACT Act Veterans Health Fair
Cookeville, TN

[VIEW EVENT](#)

November 09

PACT Act Enrollment Claims Event
Mohave Valley, AZ

[VIEW EVENT](#)

For more information on these and other events, please visit <https://www.va.gov/outreach-and-events/events/>



VA is committed to providing world class and timely health care, benefits and services to Veterans and Survivors. In this section, we measure VA's success in delivering outstanding and timely support and in earning the Veteran's and Survivor's trust.

Care Experience

4,573,518
Total Toxic Exposure Screenings
(09/06/2022–09/24/2023)

1,957,317 (42.80%)
Toxic Exposure Screenings where Veterans Endorsed more than 1 Potential Exposure

387,404 (8.47%)
Toxic Exposure Screenings where Veterans Endorsed more than 1 Potential Exposure

1,569,913 (34.33%)
Toxic Exposure Screenings where Veterans Endorsed exactly 1 Potential Exposure

172,766
New Enrollees in the PACT Act Planning Population
(08/10/2022–09/24/2023)

61%
New Enrollees in Priority Groups 1, 2, or 3 (percentage based on the Planning Population)

95,796
Total New Enrollees under a PACT Act Enrollment Authority since 08/10/2022

3,927,876
Current Enrollees in the PACT Act Planning Population (as of 09/24/2023)

1-YEAR SPECIAL ENROLLMENT PERIOD (SEP)

Veterans who deployed to a combat zone, never enrolled in VA health care, and left active duty between September 11, 2001, and October 1, 2013, are eligible to enroll directly in VA health care in a special enrollment period until September 30, 2023.

1,780,296
Total Veterans that may be eligible for the SEP

1,382,122
Total Veterans Currently Enrolled

18,800
Total New Enrollees from 10/01/2022 to Present

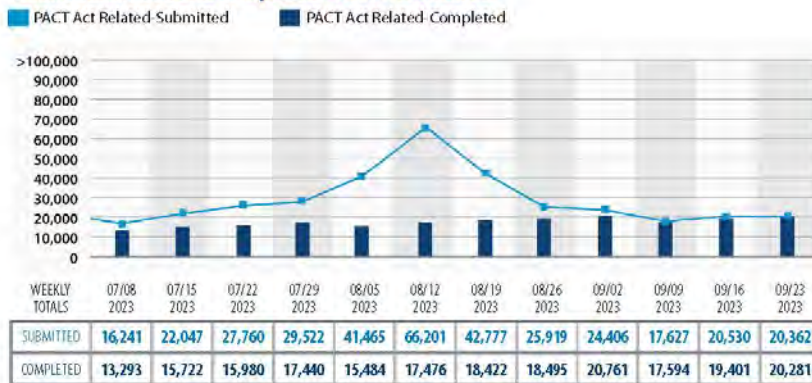
398,174
Total Veterans not yet Enrolled

VA is including a call out on the Special Enrollment Period leading up to the September 30, 2023 deadline.

Benefits Experience

The charts below show the past 12 weeks (a rolling 12-week view).

Claims Submitted and Completed—PACT Act-Related



1,061,270
Cumulative Total PACT Related Claims Submitted
(08/10/2022–09/23/2023)

1,042,124
Total Veteran PACT Related Claims Submitted

19,146
Total Survivor PACT Related Claims Submitted

591,089
Cumulative Total PACT Related Claims Completed
(08/10/2022–09/23/2023)

580,015
Total Veteran PACT Related Claims Completed

11,074
Total Survivor PACT Related Claims Completed

153.1
Average Days For PACT Act Related Claim Completion
(09/23/2023)

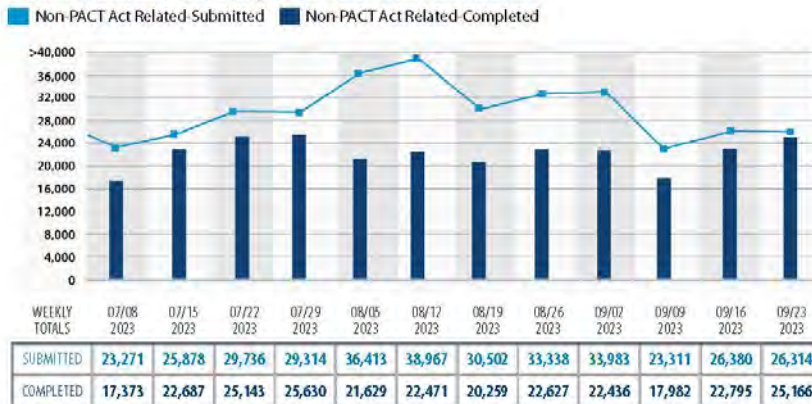
47.6%
PACT Act Related Rating Claims Completed <=125 Days
(09/23/2023)

Percentage of Claims Submitted PACT Related vs. Non-PACT Related (08/10/2022–09/23/2023)

39.5% PACT RELATED

60.5% NON-PACT RELATED

Claims Submitted and Completed—Non-PACT Act Related



1,628,574
Cumulative Total Non-PACT Related Claims Submitted
(08/10/2022–09/23/2023)

1,612,434
Cumulative Total Non-PACT Related Claims Completed
(08/10/2022–09/23/2023)

125.2
Average Days For Non-PACT Related Claim Completion
(09/23/2023)

67.4%
Non-PACT Act Related Rating Claims Completed <=125 Days
(09/23/2023)

PACT Act Claims Submission Methods



31.5%
PACT Act Claims Electronically Submitted
(08/10/2022–09/23/2023)

92.1%

Electronic Claims Submitted by Veterans

7.9%

Electronic Claims Submitted by Power of Attorney



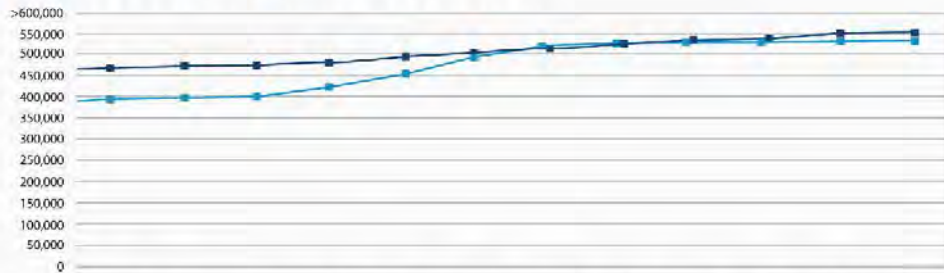
68.5%
PACT Act Claims Submitted by Mail
(08/10/2022–09/23/2023)

85.6%

Mailed Claims Submitted with a Power of Attorney on File with VA

Pending Claims—PACT Related and Non-PACT Related

Inventory Pending PACT Related Inventory Pending Non-PACT Related



74,126

Total Pending PACT Act Related Claims with Partial Decisions
(as of 09/23/2023)



38,535

Total Pending Non-PACT Act Related Claims with Partial Decisions
(as of 09/23/2023)

WEEKLY TOTALS	07/08 2023	07/15 2023	07/22 2023	07/29 2023	08/05 2023	08/12 2023	08/19 2023	08/26 2023	09/02 2023	09/09 2023	09/16 2023	09/23 2023
PACT RELATED	394,782	401,107	412,887	424,969	450,950	499,675	524,030	531,454	535,099	535,132	536,261	536,342
NON-PACT RELATED	466,940	470,131	474,724	478,408	493,192	509,688	519,931	530,642	542,189	547,518	551,103	552,251



536,342
Total Pending PACT Act Related Claims
(as of 09/23/2023)



552,251
Total Pending Non-PACT Act Related Claims
(as of 09/23/2023)



110.3
Average Days Pending for PACT Act Related Claims
(09/23/2023)

363,463
Total PACT ACT Related Claims Pending <=125 Days
(09/23/2023)



93.6
Average Days Pending for Non-PACT Act Related Claims
(09/23/2023)

428,051
Total Non-PACT Act Related Claims Pending <=125 Days
(09/23/2023)



Top 5 Most Frequent Conditions on PACT Act Related Claims (As of 09/23/2023)

Condition	Number of Claims	Number of Issues	Percent Granted	Percent Denied
Hypertensive Vascular Disease	176,308	178,719	78%	22%
Allergic Rhinitis	103,892	105,498	81%	19%
Maxillary Sinusitis	49,251	49,649	54%	46%
Bronchial Asthma	46,247	47,092	49%	51%
Malignant Growths of Genitourinary System	26,248	26,904	65%	35%

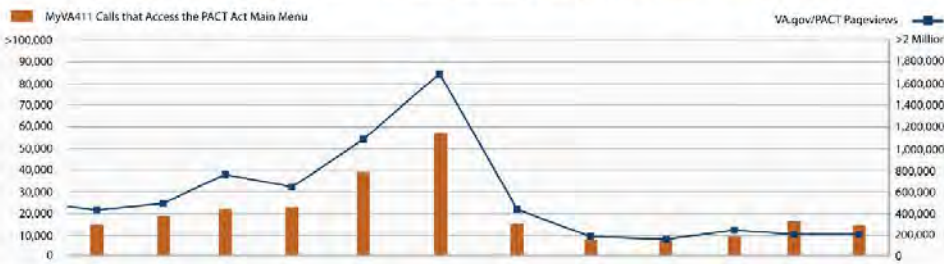


Most Frequent Denial Reasons (as of 09/23/2023)

- 1 No Diagnosis
- 2 Not Incurred or Not Caused by Service
- 3 Not Established by Presumption

Web and Phone Experience

VA.gov/PACT Pageviews & 1-800-MyVA411 Calls that Access the PACT Act Main Menu (Press 8)



The PACT Act webpage has received to date:



20,410,096

Total Page Views
(08/10/2022–09/24/2023)



827,297

Total Clicks on Call to Action to File a Disability Claim Online
(08/10/2022–09/24/2023)



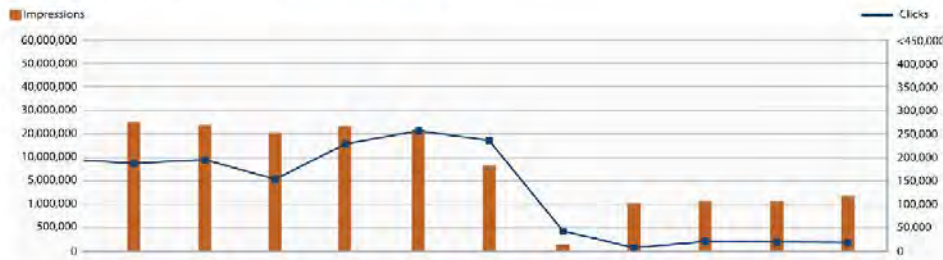
166,551

Total Clicks on Call to Action to Enroll in Health Care
(08/10/2022–09/24/2023)

WEEKLY TOTALS	07/08 2023	07/15 2023	07/22 2023	07/29 2023	08/05 2023	08/12 2023	08/19 2023	08/26 2023	09/02 2023	09/09 2023	09/16 2023	09/23 2023
VA.gov/PACT PAGEVIEWS	437,433	503,898	773,661	633,826	1,078,233	1,698,401	437,705	195,978	182,916	244,031	214,858	212,687
MyVA411 Calls	14,789	18,686	22,038	23,058	39,863	57,670	15,561	8,986	7,813	9,971	16,219	14,673

Web and Phone Experience

Digital Advertising (ChooseVA PACT Act Campaign)



855,452,740
Total Impressions

6,227,425
Total Clicks

0.73%
Click Through Rate

WEEKLY TOTALS	07/08 2023	07/15 2023	07/22 2023	07/29 2023	08/05 2023	08/12 2023	08/19 2023	09/02 2023	09/09 2023	09/16 2023	09/23 2023
Clicks	189,629	199,640	156,807	225,860	253,899	240,098	41,268	8,970	23,069	23,484	23,093
Impressions	24,637,017	23,180,355	20,208,253	23,170,421	21,724,976	8,170,277	181,585	1,046,417	1,957,543	1,911,257	2,111,916
CTR	0.90%	0.90%	0.78%	0.98%	1.17%	2.96%	22.70%	0.85%	1.18%	1.23%	1.09%

VA Call Centers



917,668

Total MyVA411 that Access the PACT Act Main Menu (Press 8)
(10/20/2022-09/24/2023)

MAIN MENU



217,990

Calls that Access Option 1 to Learn More about PACT Act and Health Care
(10/20/2022-09/24/2023)

OPTION 1



185,552

Calls that Access Option 2 to Learn More about PACT ACT Benefits
(10/20/2022-09/24/2023)

OPTION 2



259,006

Calls that Access Option 3 to Learn More about the PACT Act Overall
(10/20/2022-09/24/2023)

OPTION 3

STEWARDSHIP

Issue 17—September 29, 2023



VA seeks to act as a wise steward of PACT Act resources. In this section, we measure VA's success in hiring and obligating resources funded through the PACT Act Toxic Exposures Fund, P.L. 117-68.

PACT ACT Toxic Exposures Fund (TEF)

(Initial \$500M)

Stewardship information will be included in every other issue of the VA PACT Act Dashboard or when updated data is available.

VA ACCOUNT	HIRING			FUNDS	
	FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT EMPLOYEES (FTE)	PERMANENT EMPLOYEES ONBOARDED	TERM EMPLOYEES ONBOARDED	FUNDS ALLOCATED	TOTAL OBLIGATIONS
VHA Medical Care	101	—	—	\$34,124,000	\$9,897,000
Medical and Prosthetic Research	8	—	—	\$650,000	\$638,000
Office of Information & Technology	99	—	28	\$123,053,000	\$91,249,000
VBA General Operating Expenses	1,884	—	—	\$302,018,000	\$297,117,000
Board of Veterans' Appeals	153	—	—	\$10,328,000	—
Office of General Counsel	73	62	12	\$4,374,000	\$3,655,000
VA Central Office	64	38	8	\$25,453,000	\$21,305,000
Total PACT Act Toxic Exposures Fund	2,382	100	48	\$500,000,000	\$423,861,000

Page One

Metric/Term

Total Veterans/Survivors with Completed PACT Act Claims
 Total Veterans with Completed PACT Act Claims
 Total Survivors with Completed PACT Act Claims
 VHA Trust

Approval Rate for PACT Act Related Claims since 08/10/22 (percentage)
 Average Days for PACT Act Claims Completion

PACT Act Related Rating Claims Completed <= 125 days
 Total PACT Act Claims Approved
 PACT Act Planning Population

New Enrollees in the PACT Act Planning Population

Total New VHA Enrollees

Increase in New Enrollees in VHA
 Upcoming Outreach Calendar

Definition

This metric identifies the unique number of Veterans and Survivors who have filed a PACT Act benefit claim which VBA processed to completion.
 This metric identifies the unique number of Veterans who filed a PACT Act benefit claim which VBA processed to completion.
 This metric identifies the unique number of Survivors who filed a PACT Act benefit claim which VBA processed to completion.
 This trust score reflects the percentage of Veterans who respond to the survey question, "I trust the VHA [Facility Name] for my health care needs" with a score of 4 or 5.
 Percentage of PACT act disability claims where at least one condition was granted (regardless of whether or not the condition was filed under PACT).
 This metric indicates the length of time it takes VBA to process a PACT Act-related benefits claim. This is measured from the date VA receives a claim to the date VA finished processing the claim and closed it out + 1 day, to eliminate the possibility of claims being completed in 0 days (i.e. claim completed on the day it was received).
 The Average Days to Complete (ADC) for PACT Act Related Claims is calculated based on the date VA received the claim, not the date VA began processing those claims. VA prioritized and completed some claims related to terminal illnesses, but VA did not begin processing most claims until January 1, 2023. As a result, the current value of ADC is inflated by any time between the date the claim was received and the January 1, 2023 implementation date for processing. The high ADC for PACT claims demonstrates VA's commitment to completing oldest pending claims first.
 This statistic identifies the number of VBA benefit claims with one or more PACT Act-related conditions that have been completed in 125 days or less.
 This metric identifies the number of completed PACT Act disability claims where at least one issue was granted.
 The PACT Act Planning Population consists of Veterans where VA has a high level of confidence they are a member of one or more of the three PACT Act eligible cohorts (Vietnam, Gulf War, Post 9-11). VA is using this population as a means of identifying the impact of the PACT Act on enrollment in VA health care.
 This statistic measures the number of new enrollees in VA health care that fall within the PACT Act Planning Population to understand the impact of the PACT Act on enrollment. By design, this more focused metric will always be a subset of the metric above that shows overall new enrollment regardless of whether a Veteran is in an eligible PACT Act cohort. Together these two enrollment metrics help identify both the broad impact of PACT Act on enrollment—for example, those who may enroll for VA health care because of the publicity of PACT Act but are not directly eligible because of PACT Act—and the more direct impact of PACT Act—meaning those who are enrolling from populations VA assesses as becoming eligible due to the PACT Act.
 This statistic identifies the total new VHA enrollments (newly registered healthcare beneficiaries) for the periods of August 2022-End of Current Month 2023 and August 2021-End of month 2022, for comparative analysis purposes.
 This number identifies the change between 2023 and 2022 VHA enrollees during the same time period.
 This calendar identifies key activities or outreach events occurring in the coming weeks.

Page Two

Metric/Term

Total Toxic Exposure Screenings

Toxic Exposure Screenings where Veterans Endorsed at least 1 Potential Exposure

Toxic Exposure Screenings where Veterans Endorsed 1 Potential Exposure

Toxic Exposure Screenings where Veterans Endorsed more than 1 Potential Exposure

New Enrollees in Priority Groups 1, 2, or 3

New Enrollees enrolled with a PACT Act Authority

Weekly Total: PACT Act Related Claims Submitted
 Weekly Total: PACT Act Related Claims Completed
 Cumulative Total: PACT Act Related Claims Submitted
 Cumulative Total: PACT Act Related Claims Completed
 Weekly Total: Non-PACT Act Related Claims Submitted
 Weekly Total: Non-PACT Act Related Claims Completed
 Average Days for PACT Act Claims Completion
 PACT Act Related Rating Claims Pending <= 125 days

PACT Act Related Rating Claims Completed <= 125 days
 Average Days Pending for Non-PACT Act Related Claims
 Non-PACT Act Related Claims Pending <= 125 days
 Non-PACT Act Related Claims Completed <= 125 days
 Cumulative Total of Non-PACT Related Claims Submitted
 Cumulative Total of Non-PACT Related Claims Completed

Definition

This statistic identifies the number of Veterans who have received a VHA Toxic Exposure Screening. Every Veteran enrolled in VA health care will receive an initial screening and a follow-up screening at least once every 5 years. Veterans who are not enrolled and who meet eligibility requirements will have an opportunity to enroll and receive the screening.
 The screening will ask Veterans if they think they were exposed to any of these hazards while serving: Open burn pits and other airborne hazards, Gulf War-related exposures, Agent Orange Radiation, Camp Lejeune contaminated water exposure and/or Other Exposures.
 This statistic identifies the number of VHA Toxic Exposure Screenings where a Veteran identified at least one exposure to toxic substances. It includes the number of Veterans who received the screening, the number of Veterans who identified at least one potential concern related to a toxic substance exposure, and the percentage of responses in which Veterans identified at least one instance of toxic exposure during the screening.
 This statistic identifies the number of VHA Toxic Exposure Screenings where a Veteran identified exactly one exposure to toxic substances. **Please note the difference from the metric above – the metric above includes Veterans who identified at least one (includes both those who identified one exposure and also those who identified more than one exposure); this metric only includes Veterans who identified exactly one exposure.**
 This statistic identifies the number of VHA Toxic Exposure Screenings where a Veteran identified more than one exposure to toxic substances. **Please note the difference from the metric above – the metric above includes Veterans who identify exactly one potential concern; this metric includes Veterans who identify more than one potential concern.**
 Priority Groups: When Veterans apply for VA health care, they are assigned to 1 of 8 priority groups that impact how soon they are signed up for health care benefits and how much they may have to pay (if anything) toward the cost of care. To learn more about the factors that impact assignment, please visit <https://www.va.gov/health-care/eligibility/priority-groups>.
 This metric measures the number of new enrollees who were specifically enrolled with an authority provided by the PACT Act (PL 117-168). This includes 1-year Special Eligibility, 10-Year Special Eligibility, Agent Orange Exposure, and Radiation Exposure. For more on information on eligibility for enrollment, please visit www.va.gov/pact. VA utilizes a number of authorities to enroll Veterans, both authorities granted in the PACT Act and pre-existing authorities. VA applies the authority that will result in the Veteran being placed into the highest priority group possible.
 This metric identifies the total number of VBA benefit claims with at least one PACT Act-related claimed issue received each week.
 This metric identifies the number of VBA benefit claims with at least one PACT Act-related condition completed each week.
 This statistic identifies the total number of VBA benefits claims with at least one PACT Act-related condition received since August 10, 2022.
 This statistic identifies the total number of VBA claims with at least one PACT Act-related condition completed since August 10, 2022.
 This number identifies the total VBA benefits claims received each week not related to PACT Act.
 This number identifies the total VBA benefits claims completed each week not related to PACT Act.
 This metric identifies the average number of days it takes VBA to process a PACT Act related benefits claim.
 This statistic identifies the current number of VBA benefit claims with one or more PACT Act-related conditions that have been pending for 125 days or less.
 This statistic identifies the number of VBA benefit claims with one or more PACT Act-related conditions that have been completed in 125 days or less.
 This metric identifies the average number of days it takes VBA to process a Non-PACT Act related benefits claim.
 This statistic identifies the current number of pending VBA benefit claims with one or more Non-PACT Act related conditions less than 125 days old.
 This statistic identifies the number of non-PACT VBA benefit claims that have been completed in 125 days or less.
 This statistic identifies the cumulative total of VBA benefits claims received since August 10, 2022, which are not related to the PACT Act.
 This statistic identifies the cumulative total of VBA benefits claims completed since August 10, 2022, which are not related to the PACT Act.

1-Year Special Enrollment

Metric/Term

1-Year Special Enrollment Period (SEP)

Total Veterans that may be eligible for the SEP

Total Veterans Currently Enrolled

Total Veterans not yet Enrolled

Total New Enrollees from 10/01/2022 to Present

Definition

Combat Veteran Eligibility with an end date of September 30, 2023 for Veterans who discharged between September 11, 2001 and September 30, 2013 and applied outside their 5-year eligibility period.
 Total Veterans from the PACT Act Planning Population that may be eligible for the Special Enrollment Period (SEP). This total may change to reflect changes in the PACT Act Planning Population (due to deaths, for example).
 Total Veterans from the PACT Act Planning Population that may be eligible for SEP and currently enrolled. This metric may fluctuate in different amounts than total new enrollees because Veterans may become enrolled due to other authorities besides SEP or may no longer be living.
 Total Veterans from the PACT Act Planning Population that may be eligible for SEP and are currently non-enrolled. This metric may decrease more than the increase in total new enrollees because Veterans may leave the "non-enrolled" category when they are enrolled under other authorities besides SEP or may no longer be living.
 Veterans from the group of "Total Veterans that may be eligible for SEP" who have been enrolled using the SEP authority between 10/1/2022 and present.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

News Release

Office of Public Affairs Washington, DC 20420
Media Relations (202) 461-7600
www.va.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sept. 29, 2023

VA expands maternity care coordination for Veterans

WASHINGTON – Starting October 1, Veterans will have access to maternity care coordinators from the beginning of their pregnancy to 12 months post-partum – an expansion from the previous end-date of 8 weeks post-partum. These coordinators help Veterans navigate health care inside and outside of VA, connect Veterans with care after delivery, ensure access to follow-up screenings, and [more](#). This means that all new mothers will have the support and resources they need from VA, regardless of where they give birth.

This expansion is key step toward improving maternal outcomes for Veterans and part of the work that VA is doing to implement the [White House Blueprint for Addressing the Maternal Health Crisis](#). In addition to these maternity care coordinators, VA provides Veterans with the full range of maternity care services throughout pregnancy, delivery, and postpartum – including primary care, exams, tests, ultrasounds, newborn care, lactation support, and [more](#).

Women Veterans are the fastest-growing cohort of Veterans who use VA, and VA currently provides health care to approximately 600,000 women Veterans – half of whom are of child-bearing age. Pregnancies in women Veterans using VA care have increased by more than 80% since 2014, from 6,950 pregnancies in 2014 to 12,524 in 2022.

“This expansion of care coordination is a critical step toward improving outcomes for Veteran mothers and their newborn children,” said **Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough**. “Now, Veteran mothers will know that they have one-on-one support throughout every step of their pregnancy – from the day it begins to one year postpartum.”

“Evidence shows that new mothers often need support and care coordination long after 8 weeks post-partum, which is why VA is taking action to support Veteran mothers for much longer after they give birth,” said **Under Secretary for Health Shereef Elnahal, MD**. “We will also screen pregnant and postpartum Veterans for social determinants of health, mental health risk factors, relationship health and safety, and more.”

“Extended follow-up care for postpartum Veterans is a great step forward, given that a significant proportion of poor maternal outcomes happen later in the postpartum period,” said **Acting Chief Officer for VA Office of Women’s Health Sally Haskell, MD**. “Extending postpartum care coordination up to one year allows VA maternity care coordinators the ability to double the amount of contact with their patients to help improve the physical and mental health of both parent and child.”

VA maternity care coordinators also screen for social, physical, and mental health concerns; answer questions about billing; provide resources for childbirth education; and offer lactation consulting during pregnancy and after delivery.

VA understands the importance of having a solid support system during and after pregnancy, so along with extended maternity care, the Department offers essential wraparound services. In addition to primary care, this includes access to mental health care, housing assistance, and resources to address food insecurity.

Learn more about [VA maternity care coordination](#).

VAU.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs**News Release**Office of Public Affairs
Media RelationsWashington, DC 20420
(202) 461-7600
www.va.gov**FOR IMMEDIATE
RELEASE**

Sept. 21, 2023

VA expands burial benefits for Veterans and their families

WASHINGTON — Today, VA announced that Veterans, and their families, caregivers, and survivors now have access to expanded burial benefits to help with end-of-life expenses related to a Veteran’s gravesite, burial, funeral and transportation of remains to their final resting place. Burial benefits are available to individuals who pay for a Veteran’s burial and funeral costs that are not reimbursed by any other organization. The updated burial benefits are:

- Expanded reimbursement of transportation expenses, to include costs for transporting remains, to state or Tribal Veterans' cemeteries in addition to previously eligible national cemeteries.
- Broadened eligibility to more individuals who are eligible to receive the transportation benefit.
- Instituted a more generous single payment rate for non-service-connected burial benefits.
- Extended the VA plot or interment allowance to Tribal organizations.

“Last fiscal year, VA delivered more than 84,000 burial benefits to families of Veterans,” said **VA Under Secretary for Benefits Joshua Jacobs**. “Expanding burial benefits means we are able to ensure Veterans are honored in their final resting place, and assist their family, caregivers, and survivors during the difficult time of their loved one’s passing.”

VA provides burial benefits for all legal burial types, including cremation, burial at sea, and donation of remains to a medical school. Eligible individuals include a surviving spouse or legal partner, surviving child, parent or executor of the Veteran’s estate. Additionally, VA may pay burial benefits to a funeral home or third party who handled burial arrangements for a Veteran whose remains are unclaimed.

Veterans are encouraged to plan with end-of-life benefits provided by VA. These benefits include VA life insurance, care preferences, survivor benefits, and burial benefits that can be applied for in advance of a Veteran’s passing. Visit www.va.gov/plan-ahead to learn more.

There is no time limit to file for a service-connected burial, plot or interment allowance, or the transportation benefit. However, claims for non-service-connected burial benefits must be filed within two years of the Veteran’s burial or cremation. A non-service-connected burial benefit is one where the cause of death was not related to military service.

Learn more about [burial benefits](#) and additional information regarding [flags, headstones, and markers](#).

Communications Toolkit

End-of-Life Benefits



VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

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End-of-Life Benefits and Toolkit Overview

The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) and the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) collaborated to develop a communications campaign to increase Veterans' awareness of the end-of-life benefits available to them.

As the PACT Act brings millions of additional Veterans and their families under the umbrella of VA benefits, it's important to highlight some of the lesser-known benefits that they may be entitled to. End-of-life planning impacts not only the Veteran, but also loved ones and survivors, which makes distribution of this information to multiple audiences especially important. Veterans who are more advanced in age, battling a serious illness or pass away suddenly may not be able to advocate for their benefits, in which case family members may become the targeted audience who will act upon the information distributed.

Ensuring Veterans and their families are informed about their earned benefits, sometimes well before the benefit is needed, is especially important when it comes to life insurance, end-of-life wishes, dependency benefits, and memorial and burial benefits. Without advanced knowledge of these benefits, Veterans and their survivors could potentially lose out on significant assistance and support while navigating the difficulty of the death of a loved one.

This toolkit provides resources for communicating about benefits offered by VA in support of end-of-life planning. Each of the resources can be used exactly as is, or they can be customized for your unique audience. Be sure to open the attachments listed at the end of the toolkit. They include additional items that can help you communicate about these important benefits. Please note that some attachments are also designed images for social media, or an appropriately sized image for a blog.

Additional information regarding the content found in this toolkit can be found at www.va.gov/plan-ahead.

End-of-Life Blog

End-of-Life benefits: Your checklist for planning ahead

As a Veteran, you've earned benefits that can help you provide for your loved ones and preserve your legacy. VA's end-of-life benefits include financial, health care and burial assistance. Making these benefits part of your estate and legacy planning can provide peace of mind and security for your family. No matter your age or health status, prepare your end-of-life benefits now so your loved ones don't have to.

Be prepared

Organize important planning documents and information to make the benefits process as easy as possible. Here are some tips to help you plan ahead:

- Create a living will that clearly outlines your care preferences.
- Include your DD-214 and insurance documents with your will. You can request your DD-214 at www.va.gov/records/get-military-service-records/.
- Ask your VA care team to help you document an Advance Care Plan (ACP). ACPs outline your preferences for future health care and designate a person you trust to make decisions on your behalf, if you are ever unable to do so yourself.
- Talk with your family about [survivor benefits](#) they may be entitled to and how to claim them after you pass away. These benefits include [VA Dependency and Indemnity Compensation \(DIC\)](#), [survivors pension](#) and [burial benefits](#).

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Benefits Administration – Office of Communication
End-of-Life Benefits Toolkit

Apply for benefits now

Easing the burden of end-of-life planning also means providing for your family's financial security and helping them preserve your legacy. Review VA's life insurance, pension and burial benefits, see if you're eligible, and apply now.

- [Veterans' Group Life Insurance \(VGLI\)](#) is term insurance available up to \$500,000 for service members who had Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance and have recently been discharged or separated from the military. Learn more and apply [online](#).
- [VALife](#) is a guaranteed acceptance whole life insurance program. It provides up to \$40,000 in coverage for Veterans aged 80 and under, with any level of service-connected disability rating, and does not require medical underwriting. You can apply online and get an instant decision.
- [Veterans Pension with Aid and Attendance](#) can help with expenses related to an assisted living facility, nursing home or caregiver fees.
- VA's no-cost burial benefits and burial allowances for Veterans include a gravesite in any of VA's national cemeteries with available space, perpetual care, opening and closing of the grave, a burial flag and more. You can file a [pre-need eligibility application](#) now to determine your eligibility for burial benefits.

Save the resources you and your family may need later

Bookmark the page www.va.gov/family-member-benefits/ for future reference. It has information and resources on benefits for your loved ones. You can also visit va.gov/plan-ahead to learn more about end-of-life planning.

Suggested Photo:



*Please find the appropriately sized image in the attachments.

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U.S. Department
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5

Top 10 End-of-Life Planning Talking Points When Speaking with Veterans

1. You've earned your benefits, and that includes benefits for your survivors. When planning for your estate and legacy, ensure your family receives those benefits by including VA end-of-life planning.
2. Some of the most difficult days for many are a loved one's final days and the days after. Getting started with VA end-of-life planning now helps your family in the future.
3. Organize important documents. Keep your will, DD-214, Advance Care Plan, life insurance policy and pre-need burial eligibility decision letter together.
4. Ask your VA health care team about making an Advance Care Plan (ACP). Any Veteran eligible for VA health care can receive ACP services, which clarify your values and preferences regarding future care.
5. Apply for Veteran's Pension with Aid and Attendance to help pay for your assisted living, nursing home or caregiver fees.
6. Apply for Veterans' Group Life Insurance (VGLI) for up to \$500,000 if you had Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance and recently separated from the military. Apply online at www.va.gov/life-insurance/options-eligibility/vgli/.
7. Apply for VALife if you're under 80 years old and have any level of service-connected disability rating. VALife doesn't require any medical questions for enrollment and offers coverage up to \$40,000. You can apply online and receive an instant decision at <https://insurance.va.gov/VALIFE/>.
8. Make sure your family knows about survivor benefits, such as VA Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC), if you believe your spouse could be entitled to this benefit following your death. You can find the form online at <http://www.va.gov/disability/dependency-indemnity-compensation/>.
9. VA burial benefits can help service members, Veterans and their family members plan and pay for a burial or memorial service in a VA national cemetery. Family members can also order memorial items to honor the service of a Veteran. Find out more information at www.va.gov/burials-memorials/. You can file a pre-need eligibility application at www.va.gov/burials-memorials/pre-need-eligibility/ in advance to determine your eligibility for burial benefits.
10. Search any of these topics on VA.gov or visit at <https://www.va.gov/family-member-benefits/> to learn more about survivor benefits.

Top 10 End-of-Life Planning Talking Points When Speaking with Survivors

1. If you've lost a loved one who was a Veteran, it can be hard to know where to start to receive your benefits. Survivor benefits provide one-time and monthly benefits after your Veteran passes away. Visit www.va.gov/survivors/ to learn more about these important benefits.
2. Keep end-of-life documents accessible as you apply for your survivor benefits. Your Veteran's will, DD-214, life insurance policy and pre-need burial eligibility decision letter will be helpful throughout this process.
3. VA Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) is a tax-free monthly benefit paid to eligible survivors. There's no time limit to apply, but if you apply within a year of the Veteran's death, you may be eligible for benefits back to the date of death. Apply online at www.va.gov/disability/dependency-indemnity-compensation/.
4. VA Survivors Pension offers monthly payments to qualified surviving spouses and unmarried dependent children of wartime Veterans who meet certain qualifications. See if you qualify at www.va.gov/pension/survivors-pension/.
5. VA Aid and Attendance or Housebound benefits are increased monthly payments of VA pension or VA DIC. These benefits are available for qualifying survivors who need help with daily activities or are housebound. Learn more at www.va.gov/pension/aid-attendance-housebound/.
6. A Month of Death payment is a one-time benefit that provides an eligible surviving spouse with the pension or compensation payment due to the Veteran during their month of death. If you believe you're eligible for this benefit, visit at <https://www.va.gov/family-member-benefits/> or contact your local VA Regional Office.
7. VA Accrued Benefits are benefits due, but not yet paid to a beneficiary, prior to the Veteran's death. Visit benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets/general/Accrued.pdf to learn more about Accrued Benefits.
8. If your Veteran had a pre-need decision letter that confirms eligibility for burial benefits, you or a funeral home director can call the National Cemetery Scheduling Office at 800-535-1117 (TTY: 711) to request a burial.
9. If your Veteran did not have a pre-need decision letter regarding eligibility for burial benefits, you can learn more about applying for these benefits at www.va.gov/burials-memorials/veterans-burial-allowance/.
10. You can preserve your Veteran's legacy on the Veterans Legacy Memorial (VLM). VLM is a digital platform dedicated entirely to the memory of Veterans interred in VA's national cemeteries and VA-funded state, territorial and tribal Veterans cemeteries. You can "find a Veteran" and post tributes, upload images, share their military service and more at www.va.gov/remember/.



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News Release

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EMBARGOED UNTIL RELEASED BY VA AT 10AM ON 8/3/23

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Aug. 3, 2023

VA launches mobile medical units to increase access to health care for homeless Veterans

WASHINGTON — Today, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced that it will deploy 25 mobile medical units across the country during the next six months to provide health care and support to homeless and at-risk Veterans. The first MMU arrived today at the VA Orlando Healthcare System, and the full deployment schedule for upcoming MMUs can be viewed [here](#).

Mobile medical units are vans or trucks that move from one location to another to provide a private space for eligible Veterans to meet with medical providers, including mental health clinicians, social workers, and other staff that provide primary care, women’s health, audiology, laboratory, and telehealth services to those who may not have access to a local VA medical center.

Ending Veteran homelessness is a top priority for VA, and President Biden has made supporting Veterans a key pillar of his [Unity Agenda](#) for the nation. In 2022 alone, [VA housed more than 40,000 formerly homeless Veterans](#), prevented more than 17,700 Veterans and their families from falling into homelessness, and helped nearly 191,700 additional Veteran families who were experiencing financial difficulties retain their homes or avoid foreclosure. Thanks in part to these efforts, the number of Veterans experiencing homelessness [has fallen by 11% since early 2020](#) and by more than 55% since 2010. In 2023, VA has set a goal to house [at least 38,000 Veterans](#).

“Veterans experiencing homelessness face a variety of barriers to accessing health care, including a lack of transportation,” said **VA Secretary Denis McDonough**. “With these new mobile medical units, homeless and at-risk Veterans don’t have to visit VA hospitals — we come right to them.”

This announcement builds on sweeping new investments to address Veteran homelessness [announced](#) by the White House in June.

VA’s efforts to end Veteran homelessness are built upon the evidence-based “Housing First” approach, which prioritizes first getting a Veteran into housing and then providing them with the wraparound support they need to stay housed, including health care, job training, legal and education assistance, and more.

These MMUs have been made available through VA’s [Homeless Patient Aligned Care Teams](#), whose mission is to address the unique needs and distinct challenges homeless Veterans face both accessing and engaging in health care. In addition to MMUs, VA already has 83 [Mobile Vet Centers](#) around the country to provide confidential counseling and outreach to eligible individuals in communities that are distant or remote from existing services.

If you are a Veteran who is experiencing homelessness or at risk for homelessness, call the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at 877-4AID-VET (877-424-3838). Visit the [VA Homeless Programs website](#) to learn about housing initiatives and other programs for Veterans exiting homelessness.

[VA.gov Technical Issues Update](#)

Today, VA announced that it has uncovered two technological issues with VA.gov, resulting in delays for some Veterans who sought to update their dependency status or file appeals online.

- **VA.gov dependency status update issue:** An estimated 56,000 Veterans who filed a request to update their dependency status online since online filing became available in 2011 did not have those claims successfully processed by VA.gov – meaning that VA was likely delayed in adding or removing a dependent from these Veterans' profiles, which could have increased or decreased their monthly benefit payments. We are implementing a fix to this problem to ensure that no further Veterans are impacted, working to identify the exact number of impacted Veterans, and taking steps to urgently review and process the delayed requests. We will ensure that all underpaid Veterans receive the full backdated benefits they deserve, and that no Veterans are negatively impacted by our error. While VA first began investigating this issue in August 2021, the full scope and urgency of the problem wasn't understood across VA until August 2023. The delay in understanding and fixing this issue is unacceptable, and we are working around the clock to ensure that it does not happen again.
- **VA.gov appeals issue:** On September 1, VA identified and fixed a technical issue on VA.gov that had prevented an estimated 900 Veterans from appealing their decisions online since July 27. Specifically, when some Veterans attempted to access the online "[Notice of Disagreement](#)" form, the website did not load due to a software bug that was accidentally introduced to the website during a planned update on July 27. VA began investigating this issue on August 31, quickly implemented a fix to address the bug on September 1, and we are now monitoring to ensure that no further Veterans are impacted by it. We are working urgently to identify the impacted Veterans, contact them, and ensure that they are able to successfully submit their appeals – without any impact on their appeal date or their place in line.

We at VA deeply apologize to all impacted Veterans, and we are working urgently to identify them, contact them, and ensure that they get all of the benefits and appeals decisions that they deserve. In both cases, VA has confirmed that we will be able to identify and contact all impacted Veterans and ensure that they are not further impacted in any way.

While these issues have impacted a small percentage of total appeals and dependency updates, it's unacceptable for even one Veteran to be delayed due to technological issues. We are taking immediate steps to prevent issues like this from happening in the future – and to ensure that when issues do arise, they are identified and fixed much more quickly. These steps include:

- **Conducting a full review of all VA.gov processing systems.** During this review, we will look at every place where Veterans submit applications, claims, or other forms to ensure that the process is working quickly and efficiently – and that no Veterans are being delayed as a result of unacceptable technological errors.
- **Creating new technological measures to immediately flag any claims that are not processed correctly,** so they can be addressed immediately. This will include notifications of VA leadership across the enterprise – including leaders in VA's Veterans Benefits Administration and Office of Information Technology – and the creation of a new process that automatically triggers an internal investigation when there is an unexpected change in volume of claims, appeals, or other submissions.
- **Investigating the bug on the [Notice of Disagreement](#) form** to determine why it was not caught during pre-publication testing – and making any necessary changes to ensure this doesn't happen again.
- **Investing in modernizing our claims processing infrastructure** to ensure a seamless, error-free experience for Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors on VA.gov.

We will resolve these issues, prevent them from happening in the future, address them more quickly when needed, and – most importantly – make sure that all impacted Veterans get the benefits and service that they deserve as quickly as possible.

[Additional Background on VA.gov Dependency Issue](#)

What happened?

An estimated 56,000 Veterans who filed a request to update their dependency status online since online filing became available in 2011 did not have those claims successfully processed by VA.gov (or its predecessor, eBenefits) – meaning that VA was likely delayed in adding or removing a dependent from these Veterans' profiles, which could have increased or decreased their monthly benefit payments.

We are currently implementing a fix to this problem to ensure that no further Veterans are impacted by it, and we are taking steps to urgently review and process the delayed requests. We will ensure that all underpaid Veterans receive the full backdated benefits they deserve, and that no Veterans are negatively impacted by our error. We will also contact all affected Veterans by mail to advise them of the error and assure them that their previously submitted claims will be addressed.

In total, over 574,000 Veterans have filed a VA Form 686c or VA Form 21-674 (through VA.gov, eBenefits, and other corresponding systems) to update their dependency status since 2011 – resulting in over 749,000 total electronic submissions. Of those dependency updates, VA is reviewing the claims of an estimated 56,000 Veterans to ensure that the proper adjustments to benefits have been made. These reviews could result in either no action (in cases where VA has already updated the dependency status) or adjustments to monthly benefits payments. Reviews are ongoing to determine the exact number of impacted Veterans, and this estimated number could rise or fall as a result.

While VA first began investigating this issue in August 2021, the full scope and urgency of the problem wasn't understood across VA until August 2023. The delay in understanding and fixing this issue is unacceptable, and we are working around the clock to ensure that it does not happen again. We deeply apologize to these Veterans for the delay in processing their claims, and we will ensure they receive the benefits they've earned as quickly as possible.

What is VA doing to inform Veterans of the issue?

We at VA are working urgently to identify the exact number of impacted Veterans and directly contact them by mail. To ensure that Veterans are informed, we have also notified Veterans Service Organizations, Congressional leaders, and State Directors of Veterans Affairs about this issue. We are also updating the VA Hotline and VA Technical Support call center to make sure that any Veterans who call us get the information and support they need. Telephone assistance is available Monday through Friday, 8:00am to 9:00pm EST by calling 1-800-827-1000.

Why did it take so long to identify this issue?

The delay in understanding and fixing this issue is unacceptable – and we are working around the clock to ensure that it does not happen again. Moving forward, we are creating a new process that automatically triggers an investigation when there is an unexpected change in volume of claims, appeals, or other submissions. This process will help us immediately identify and fix future issues of this type. We are also creating additional internal monitoring and feedback systems to ensure early detection of such issues in the future.

Has the technological issue been resolved?

VA has taken steps to fix the technical issue, and as of now, less than 1 percent of submitted dependency claims are experiencing this error. Any submissions that experience this error are being tracked, and VA will be manually establishing all claims that experience the error to ensure that no further Veterans are impacted by this issue.

Is this the same issue that impacted Veterans attempting to apply for PACT Act benefits before August 10?

No, this is a separate issue – but all recent technical issues will be reviewed as a part of our full review of VA.gov. We are taking urgent steps to prevent issues like this from happening in the future – and to ensure that when issues do arise, they are identified and fixed much more quickly.

[Additional Background on VA.gov Appeals Issue](#)

What happened?

On September 1, VA identified and fixed a technical issue on VA.gov that had prevented some Veterans from appealing their decisions online since July 27. Specifically, when some Veterans attempted to access the online “[Notice of Disagreement](#)” form, the website did not load. Instead, these Veterans saw a frozen or blank screen in their web browsers when they attempted to access the online form.

This issue happened because a software bug was accidentally introduced to VA.gov on July 27 when we made a planned change to the Notice of Disagreement form. As a result of this bug, the average volume of online NOD submissions dropped from ~33 per day before July 27 to ~8 per day after July 27, meaning that approximately 900 Veterans were potentially prevented from submitting an online NOD until the issue was discovered on September 1.

VA began investigating potential issues with the online Notice of Disagreement form on August 31. We identified the bug and implemented a fix to address it on September 1, and we are monitoring to ensure that no further Veterans will be impacted by it.

We deeply apologize to all impacted Veterans, and we are working urgently to identify them, contact them, and ensure that they are able to successfully submit their appeals – without any impact on their appeal date or their place in line. We have confirmed that we will be able to identify the Veterans who may have been impacted and ensure that they are not adversely impacted in any way. We will continue to work with the utmost urgency to ensure that every impacted Veteran is able to successfully submit their claims appeal.

What is VA doing to inform Veterans of the issue?

We at VA are working urgently to identify the exact number of Veterans, determine whether they successfully submitted their notices of disagreement via another channel, and directly contact any remaining Veterans to ensure that they are able to successfully submit their appeals – without any impact on their appeal date or their place in line. We have confirmed that we will be able to identify every Veteran who may have been impacted by this issue and ensure that they are not further impacted in any way.

To ensure that Veterans are informed, we have also notified Veterans Service Organizations, Congressional leaders, and State Directors of Veterans Affairs about this issue. We are also updating the VA Hotline and VA Technical Support call center to make sure that any Veterans who call us get the information and support they need.

What would happen if a Veteran was prevented from filing their appeal as a result of this issue, and therefore missed their one-year window to file their notice of disagreement?

We will make sure that every Veteran who sought to file their appeal online – but was prevented from doing so as a result of this bug – is able to successfully submit their appeal, regardless of whether they missed their deadline.

Why did it take so long to identify this issue?

First and foremost, the delay in identifying and fixing this issue is unacceptable – and we are working around the clock to ensure that it does not happen again. In this specific case, there was an issue with the website loading, so error messages were not automatically created in our internal system as they normally would be. This prevented us from immediately identifying the issue and addressing it.

Moving forward, we are creating a new process that automatically triggers an investigation when there is an unexpected change in volume of claims, appeals, or other submissions. This process will help us immediately identify and fix future issues of this type. We are also creating additional internal monitoring and feedback systems to ensure early detection of such issues in the future.

GO GREEN AND GET THE BULLETIN VIA EMAIL



In our continual effort to reduce costs and lessen our “ecological footprint,” the Office of Veterans Advocacy is again asking for your help. In order to reduce printing and mailing costs, as well as the amount of paper used, we are asking you to volunteer to receive the bulletin via email.

The bulletin will arrive in your in-box every quarter as a Word document, which will allow to you forward or print and disseminate as many copies as you like. In addition to receiving the quarterly bulletin, you will also receive our annual Veterans Resource Directory via email.

If you can help us with our goal of reducing costs and the saving paper, please email Tiffany Barrett at tiffany.barrett@veterans.idaho.gov. Thanks for your help with this most worthwhile endeavor! And don't forget you can always view and print the Bulletin and Resource Directory by visiting our website at www.veterans.idaho.gov.

HISTORY OF THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER



On March 3, 1931, U.S. President Herbert Hoover signed an act that officially made "The Star-Spangled Banner" the national anthem for the United States. Before this time, the United States had been without any national anthem.

The words of "The Star-Spangled Banner" were first written on September 14, 1814, by Francis Scott Key as a poem titled, "The Defense of Fort McHenry." Key, a lawyer and an amateur poet, was being detained on a British warship during the British naval bombardment of Baltimore's Fort McHenry during the War of 1812. When the bombardment subsided and Key witnessed that Fort McHenry was still flying its huge American flag, he began writing his poem. (Historical Note: This flag was truly huge! It measured 42 by 30 feet!) Key recommended that his poem be sung as a song to the popular British tune, "To Anacreon in Heaven." It soon became known as "The Star-Spangled Banner."

"The Star-Spangled Banner" was published in a number of newspapers at the time, but by the Civil War it had become one of the most popular patriotic songs of the United States. By the late 19th century, "The Star-Spangled Banner" had become the official song of the U.S. military, but it wasn't until 1931 that the United States officially made "The Star-Spangled Banner" the official national anthem of the country.

Interestingly, it was Robert L. Ripley of "Ripley's Believe It or Not!" that spurred the interest of the American people to demand "The Star-Spangled Banner" to become the official national anthem. On November 3, 1929, Ripley ran a panel in his syndicated cartoon stating that "Believe It or Not, America has no national anthem." Americans were shocked and wrote five million letters to Congress demanding Congress proclaim a national anthem.

DATES TO REMEMBER



- July 2..... U.S. Army Air Corps established, 1926
- July 4..... Independence Day
- July 20..... Neil Armstrong walks on the moon, 1969
- July 27..... Korean War Armistice Day, 1953
- August 4..... U.S. Coast Guard established, 1790
- August 7..... Order of the Purple Heart established, 1782
- August 14..... Japan surrendered, ending WWII, 1945
- September 5..... Labor Day
- September 11..... Patriot Day
- September 14..... Star Spangled Banner written by Francis Scott Key, 1814
- September 16..... POW/MIA Day
- September 17..... FW Ladies Auxiliary organized, 1914
U.S. Constitution approved, 1787
- September 18..... U.S. Air Force established, 1947
- September 29..... Veteran of Foreign Wars (VFW) established, 1899

