



Veterans-For-Change Newsletter

A Voice of the Veterans

Week Ending Sunday, April 15, 2018

Volume 9, Issue 15



This-N-That

Parkinson's and ALS (aka Lou Gehrig's Disease), both are on the presumptive list with the VA, both are in the same family of illnesses and in my personal opinion and based also on personal experience are the two worst possible diseases anyone can possibly be diagnosed with.

They make you a prisoner in your own body

while you can see, hear, understand what is going on around you, you can't do or say anything. You lose your ability to eat like anyone else, lose your ability to move what-so-ever, lose your ability to breath, and urinating and bowel movements are also humiliating.

And once the symptom's begin to appear, you begin to lose what dignity you have and must rely on someone to take care of your every need.

The worst part of it all, and I only found this out just recently is your brain damage can actually start a decade before any symptoms begin to appear!

There are not blood test, or X-Ray, Cat-Scan or MRI that can help in a diagnosis. Doctors need to run every single imaginable test under the sun with negative results to rule out all other possibilities before they can lay out your diagnosis of Parkinson's or ALS.

Typically once you receive a diagnosis, life expectancy is approximately 5 years. And I

can't say it's a blessing for those who survive longer, but there are so many like my dad who we began to see his symptoms in August 2005 and he didn't receive his diagnosis until mid to late September of the same year.

Dad passed away late April 2006, and I don't think the VA or Congress really recognizes how important care giver support is needed or what is involved, the stress, fatigue, exhaustion, frustration, etc. all take a toll on family.

For dad, passing so quickly as he did, I can only assume was a blessing for him as he did not want to live on machines.

There have been so many changes in the VA Caregiver program and assistance and financial aid support, none for the good.

When dad was diagnosed, and when it finally came down to 24/7 caregiver needs, the VA didn't have this program, or it was very strictly limited, and over the last couple of years for

many families has been a blessing in disguise.

Today, it's becoming more and more of a nightmare with all the cuts!

What I'm getting down to is asking for your help! You and your family may not need it today, and hopefully never will, but there are so many other Veteran's and families who desperately need all they can get and I'd like to ask you to please, take 30 minutes out of your day and call each of your reps and ask them to do all they can to support Veterans and families in the care giving programs. Then follow that up with an E-Mail which you can do by going to their individual websites and send a secondary message asking their full support.

On behalf of our Volunteers nationwide and myself, we wish you and your family good health!

Respectfully,

Jim Davis

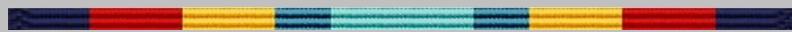
Founder

Jim.Davis@Veterans-For-Change.org



DoD's New Health Record System Has User Support

Despite some early hiccups, the Defense Department's new electronic health record system, known as MHS Genesis, appears to have won early support at the four military medical facilities in Washington state. Read the full 'Military Update' [story](#).



President Donald J. Trump Proclaims April 9, 2018, as National Former Prisoner of War Recognition Day

Since the days of the American Revolution, brave men and women have selflessly answered the call to protect and defend our great Nation. During the conflicts of the past two centuries, more than 500,000 United States service members have been captured

and held as prisoners of war (POWs). National Former Prisoner of War Recognition Day honors these American patriots, who each paid an extraordinary price to help preserve our liberty.

This year commemorates several significant military anniversaries, including the centennial observance of the Armistice that ended World War I, the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Kasserine Pass in World War II, the 65th anniversary of the Korean Armistice Agreement, the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War's Tet Offensive, and the 25th anniversary of the Battle of Mogadishu. Enemy forces captured and imprisoned American service members during each of these conflicts. During these battles, as with those throughout our Nation's history, military personnel carried out their missions undaunted by risk of capture or loss of life, because of their love for each other and their devotion to the principles of duty, honor, and justice.

On this day, we pay homage to the courageous

warriors who endured time in enemy hands and returned with honor to their families. During their capture, they faced loneliness, torture, hardship, separation from loved ones, and uncertainty about the future. In spite of unimaginable tribulations, these patriots persevered and survived. They are American heroes.

Former POWs remain actively engaged in communities throughout our country. Their efforts help fellow veterans and their families cope with life after military service. In addition, their stories are a source of inspiration for current and future generations. Former POWs and loved ones of military personnel who have not returned from past conflicts share a unique connection. Few people can comprehend the emotional toll, the loss, and the pain of uncertainty the families of the fallen or captured endure better than former POWs. Their encouragement, understanding, and outreach helps ensure that their fallen and unaccounted-for comrades are not forgotten.

As President, I remain committed to honoring and caring for former POWs. They have persevered through the harshest of conditions and, thankfully, have returned home to their loving families and a grateful Nation. They deserve our utmost reverence and respect.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, DONALD J. TRUMP, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim April 9, 2018, as National Former Prisoner of War Recognition Day. I call upon Americans to observe this day by honoring the service and sacrifice of all our former prisoners of war and to express our Nation's eternal gratitude for their sacrifice. I also call upon Federal, State, and local government officials and organizations to observe this day with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this

sixth day of April, in the year of our Lord two thousand eighteen, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and forty-second.

DONALD J. TRUMP

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/president-donald-j-trump-proclaims-april-9-2018-national-former-prisoner-war-recognition-day/>

Soure: TREA



Introducing Qualifying Life Events: Changes in Your Life May Mean Changes to Your TRICARE Options

When life changes for you and your family, your TRICARE options may also change. With TRICARE, certain life events (like moving due to a permanent change of station, getting married or divorced, adopting or having a baby, becoming Medicare eligible or losing health coverage) are called Qualifying Life Events (QLEs). QLEs include military and family-related changes.

Read the full article [here](#).



Veterans-For-Change Web Site

The Veterans-For-Change website has been under construction since day one back in 2009 and every day since then. The looks pretty

much stay the same, but in the background constant improvement and change is being done to make our website the most user friendly “One-Stop-Shop” website to find almost everything you might have tried to find searching the internet.

Almost a hundred people have been involved; collecting web links to documents now houses on the VFC website, collecting thousands of web links for various issues, illnesses and benefits. Creating forums for all eras of service and two forums one just for men and one just for woman where you can go question, comment, share medical and personal concerns, what ever you'd like it to be.

We also have a forum with a licensed Mental Health Worker, again where you can seek help or just ask questions.

We average 2,100 hits per day, and downloads average 1,200 per day with a total **4,006,236** visitors as of Friday.

If you subscribe you will have full access to the entire website and best of all it's FREE of charge! You just need a valid E-mail address so the system can send you a confirmation E-Mail. Once received, click on the link to be authorized automatically.

www.veterans-for-change.org

- Documents Library with over **16,387** documents on-line (Updated: 02/20/18)
- FAQ's with more than 1,600 FAQ's and answers
- Multiple Forums
 - o Afghanistan Veterans
 - o FMP - Foreign Medial Program
 - o Gulf War & Desert Storm Veterans
 - o Iraq Veterans
 - o Korean Veterans
 - o Men Veterans Forum
 - o Mental Health for Veterans (Counselor Needed)
 - o Political Issues
 - o Suggestion Box
 - o The Mess Hall

- o VA Hospitals and Medical Centers
- o Veteran Affairs
- o Vietnam Veterans
- o Welcome Mat
- o Women Veterans Forum
- o WW II Veterans
 - Job Postings
 - Memorial Pages (Updated: 01/11/18)
 - News (Articles On-Line: **7,273**)
 - Polls
 - Web Links, more than 3,625, Added 6 New Links (Updated: 02/19/18)

If you have a submission for the memorial pages, E-Mail: Jim.Davis@veterans-for-change.org



What You Need to Know About TRICARE and Retirement

You should know before you retire which TRICARE programs best suit your and your family's needs. Once you retire, you will only have 90 days from your retirement date to [enroll in a TRICARE](#) plan to continue TRICARE coverage. If you retire from active duty and are under age 65, you can choose either [TRICARE Prime](#) (where available) or [TRICARE Select](#) (available worldwide). If you live overseas, you may seek coverage under the [TRICARE Select Overseas](#). For more information, visit Enroll or Purchase a Plan on the [TRICARE website](#) and read the Retiring from Active Duty Brochure on the TRICARE website. For information about all TRICARE plans, visit the [TRICARE section](#).



OUR DEBT TO THE
HEROIC MEN AND VALIANT
WOMEN IN THE SERVICE
OF OUR COUNTRY CAN
NEVER BE REPAID. THEY
HAVE EARNED OUR
UNDYING GRATITUDE.
AMERICA WILL NEVER
FORGET THEIR SACRIFICES.

PRESIDENT HARRY S TRUMAN



**You May See a Reduction in
Your Combat
Compensation Payments**

If you receive Combat-Related Special Compensation ([CRSC](#)) and have the Survivor Benefit Plan ([SBP](#)), you will soon see a decrease in your CRSC payment. Beginning with this month's SBP premiums, DFAS will start deducting the monthly payments from CRSC when retired pay isn't enough to cover the full amount of the premiums. For more details, see this [Paycheck Chronicles post](#).



LT Bobby Ross

April's Featured Song

LT is #1 Singer in World

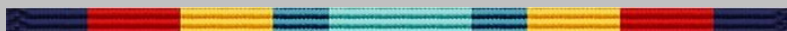
LT's #1 Song in 2017

LT's #2 Song Honoring Native Americans
Autistic Farmers Of America (AFOA)

LT Bobby Ross

PATRIOTIC MUSIC

Remember this site is an Internet Adventure.
All you need do is click on the pictures and any
highlighted word, and you are launched to
another world in Cyberspace. Try it! So much
fun!



VA Failed to Perform Background Checks for Thousands of Medical Providers

A recent Inspector General report at the
Department of Veterans' Affairs found that

6,200 workers have not received any background screening. Another 10,400 employees, or one in eight workers hired by the Veterans Health Administration between 2012 and 2016, did not have their investigations conducted in a timely matter.

Its findings were based on a sample of various VHA medical facilities. By failing to properly to investigate its employees, the IG said, VA was risking putting unqualified or otherwise problematic employees in charge of veterans health care.

Needless to say, this is entirely unacceptable. Veterans deserve to have properly vetted medical personnel.

Most VA medical professionals, such as physicians, nurses, pharmacists and lab technicians, are required to undergo the lowest-level "tier one" investigation to verify their suitability for the job. The Office of Personnel Management conducts the review and sends its findings back to VA to determine

if any "derogatory information" should disqualify employees from their position. Investigation results are then expected to be retained both at VA and OPM.

The IG found, however, that VHA was not initiating the investigations in about 6 percent of cases. Agency adjudicators were also not reviewing in a timely manner the investigations that were conducted, which federal regulations require to happen within 90 days. Some employees whose background checks were never initiated had been working at the department for several years, the IG found, despite the requirement for the reviews to begin within 14 days.

Source: TREA





H.R. 3605 and S. 2038, Fairness for Korean DMZ Veterans Act of 2017

Representative Thomas McArthur (NJ) and Senator Jerry Moran (KS) introduced H.R. 3605 and S. 2038, respectively, the Fairness for Korean DMZ Veterans Act of 2017.

Currently, VA regulations provide that any veteran who, during active military, naval, or air service, served between April 1, 1968, and August 31, 1971, in a unit that, as determined by the Department of Defense, operated in or near the Korean demilitarized zone (DMZ) in an area in which herbicides are known to have been applied during that period, shall be presumed to have been exposed during such service to an herbicide agent.

This bill would define the exposure to herbicides as a veteran who, during active military, naval, or air service, served in or near the Korean DMZ, during the period beginning on September 1, 1967, and ending on August 31, 1971.

In accordance with DAV Resolution No. 025, we support this legislation to recognize September 1, 1967 as the earliest date for exposure to herbicides on the Korean DMZ. This change will provide veterans greater equity with respect to herbicide exposure and the presumptive diseases associated with it.

Please use the prepared letter or draft your own to urge your Representative to support and cosponsor H.R. 3605.

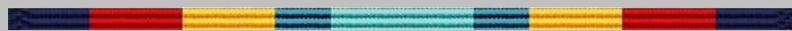
Thank you for your continued advocacy through the DAV Commander's Action Network (DAV CAN)

Take Action



Up to \$1 Million SGLI/VGLI Supplement from Just \$41 a Month

Get coverage customized to your family's needs. Get up to \$1 million coverage from just \$41 a month. Because tomorrow is never guaranteed, [start protecting your family today.](#)



**CONTACT YOUR
MEMBERS OF CONGRESS!**

To Call your Representative:

202-225-2305

To Call your Senators:

202-224-3841 or 202-224-3553

To call Different Members of Congress:

202-224-3121

TOLL FREE: 866-272-6622

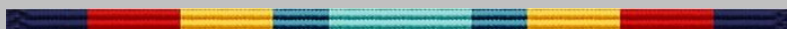
PLEASE... STOP Making Excuses!

www.veterans-for-change.org



New Ruling: Chronic Pain Now a VA Disability

A recent ruling by the [U.S. Court of Appeals](#) for Veterans Claims may have a major effect on the outcome of many veteran's disability claims. On April 3, the court ruled that pain, without any underlying disability, may be a valid reason for awarding [VA compensation benefits](#). For more details, see this [article](#).





IN REMEMBERANCE FOR ALL OF OUR POW'S & PURPLE HEART RECIPIENTS & FAMILIES

Fellow Veterans:

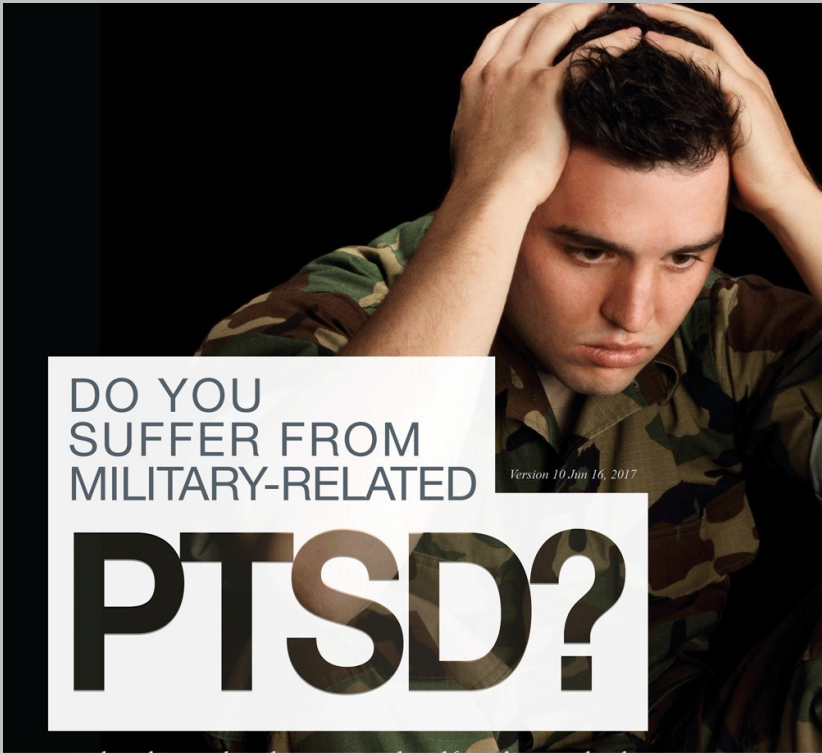
The Raising of the POW/MIA Flag Will take place in front of the County Administration Building on: Tuesday May 15, 2018 at 7:30 A.M. The St. Johns County Commissioners will issue a Proclamation designating the county as a PURPLE HEART COUNTY A Purple Heart County Designates Our County as one that recognizes those in our community who gave their lives or were wounded in combat defending our American Freedoms Date & Time: May 15, 2018 at 9:00A.M. Location: SJC

County Commission Meeting at the SJC
Auditorium, County Administration Building,
500 San Sebastian View St. Augustine, Florida
32084

We would like to have every veteran who has received a Purple Heart while serving in any military branch of the Armed Forces to join us at the County Commission meeting when the proclamation is presented to the Veterans Council. The County Commissioners and Veterans Council would like to recognize you on that day and thank you for your service to our country.

Courtesy:
Michael Isam





DO YOU
SUFFER FROM
MILITARY-RELATED

Version 10, Jun 16, 2017

PTSD?

**Veterans Crisis Line:
1-800-273-8255 & Press 1
Ntl Call Center for Homeless Vets
1-877-424-3838**



S. 2131, Support Emergency Services for Newborns of Women Veterans

DAV is proud to support S. 2131, the VA Newborn Emergency Treatment Act. This bill would authorize the VA Secretary to provide payment for emergency transportation in cases where a newborn of a woman veteran requires treatment at a more specialized medical facility. If a veteran mother and infant are transported to another medical facility together, VA is authorized to pay for that transportation. Currently, VA lacks clear authority to pay for the transportation of the newborn infant alone. However, this legislation would provide such authority.

In concurrence with DAV resolution 225, which calls for enhancing women's health care services, DAV believes women veterans deserve a robust maternity care benefit that allows their infants basic transportation coverage for care that would be covered under

Medicaid and most private insurance plans. Maternity care is an important benefit to the large portion of women veterans who use VA services. Many women veterans for whom VA coordinates maternity care are at high-risk for pregnancy complications, including pre-term labor or low-birth weight newborns, because of service-connected conditions. Infants born to these mothers often require more specialized and intensive services after birth; however, not all hospitals have such services available and transportation for the infant, but not necessarily the mother becomes necessary.

Please help us ensure that VA covers the expense of emergency transportation for the newborns of women veterans. Use the prepared letter to ask your Senators to support S. 2131, the VA Newborn Emergency Treatment Act.

Thank you for your support of our nation's women veterans and the DAV CAN-the Commander's Action Network.

Take Action



Our values
match yours.



www.veterans-for-change.org



Your Tricare Supplement: Save on Co-Pays & Rx Costs Now

Get a Tricare supplement that pays your cost shares and can pay 100% of covered excess charges. Get [valuable coverage](#) now.



Need Help Selecting the Right School?

CollegeRecon is a no-cost online research tool designed to help veterans, service members and their families select the colleges and universities that fit their unique lifestyle and experience, all while maintaining their privacy. [CollegeRecon](#) provides information regarding housing, out-of-pocket costs and military and veteran support programs from nearly 3,000 schools to help you make the best decision regarding your future.





Vets Don't Need 20% Down with the VA Loan Benefit

2018 is here and the VA Loan Limits have increased again, now worth up to \$453k financing. Now is the time to use this great benefit. Qualified borrowers can buy or refi with as little as \$0 down, and have no PMI payments with great rates and financing up to \$453k. Use your [VA Loan Benefit](#) today.



9 Discounts for the Month of the Military Child

April is designated as the [Month of the Military Child](#). Throughout the month, "military brats" are recognized for the sacrifices they make because they have a parent in the military. In honor of the Month of the Military Child, here are [9 military discounts for kids](#) and their families.



Update About FEDVIP (Federal Employee Dental and Vision Insurance Program) for TRICARE Beneficiaries

Recently we have been getting more questions in our Washington office about the pending FEDVIP program. And it is very sensible that people are concerned; since we have some new information it is a good time to write about it again.

On December 31, 2018 the present TRICARE

Retiree Dental Program (TRDP) will cease to exist. In its place will be the FEDVIP Dental Plan. Anyone who is presently eligible to enroll in TRDP will be eligible to sign up for FEDVIP Dental. This change was authorized by FY17 NDAA Section 715. The new program, like the old is a voluntary dental benefits plan with enrollee paid premiums. (That means retirees and their families from the 7 Uniformed Services.)

FEDVIP will, be run by the federal Office of Personnel Management (OPM), not DoD. The enrollment season for this program is November 12th 2018 - December 11th 2018 with coverage beginning on January 1st 2019. There will be no rollover from the present TRICARE Retiree Dental Program (TRDP). If you don't sign up during the enrollment season you will not be covered in 2019.

There are no waiting periods for work except some carriers plans with orthodontia work.

This is the same voluntary program that is

available to federal civilian retirees, annuitants (retirees) and their families. The OPM has been running this program for 12 years and it is very popular.

The Defense Health Agency DHA has put up a website at www.TRICARE.Benefeds.com where you can sign up for updates. At this time, it does not have a great deal of information on it but they are promising to add more.

You will be able to enroll thru BENFEDS site during the open season. This will be the primary site in which you enroll. However, DHA has also assured us that they will be opening a call center before the open season so you can ask questions and enroll by phone as well.

For the first time you will also be able to sign up for a vision insurance plan through DHA. Again, all retirees and their families from the 7 Uniformed Services will be eligible for the plan. Additionally, Active Duty Family Members will be eligible for the vision plan.

DHA is telling us that we will learn the 2019 FEDVIP plan rates in Mid-October. In the meantime, since this is the same program presently being run by OPM if you go to their website, click insurance and then click dental and vision you can see what commercial plans are presently in the program what they cover and what they cost in 2018. There may be some changes next year but nothing major is expected. So you can get a real idea of the many plans that are included and which one will be best for you and your family. Again, as we get more information we will publish it for you.

Source: TREA





Never forget our fallen!



FEDVIP Brings Vision Coverage to TRICARE Beneficiaries

Eye exams can help keep your vision strong, diagnose potential issues early, and prevent diseases that may lead to vision loss or blindness. Beginning with the 2018 Federal Benefits Open Season (Nov. 12 to Dec. 10, 2018), beneficiaries enrolled in a TRICARE health plan will be eligible to enroll in the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP). Coverage will start Jan. 1, 2019.

Read the full article [here](#).



AF Expands Child Care Hours

The Air Force expanded the number of hours it will provide free child care for families of military members deployed or on remote assignments beginning April 1, 2018. The change provides 16 hours of pre-deployment, 16 hours each month during deployment or remote assignment, and 16 hours of post-deployment care per child. This increases free care from a maximum of 48 hours total for those same periods previously. To apply, Airmen must provide a copy of deployment or permanent change of station orders and complete an Air Force FCC Expanded Child Care Request. Airmen can visit their installation family child care office for more information.



Veteran Crisis Resources

Veterans Crisis Line 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1

Military Crisis Line 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

National Call Center for Homeless Veterans

1-877-4AID-VET (424.3838)

VA Caregiver Support Line 1-855-260-3274



Links to Other Stories

- 1) [5 things to know about VA nominee Ronny Jackson](#)
- 2) [Affordable Dentures & Implants® Launches Pro Bono Implant Treatment Initiative For U.S. Veterans, Homeless](#)
- 3) [BEYOND THE 'BROKEN VETERAN': A HISTORY OF AMERICA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH ITS EX-SOLDIERS](#)
- 4) [Ex-CIA chief: Trump's VA nominee will hurt our Veterans](#)
- 5) [How Veterans Are Powering the Democrats' 2018 Hopes](#)

- 6) Levelland native nominated as new Secretary of Veterans Affairs
- 7) Major Fallout from Firing of Veterans Secretary
- 8) New March Air Reserve Base village offers a haven for homeless Veterans
- 9) Trump looks to replace David Shulkin with Adm. Ronny Jackson as Veterans Affairs secretary
- 10) Veteran kills himself in St. Louis VA hospital waiting room, report says

You can help VFC by reading articles posted and commenting at the bottom and rate the articles. If you don't have an account, sign up today, it's FREE. Your comments and rankings tell us what type of information you want most.

Check us out today: www.veterans-for-change.org

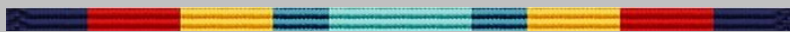


6 Unbeatable Benefits of VA Loans

Created before the close of World War II, the VA home loan benefit has helped millions of veterans, service members and military families achieve the dream of homeownership. Here's a look at [six of the biggest benefits](#) of these long-cherished home loans.



[Click here to follow us on Twitter](#)



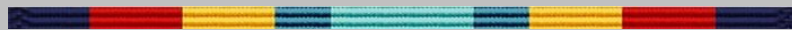
Service Members: Don't Make These 3 Mistakes with Your Money

Joe Chesloski, a personal financial counselor with more than 20 years of business and finance experience, is offering his perspective on the biggest mistakes service members make with their money — and how those mistakes can be avoided. For more details, see this Paycheck Chronicles [article](#).



Some Vets Can Get Reimbursed for Adoption Expenses

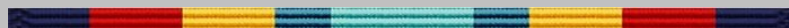
Veterans with a [service-connected disability](#) that results in infertility can now be reimbursed by the VA for adoption expenses. The VA approved the new rule on March 5, 2018. For more details on the rule and who is eligible, see this [post](#).





Reenlisting Marines Get a Break on Non-reg Tattoos

A new tweak to [Marine Corps](#) policy will reduce paperwork for re-enlisting Marines in the Individual Ready Reserve who have tattoos that fall outside regulations. The change was shared late last month with career planners and recruiters who work with prior-service Marines. For more details, see this [KitUp! post](#).



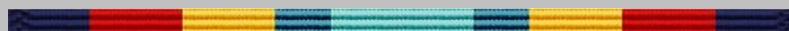
Veterans with any Disability Rating Get Free National Park Pass

A little-known benefit from the Interior Department gives military veterans with any disability rating from the [Department of Veterans Affairs](#) a [free lifetime pass](#) to national parks and other recreation areas, as well as discounts on some fees. For more details, see this [Military Advantage post](#). For more discounts for military families and veterans, visit the [Discount Center](#).



U.S. Government Accountability
Office Reports

- 1) Actions Needed to Improve Oversight of Community-Based Outpatient Clinics
- 2) Areas for Improvement in the Federal Reserve Banks' Information System Controls
- 3) CMS Needs to Ensure Complete Accurate Data on Terminations of Coverage for Nonpayment of Premiums
- 4) CMS Oversight of Medicare Beneficiary Data Security Needs Improvement
- 5) DOD Needs to Reevaluate Fighter Pilot Workforce Requirements
- 6) Improved Guidance and Oversight Needed for the Patient Advocacy Program
- 7) Information on Potential Implications of Expanding Private Disability Insurance
- 8) Opportunities Exist for Improving Veterans' Access to Health Care Services in the Pacific Islands



VA Helps Thousands of Older Veterans Find Alternatives to Potentially Risky Medications

By the late 1970s, benzodiazepines ranked among the most commonly prescribed medications in the world. These include Valium, Xanax and related medications that help calm activity in the brain. For many patients facing conditions such as anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder and depression, "benzos" became the answer.

But over time, that answer began to raise serious questions.

There is increasing evidence that benzodiazepines - along with other medications commonly prescribed for sleep, called "sedative hypnotics" - can increase the risk for adverse events like falls, hip fractures, cognitive impairment, motor vehicle crashes, drug dependence and withdrawal, and even death by overdose.

In October 2015, [VA launched a nationwide effort](#) to address the issue in a particularly vulnerable population: Veterans ages 75 and older. This effort marked phase two of VA's Psychotropic Drug Safety Initiative (PDSI), and it aimed to reduce the use of these medications, encourage the use of safer therapies and appropriate monitoring, and enhance prescribing practices for older Veterans.

"There are a lot of Veterans that I have met who have been taking these medications for a very long time," said Dr. Ilse Wiechers, a VA geriatric psychiatrist and an assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at Yale University's School of Medicine. "They were started many, many years ago by a very well-meaning and well-intentioned provider who was trying to help them, usually with problems with sleep or with anxiety. In the interim ... we now have evidence that shows there are safe and effective treatments for things like insomnia and anxiety disorders that are less potentially risky and harmful."

By June 2017, the initiative had achieved dramatic results: More than 30,000 Veterans benefited from improvements in prescribing practices, and the number of Veteran outpatients who received prescriptions for benzodiazepines or sedative hypnotics fell by more than 20,000.

"We really wanted to focus on these older Veterans because there's a growing number of older patients coming into our system," said Wiechers, who is the national director for PDSI. "Because they are so vulnerable to some of the side effects of [these] particular medications and the VA is well-equipped to provide alternative, evidence-based treatments, we wanted to make sure that they're getting the best treatment possible and not being prescribed these medications in excess."

Here's how it worked: VA facilities across the country selected at least one of 14 prescribing metrics to prioritize over the course of the initiative. For example, some chose reducing

benzodiazepine use by older Veterans, while others chose to monitor for particular side effects in Veterans taking an antipsychotic.

The PDSI program office then provided the facilities with support tools, technical assistance, educational and collaboration opportunities, and quarterly metrics to monitor progress. Facilities that may have widely prescribed benzodiazepines for insomnia prior to PDSI relied more heavily on cognitive behavioral therapy instead. Likewise, those that had prescribed benzodiazepines widely for anxiety may have shifted toward alternative, safer pharmacotherapy like antidepressants.

As a result, overall performance across the entire VA improved in all 14 metrics.

- Over 5,700 fewer Veterans with dementia received a prescription for benzodiazepines.
- Over 5,200 fewer Veterans received potentially harmful, highly anticholinergic medications.
- Over 1,400 fewer Veterans with dementia

received a prescription for antipsychotics.

"The thing that I was most excited about ... was the success that we had in reducing the use of benzodiazepines and sedative hypnotics in our older Veterans," Wiechers said. "This has often been viewed by both patients and their providers as something that is difficult to do. They often will push back on the idea that we should be targeting reduction of benzodiazepines, because they're really hard to taper off, or at least people believe that they're really hard to taper off. But we were able to have quite a bit of success."

That was the case in Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 16, where six of the eight facilities made it a priority to reduce the prescription of benzodiazepines.

"We have had patients on the front end that were very, very agitated that we were reviewing the case and suggesting to discontinue [the use of benzos]," said Dr. Jason Hawkins, the pharmacy executive for

VISN 16. "The reward of that was, a few months later, we would have either the patient or the family members come back and actually thank the staff at the facility for holding our ground and really looking out for the best case for the Veteran. They would say things like they could actually remember interactions with their family now, rather than just being in a haze for a few years."

Both Hawkins and Dr. Stacy Hargrove, an academic detailer for VISN 16, said the initiative benefited from Wiechers' close work with individual VISNs. In addition, the PDSI dashboard proved a particularly effective tool, providing near real-time updates on how facilities were doing in all 14 metrics. With just a few clicks on the dashboard, staffers could drill down to actionable data, such as a list of all patients in the facility, ages 75 and older, with an active prescription for a benzodiazepine.

"I found that some providers, before I kind of demoed it with them, were just a little

intimidated by the idea of the dashboard and trying to find information in it," Hargrove said. "But once they saw how really simple it was to use, they were much more comfortable. So, in some ways, this was unique in that it was just very user-friendly - easy to get the data, easy to get the information you were looking for."

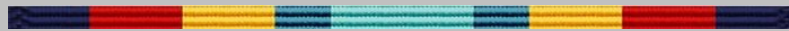
The PDSI team has now turned its attention to a critical next phase: improving access to medication-assisted treatment for Veterans with opioid and alcohol use disorders.

Particularly in the case of opioids, Wiechers calls it "an issue of life and death with people."

Already, the team has applied one lesson from its work targeting benzodiazepines: "The more facilities we have focusing on one specific performance area, the greater impact we can have across the whole system," she said. So instead of addressing 14 metrics, the team now focuses on just two, with about half of the VA health system working on alcohol misuse and the other half on the opioid issue.

"I really think that we're going to see a much more robust impact across the entire system," Wiechers said. In VISN 16, Hawkins sees successes to build on as well. "Just empower the leaders," he said. "The leaders are already in place, already engaged. Give them the information they need, and let them take ownership."

Source: TREA



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**Vet Benefits Assistance in
Puerto Rico**

The American Legion Department of Puerto Rico is providing membership and benefits training scheduled for April 9-12 in two locations. On April 9, a membership and veterans benefits workshop will take place from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. At department headquarters, located in the Las Lomas Professional Center at the corner of Jesus T. Piñero Avenue and San Patricio Avenue in San Juan. A veterans outreach effort also will take place at department headquarters from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. April 10-11. An additional effort will happen from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. April 12 at Caguas Post # 2, Carr 1 Antigua via Bairoala 25, Caguas, P.R. A veterans service officer will be available to assist.



TRICARE Nurse Advice Line Now in Japan and Korea

The Military Health System [Nurse Advice Line](#) (MHS NAL), a service available to TRICARE beneficiaries living in the U.S. and Europe, is now available to those living in Japan and South Korea. The MHS NAL allows you to speak with a registered nurse 24/7 for no cost. In Japan, you can reach the MHS NAL at 0066-33-821820. In South Korea, you can reach the MHS NAL from DSN by dialing 94-888-901-7144 or 888-901-7144. The MHS NAL toll-free number for South Korea is coming soon. The new [MHS NAL Beneficiary Portal](#) also gives you the option to discuss your health concerns with a registered nurse in a secure web chat or video chat.



1) [Acrodose PLus and PL Systems by](#)

Haemonetics: Recall - Low pH Readings for Platelets Stored in CLX HP Bag

2) Advocare Issues Allergy Alert in Select Bottles of Muscle Strength and Nighttime Recovery Product Because of Undeclared Milk Allergen on The Label

3) Aspire Food Group Issues Alert on Undeclared Sulfites in Exo Bars

4) Bob's Red Mill Natural Foods, Inc. Voluntarily Recalls Organic Amaranth Flour (22 Oz.) Because of Possible Health Risk

5) Club 13 Recalls Kratom Maeng Da Red Powder and Capsules Because of Possible Health Risk

6) Cookwell & Company Issues Allergy Alert for Undeclared Soy, Wheat and Fish Allergen in Charred Tomato & Basil Sauce with a "Best By" Date of "10 Nov 18"

7) Cut Fruit Express, Inc. Announces A Voluntary Recall of Fresh Bruschetta Mixed and Dips Because of Undeclared Soy and Milk

8) Essure Permanent Birth Control System by Bayer Healthcare: Announcement - FDA Restricts the Sale and Distribution

9) Guixens Food Group Issues Allergy Alert on

Undeclared Sulfites in La Marinera Brand Dried Yellow Potatoes

10) Independent Nutrition, Inc Issues Allergy Alert On Undeclared Milk in Ignite Pre-Workout Supplement Products

11) Maeng Da Red Powder and Capsules by Club 13: Recall - Possible Contamination With Salmonella

12) Nine Whole Foods Market Stores Issue Voluntary Recall for Explorateur French Triple Creme Cheese Due to Possible Health Risk

13) Premier Pharmacy Labs Issues Voluntary Nationwide Recall of Specific Sterile Injectable Products Lots Due to a Potential Lack of Sterility Assurance

14) Recall of Certain Lots of Izzy's Maple Nut Ice Cream Due to Undeclared Peanuts

15) Sterile Injectable Products by Premier Pharmacy Labs: Recall - Lack of Sterility Assurance

16) System 83 Plus Automated Endoscope Reprocessors (AERs) by Custom Ultrasonics: FDA Safety Communication - Completed Validation Testing



American Legion Child Welfare Grant Applications

Since 1955, more than \$13 million in American Legion Child Welfare Fund (CWF) grants have been awarded to nonprofits that support America's youth. The CWF application is available on the [CWF website](#). Applications will be accepted starting May 1 and must be postmarked to American Legion National Headquarters no later than July 15. CWF accepts funding proposals from nonprofits in a large geographic area for projects that contribute to the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual welfare of children. Donations to CWF can be made on the American Legion [website](#).



Implementing Respite Care

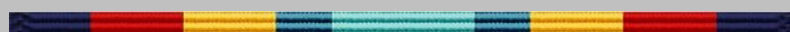
Caregivers need time for themselves, especially because the round-the-clock task of caregiving can be spiritually and socially isolating. Respite care can be rejuvenating for both the caregivers and the care recipients, but implementing it can be stressful. [This free course](#) from [PsychArmor Institute](#), sponsored by USAA, will help you understand the advantages and disadvantages of in-home care versus out-of-home care, as well as the different services available for both, in less than 15 minutes. Additionally, this course will guide you through financial resources that are available for your family. Access the course on the [PsychArmor Institute website](#).





Vet Outreach Effort in Wyoming

The American Legion is sponsoring a district revitalization and membership outreach effort April 14 in the Hot Springs County area. All wartime veterans in the area are invited to attend. The effort will take place from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. At Walter Haynes American Legion Post 18, 302 Broadway St., Thermopolis. A veterans service officer will be available to assist with Department of Veterans Affairs-related issues and other veterans benefits assistance.



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