

Greetings,

As my kids are starting to gear up for going back to school shopping, I can't help but think where has the time gone this year. The Polk County Veterans office this year has so far been a busy one and we have seen many changes to Veterans benefits. I will always refer to 2019 as the "Year of Change. "

I say that as this year the V.A. has changed its way of doing appeals, changed the Care in the Community program to the Mission Act and the big change this year is allowing Blue Water Vietnam Veterans to be eligible for Agent Orange presumptive, if the Veteran served within 12 miles from Vietnam borders. If you are a Blue Water Veteran from the Vietnam era and currently have a diagnosed Agent Orange presumptive you need to file the claim as soon as possible. If you filed a claim for Agent Orange presumptive in the past and were denied. The V.A. should reopen your claim, but I suggest you resubmit the claim to get on the claims docket sooner than later. The V.A. has a special team going through all the Navy ship logs indicating how close the ships were to the coast of Vietnam. Please contact our office and set up an appointment to get these Blue Claims completed. Read page 2 for more information.

Again, we are here to assist Veterans and their families with all Veterans benefits. So, please do not hesitate to call for our assistance.

Thank you for your Service,

*Kurt*

*Laurie*



# VIETNAM BLUE WATER NAVY VETERANS

*Disability benefits available  
to those serving offshore*

## **Agent Orange Exposure in the Republic of Vietnam Waters (Blue Water Navy)**

Blue Water Navy Veterans are now entitled to a presumption of service connection for conditions related to Agent Orange exposure. This extension of the presumption is a result of [Public Law 116-23](#), the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019, signed into law on June 25, 2019. The law takes effect January 1, 2020.

The law states that Veterans aboard a vessel operating not more than 12 nautical miles seaward from the demarcation line of the waters of Vietnam and Cambodia as defined in [Public Law 116-23](#), between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975, are presumed to have been exposed to herbicides such as Agent Orange and may be entitled to service connection for conditions related to that exposure.

To be entitled to disability compensation benefits, these Veterans must have one or more of the conditions associated with Agent Orange exposure that are listed in 38 Code of Federal Regulations section 3.309(e).

## **What conditions are related to Agent Orange exposure?**

Agent Orange presumptive conditions are:

- AL amyloidosis
- Chloracne, or other acneform disease consistent with chloracne
- Chronic B-cell leukemias
- Diabetes mellitus, Type 2
- Ischemic heart disease
- Hodgkin lymphoma, formerly known as Hodgkin's disease
- Non-Hodgkin lymphoma
- Multiple myeloma
- Parkinson's disease
- Peripheral neuropathy, early-onset
- Porphyria cutanea tarda
- Prostate cancer
- Respiratory cancers (lung, bronchus, larynx or trachea)
- Soft-tissue sarcoma (other than osteosarcoma, chondrosarcoma, Kaposi's sarcoma, or mesothelioma).

## **How do I file a claim for disability compensation?**

Apply at your local County Veterans Service Office  
OR

Work with an accredited representative or agent, OR

Go to a VA regional office and have a VA employee assist you. You can find your regional office on our [Facility Locator](#) page.

State on your application that you are filing for one of the presumed Agent Orange conditions.

Include any evidence you have of service in the offshore waters of the Republic of Vietnam during the required timeframe. Include the name(s) of the ship(s) and the date(s) you crossed within 12 nautical miles of the Republic of Vietnam, if you have that information.

Provide medical evidence showing a diagnosis of a current Agent Orange presumptive condition or tell us where you are being treated.

For more information on how to apply and for tips on making sure your claim is ready to be processed by VA, visit our [Disability Compensation](#) web page. [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)

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# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## **Do I need to prove contact with Agent Orange?**

No. You don't need to show that you came into contact with Agent Orange. Congress has provided that conditions on the list of presumptive diseases will be deemed to have been caused by contact with Agent Orange through service in the Republic of Vietnam, including offshore waters as defined by the Blue Water Navy Act of 2019. **What will the effective date for Benefits be for Blue Water Navy Veteran claims?**

Presumptive Agent Orange conditions granted for Blue Water Navy Veterans may be retroactive to the date VA received your original claim. If you had a previously denied claim and you resubmit your claim, the effective date will be determined on a case-by-case basis. **When do the Blue Water Navy presumptions go into effect?** The Blue Water Navy Act of 2019 will take effect on January 1, 2020.

Veterans can file claims at any time, and they will be decided after the law is implemented. Blue Water Navy claims and appeals currently in process have been placed on hold (stayed) until the new rules go into effect. The bipartisan Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act gives VA until Jan. 1, 2020, to begin deciding Blue Water Navy related claims. By staying claims decisions until that date, VA is complying with the law that Congress wrote and passed. **How will the previously denied claims be handled?** If you had an Agent Orange claim with one or more presumptive conditions denied in the past, you are urged to **file a new claim**. Provide any new and relevant information regarding your claim such as dates

you believe your ship traveled within 12 nautical miles of the Republic of Vietnam, or updated medical information. Claims that are currently in the VA review process or under appeal will be reviewed under the new policy.

**If a Blue Water Navy Veteran has not applied for benefits in the past, but would like to apply now will the presumption of exposure be extended to them?** Yes, VA will apply the provisions of the law to Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans who file new claims based on presumption of exposure to Agent Orange. **What happens if the Veteran dies before his or her claim is decided?** If the claimant dies while his or her claim is pending, a living dependent, such as a spouse or child, may file a request to be substituted as the claimant. **May the surviving spouse of a Blue Water Navy Veteran who passed away from a condition related to Agent Orange exposure, and who was previously denied compensation for such condition, become entitled to Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC)?** If the Veteran served on a Navy or Coast Guard ship that that operated not more than 12 nautical miles from the demarcation line of the waters of Vietnam and Cambodia as defined in the Blue Water Navy Act of 2019 and the cause of death was from a condition related to exposure to Agent Orange, then VA may award entitlement to DIC on that basis. **Where can I get additional information on disability compensation for Agent Orange?** Veterans with questions about benefits or filing a claim can visit the VA Agent Orange website [www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/hazardous-materials-exposure/agent-orange/navy-coast-guard-ships-vietnam/](http://www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/hazardous-materials-exposure/agent-orange/navy-coast-guard-ships-vietnam/). They can also call the disability benefits call center at 800-827-1000.



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 31, 2019

### MESSAGE FROM VA Secretary Robert Wilkie - "Fact check" inaccuracies in a recent news article

I want to call attention to several inaccuracies in a recent media "fact check" article that claimed the Trump administration is taking credit for progress made under the Obama administration.

This unfortunate piece went out of its way to misinterpret President Trump and my own words. Worse, it gets basic facts wrong in a way that could create a disincentive for Veterans to seek care at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

We should all be encouraging our Veterans to use our hospitals and clinics, but pieces such as these paint an incorrect picture of the VA that runs the risk of discouraging Veterans from using the benefits they have earned.

For example:

1. The piece criticized President Trump for saying, "we passed VA choice and VA accountability," and for saying people have been "trying to pass these things for 45 years." AP concluded Trump was "wrong" because "Trump is not the first president in 45 years to get Congress to pass Veterans Choice."

The President knows what he was talking about, even if the AP doesn't. In 2018, President Trump signed into law the MISSION Act, which gives VA the ability to implement the best practices we've learned in our nearly 75 years of experience offering community care. It consolidates VA's community care efforts into a single, simple-to-use program that puts Veterans at the center of their VA health care decisions.

He wasn't referring to the Veterans Choice Act, which became law under the Obama administration and created a narrow, temporary choice program that wasn't seen by anyone as a final answer. Either through neglect or willful ignorance, the AP quoted the President as referring to "VA Choice," with a Capital C, as if he meant that Obama-era bill, but he was referring to the concept of choice as defined in the MISSION Act.

Also, the piece conveniently leaves out the fact that President Trump signed the VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act of 2017, one of the most significant changes to civil service laws since the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 was passed more than four decades ago.

2. Along the way to making that flawed argument, the AP misinterpreted a statement made by the VA's top health official, Dr. Richard Stone, who said implementation of the MISSION Act should "almost be a non-event." The AP took that line out of context and imagined it to mean that few Veterans will choose care outside the VA because wait times are longer in the private sector, in an apparent effort to dismiss the value of the law the President signed.

That's news to Dr. Stone. We checked with him, and he said his "non-event" comment referred to the idea that implementation of the MISSION Act would not create any technical problems that would interrupt Veterans' efforts to seek care at the VA. He made the comment in Senate testimony in March, after being asked whether the MISSION Act would create any drastic changes to how Veterans interact with their VA providers.

3. The piece said the "key to the Choice program's success is an overhaul of the VA's electronic medical records," which will take up to 10 years. It also said I have estimated that full implementation of the "expanded Choice program" is still years away.

This is pure conjecture on the part of AP, plus it's wrong.

The Choice program will actually cease to exist on June 6, as the MISSION Act will create a new program that consolidates all of VA's community care programs, including Choice. The AP's "fact checkers" seem unaware of this crucial fact.

Also, while electronic health records modernization is an important improvement, it's not central to the success of the MISSION Act. No one from the VA has ever said implementation of the new private care option Veterans will have under the MISSION Act is "years" away because of our effort to modernize health records.



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4. The AP quoted me saying I took steps to make sure Veterans are at the center of their health care decisions, and connected that quote to

another one in which I said, "One of the things that we're doing at VA is that we have same-day mental health service."

But in the Fox News interview, those two comments happened about six minutes apart from each other. The AP ignored the back and forth of the interview for that long and misleadingly made it appear as if this was a single, related thought.

5. Finally, the piece quoted me saying that my effort to put dedicated leaders in our VA hospitals and clinics helped reduce VA wait times, as seen in a Journal of the American Medical Association study.

The AP is correct: that study measured wait times up until 2017, before my tenure. VA is seeing enough signs of improvement that it's easy

to confuse data sources under the hot lights of a TV set.

What I should have said was, we have our own internal data showing that wait times are continuing to improve since President Trump took office.

Our own data show the VA has completed more than 1.2 million more appointments through May 21 in FY 2019 compared to the same period the prior year, a sign our success in hiring more medical staff is bearing fruit for our Veterans.

Wait times for new primary and mental health care appointments have also fallen since President Trump took office. Any one of us, including me, is capable of speaking imprecisely at times. But it's another thing entirely when "fact checkers" do it themselves.



## MILITARY TRAVEL BENEFITS

United is pleased to offer a variety of benefits to active duty military members, including those who have been discharged from the military within 7 days of the date of travel. These benefits are available to members of the U.S. Army, U.S. Navy, U.S. Air Force, U.S. Marines, U.S. Coast Guard and National Guard, as well as cadets of the Air Force Academy, West Point, Naval Academy, Merchant Marine Academy and Coast Guard Academy.

### VETERANS ADVANTAGE DISCOUNTS

#### Veterans Advantage

[www.veteransadvantage.com](http://www.veteransadvantage.com)

- This United Airlines discount is available 365 days a year, with no blackouts.
- Discounts apply to travel in all 50 states, Canada, Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean
- Combine United's MileagePlus frequent flyer miles with your Veterans Advantage discount

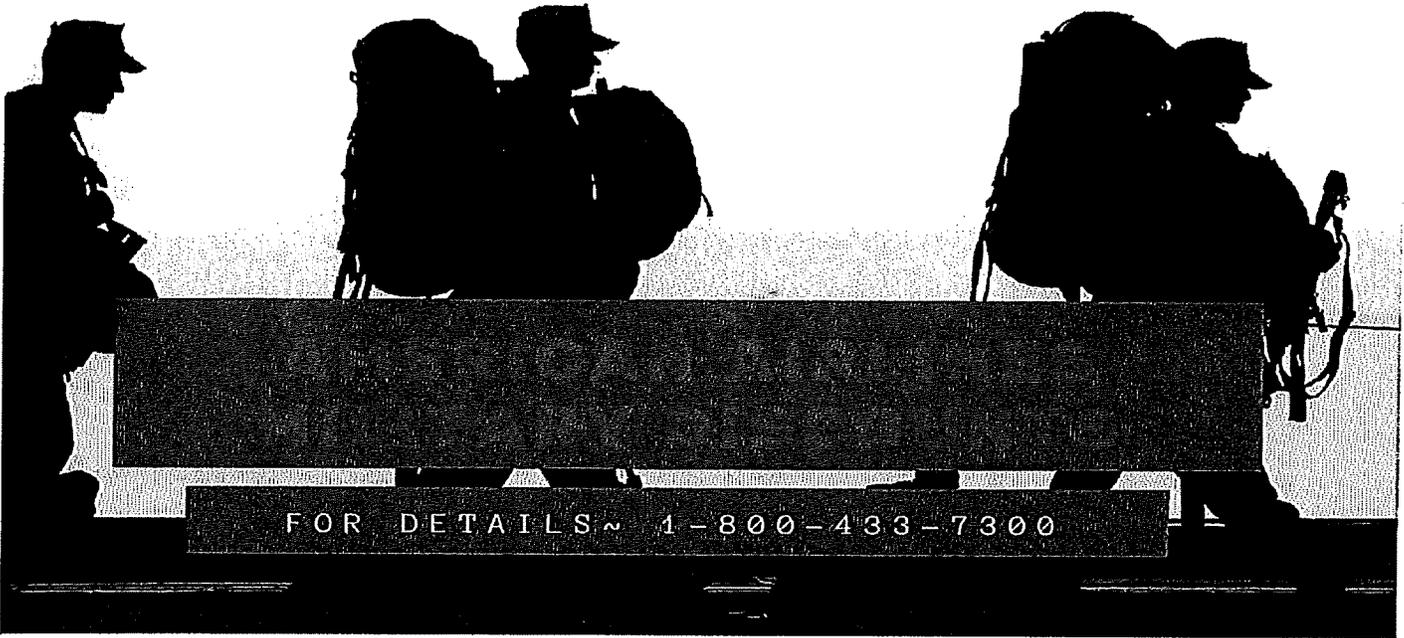
#### Baggage Allowance

Active duty military personnel traveling on official orders or for pleasure are invited to check extra baggage free of charge. In some cases, military dependents will also be included. Visit [united.com](http://united.com) for more details under the Checked baggage and Changed bag rules and optional services pages.

### UNITED CLUB INVITATION

Active military personnel are invited to visit any United Club location on the same day they are traveling on United or United Express. Please present your military ID and boarding pass for entry. Access is for military members only, not guests, and may be subject to capacity and seating availability.

# American Airlines



FOR DETAILS ~ 1-800-433-7300

FOR DETAILS CALL 1-800-433-7300

*At Delta, we're delighted to serve those who serve and protect us. We're proud to offer exclusive discounts on travel -- both for military orders and personal travel.*



# DELTA



## AIR LINES

### CALL TO BOOK

Just for active duty U.S. service members, Delta offers military discounted flights not available to civilian customers. To book for personal travel or travel on military orders, call Delta's Military and Government Desk at 1-800-325-1771.

### BAGGAGE BENEFITS

Active duty military personnel can have up to four bags free when traveling on military orders and up to two bags free for personal travel. Delta One/First Class/Business travelers have additional checked bag benefits.

### DELTA VACATIONS

In addition to discounted flights, Delta offers exclusive military discounts with Delta Vacations. With 250+ worldwide destinations to choose from and no blackout dates.

### MEDICAL TRAVEL

If you have a war-injured immediate family member or domestic partner, you qualify for Delta's Medical Emergency policy. Call the Military and Government Desk at 1-800-325-1771 for details.

# #allegiantHONORS

Allegiant proudly supports our **U.S. active duty military**, retired **military veterans**, members of the **National Guard**, **military reserve** and their dependents by offering select free services. Qualifying military personnel and their spouses or dependents, with valid identification, are eligible for the following discounts on Allegiant:

## Free services offered for U.S. active duty or reserve duty and National Guard:

- Up to three (3) pieces of checked baggage free. Each bag must weigh under 100 lbs.
- No charge for oversized checked baggage.
- One (1) carry-on bag within Allegiant size limits free.
- Free boarding pass printing at the airport.
- Free seat assignments, pending availability.
- Up to one (1) pet in cabin free.
- Active military may board with priority boarding at no charge.
- Active military will not be charged a change or cancelation fee due to a change in orders. (To change or cancel an existing reservation active military personnel must contact Customer Care.)

## U.S. active duty or reserve duty and National Guard requirements:

- Must serve in any United States branch of military service and have qualifying identification.
- Must be active personnel; this includes 'leaves' while on active duty such as weekend passes, transitioning from one base to another, or temporary duty.
- Must show valid active military identification (Uniformed Services ID Card).

## Free services offered for spouses or dependents of U.S. active duty or reserve military, National Guard and retired military veterans:

- Up to three (3) pieces of checked baggage free. Each bag must weigh under 40 lbs.
- No charge for oversized checked baggage.
- One (1) carry-on bag within Allegiant size limits free.
- Free boarding pass printing at the airport.
- Free seat assignments, pending availability.
- Up to one (1) pet in cabin free.

## Spouses or dependents of U.S. active duty or reserve military and National Guard and retired U.S. military veterans requirements:

- Must show valid military identification.
- Please note: Dependents do not have to travel with the active military personnel.

***\* All optional items and services will be added to your itinerary at the airport.***

## I already booked my flights. How do I get my free services?

It's easy! To reserve bags, seats, priority boarding, or a pet in cabin, or to obtain a printed boarding pass, our ticket counter agents will verify your ID and add the optional items and services listed above to your itinerary.

If you have already paid for items which qualify for a military waiver, once we've confirmed your identification at the airport, contact our call center at your convenience to arrange a refund of eligible fees.

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

June 10, 2019

**VA health care facilities to go smoke-free**

***VHA Modifies Policies to Increase Quality of Care to Veterans***

**WASHINGTON** — As part of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) commitment to provide excellent health care for Veterans,

the department will implement a new policy restricting smoking by patients, visitors, volunteers, contractors and vendors at its health care

facilities by October.

Although VA has historically permitted smoking in designated areas, there is growing evidence that smoking and exposure to secondhand

and third hand smoke creates significant medical risks, and risks to safety and direct patient care that are inconsistent with medical requirements

and limitations. Accordingly, VA's Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has collaborated with key stakeholders to update and recertify the

policy to be consistent with the department's commitment to Veterans and the community.

A recent VA survey revealed that approximately 85% of responding facility leadership support smoke-free campuses, and this new policy

for patients, visitors, volunteers, contractors and vendors allows VA to ensure the health and well-being of VA staff, patients and the public.

"We are not alone in recognizing the importance of creating a smoke-free campus," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "As of 2014, 4,000

health care facilities and four national health care systems in the U.S. have implemented smoke-free grounds. This policy change coincides with

additional VHA efforts to help us become the provider of choice for Veterans and the reason why Veterans will Choose VA."

VHA's new smoke-free policy applies to cigarettes, cigars, pipes, any other combustion of tobacco and non-Federal Drug Administration

approved electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS), including but not limited to electronic or e-cigarettes, vape pens or e-cigars.

VHA has extensive resources and programs to assist Veterans in their smoke-free journey. They can be found at:

<https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/quit-tobacco/>.



"You shouldn't be so afraid of the dentist"



"How about if I just follow you on Twitter instead?"

# Disabled Veterans eligible for free National Park Service Lifetime Access Pass

Good for entry into 400+ National Parks and over 2,000 recreation sites across the country



Spring flowers are blooming, the summer travel season quickly approaches and Veterans are joining the 330-million yearly visitors enjoying U.S. National Parks.

Many Veterans, with a service connected disability rating, are entering Federal parks for free with the Lifetime National Parks Access Pass from the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service. Good for entry into 400+ National Parks and over 2,000 recreation sites across the country, the Lifetime Access Pass is another way a grateful nation says thank you for the service and sacrifices of Veterans with disabilities.

The Access Pass admits disabled Veterans and any passengers in their vehicle (non-commercial) at per-vehicle fee areas; and, the pass owner plus three additional adults where per-person fees are charged. In addition to free entry at participating parks, the Access Pass includes discounts on expanded amenity fees; such as camping, swimming, boat launching and guided tours.

Veterans who have a VA disability rating, (10 percent or higher) are eligible for the Lifetime Access Pass—with two ways to apply.

First, disabled Veterans can apply in person at a participating federal recreation site. Simply present photo identification (Drivers license, State ID, Passport) and documentation proving a permanent disability (VA awards letter, VA ID with service connected annotation, VA summary of benefits, or receipt of Social Security disability income). That's it. The Pass is free and issued at the time of entry.

Second, if applying by mail, send a completed packet and \$10 processing fee to the United States Geological Survey (USGS). The packet should include:

The Access Pass application form

- Proof of residency
- VA disability award letter, VA summary of benefits, or proof of SSDI income

Pass delivery expected 10-12 weeks after receipt.

Make sure to have photo ID available when using your Lifetime Access Pass and enjoy the majestic scenery and abundant recreational opportunities our National Parks provide.

Access Pass Available for Disabled Veterans - Disabled American Veterans are eligible for the National Parks and Federal Recreation Lands Pass. This pass which is free of charge to disabled citizens, grants access to National Parks which provides access to recreation areas managed by US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Forrest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service and the Bureau of Reclamation. To apply for the pass, disabled veterans should secure proof of permanent disability such as a rating decision letter, a VA Healthcare Card noting service connected status, or some other means. The veteran must bring that information in person to a participating federal recreation site or office. Keep in mind, this is a lifetime pass. As we all know, no two federal agencies operate under the same regulations and structures so we would advise interested disabled veterans to check on the Access Pass discounts on the following Web sites:

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Bureau of Land Management <http://www.blm.gov>

Bureau of Reclamation <http://www.usbr.gov>

Fish and Wildlife Service <http://www.fws.gov>

USDA Forest Service <http://www.fs.fed.us>

National Park Service <http://www.nps.gov>

**You ask "Who qualifies for the Access Pass?"** The pass may be issued to U.S. Citizens or permanent resi-

dents of the U.S., regardless of age, that have been medically determined to have a permanent disability that severely limits one or more major life activities.

**You ask "What is a permanent disability?"** They define permanent disability as a permanent physical, mental, or sensory impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, such as caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working.



# VEText

## Text Message Appointment Reminders and Cancellation System

### How Does It Work?

VEText will notify a Veteran of **MOST** future scheduled VA appointments **7 days and 2 days** prior to a scheduled appointment and allow him or her to reply with "Y Number" to Confirm they plan to attend, or reply with "N Number" to Cancel the appointment.

### VEText System does NOT recognize the following responses:

Multiple Confirmations or Cancellations to ONE message: **Y9 Y11 Y13**

Further Questions or Text Response's: **Could this appointment be changed to this afternoon or anytime this week?**

If you have any additional questions, please call the number listed on the text message or the number listed on your VA Appointment letter.

### Correct way to respond to EACH individual text message separately:

Your VA appointment is on Jun 25 at 08:30.

Reply:  
Y23 to CONFIRM  
N24 to CANCEL

We hope to see you then!

More info at <https://www.myhealth.va.gov> or 800-410-9723.

Send STOP to end messages.

Y23

Thank you for confirming your appointment with FAR DENTAL CLINIC 3-DR. AMERSON (1ST FLOOR/DENTAL) at FARGO VAMROC. Please arrive 15 minutes before your appointment.

Your VA appointment is on Jun 29 at 14:00.

Reply:  
Y19 to CONFIRM  
N20 to CANCEL

We hope to see you then!

More info at <https://www.myhealth.va.gov> or 800-410-9723.

Send STOP to end messages.

N20

Please Secure Message or call 800-410-9723 to reschedule.

# VA MISSION Act and New Veterans Community Care Program

## Overview

The VA MISSION Act of 2018 consolidates VA's community care programs into a new Veterans Community Care Program that will help to ensure Veterans choose VA by getting them the right care at the right time from the right provider.

Over the next year, VA will need to develop regulations to implement the new law, while also developing policies, training staff, and awarding contracts to furnish care. Veterans and their families, community providers, and VA staff can expect ongoing improvements and regular engagement as VA creates this new Community Care Program.

## New Community Care Program

The new Veterans Community Care Program will be a major advancement that will consolidate VA's community care programs and strengthen VA by merging the Department's tangled web of competing and confusing community care programs, including the Choice Program, into one system that is easier to navigate for Veterans.

This single Program will also greatly reduce the complexity associated with administration of these benefits, making for more efficient use of VA's resources.

To implement this new Program, VA will need to develop regulations. The Act provides VA one year to develop these regulations and to prepare to implement this new authority. This time is critical to ensuring that the transition to the new program is as seamless as possible.

The Act appropriates \$5.2 billion in mandatory funding for the Veterans Choice Program to continue to provide care to Veterans until the new, consolidated Veterans Community Care Program is operational—approximately one year after the enactment of this Act.

Going forward, Veterans and their families can expect continued improvements to be made in how Veterans navigate and receive community care.

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### Q1. What are the immediate impacts to Veterans for community care due to the VA MISSION Act?

A1. In the near term, the VA MISSION Act of 2018 appropriates \$5.2 billion in mandatory funding for the Veterans Choice Program to continue to provide care to Veterans until the new, consolidated Veterans Community Care Program is operational—approximately one year after the enactment of this Act.

### Q2. What are the immediate impacts to community providers due to the VA MISSION Act?

A2. There will be no immediate changes for community providers as a result of the VA MISSION Act of 2018. Community providers can expect continuity of operations due to the appropriation of \$5.2 billion in mandatory funding for the Veterans Choice Fund while VA works to implement the new Veterans Community Care Program.

Meanwhile, VA is working hard to ensure a seamless transition for Veterans and community providers when VA's contract with Health Net Federal Services ends on September 30, 2018. At that time, new care authorizations, scheduling, coordination, and payments will take place directly between VA, Veterans, and community providers. VA is actively working with Health Net and other partners on a transition plan.

### Q3. Why will it take so long for VA to implement changes to consolidate its community care programs?

A3. Due to the significant complexity associated with health care delivery, the large size of the VA health care system, along with VA's network of more than half a million community providers, adequate time and consideration is required to properly develop the required regulations and necessary system changes and training for successfully implementing the consolidated community care program. A lesson learned from the implementation of the Veterans Choice Program is that

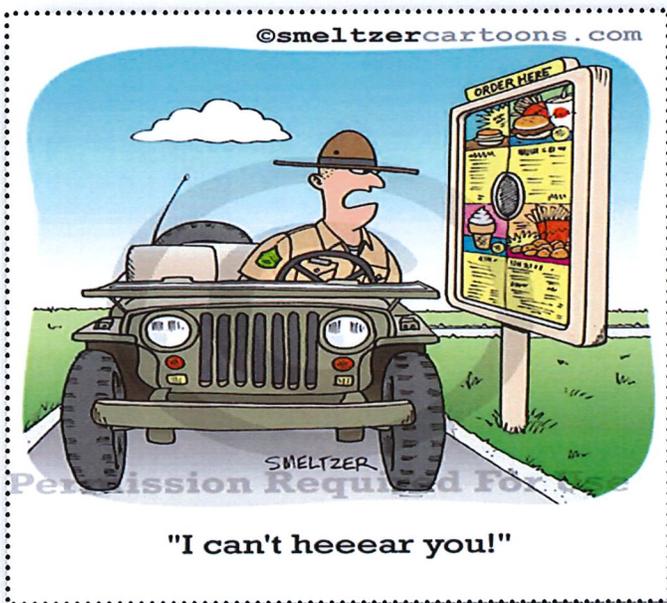
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# Fact Sheet

rushing implementation wasted resources and did not serve Veterans, providers, or VA well.

### **Q4. Does the consolidation of community care programs under the law affect VA's community provider networks?**

A4. No. The consolidation of community care programs is different from and independent of the community provider networks through which VA purchases care for Veterans from a community provider. VA purchases care for Veterans from community providers under specific conditions, while VA's community provider networks (i.e. Patient-Centered Community Care (PC3) and Veterans Choice Program (VCP) networks) are the contract vehicles between VA and over half a million community providers through which VA actually purchases care for Veterans. VA's community provider networks are managed by Third Party Administrators (TPAs) who perform certain functions on behalf of VA.



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 6, 2019

### **VA launches new health care options under MISSION Act**

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) launched its new and improved Veterans Community Care Program on June 6, 2019,

implementing portions of the VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act of 2018 (MISSION Act),

which both ends the Veterans Choice Program and establishes a new Veterans Community Care Program.

The MISSION Act will strengthen the nationwide VA Health Care System by empowering Veterans with more health care options.

“The changes not only improve our ability to provide the health care Veterans need, but also when and where they need it,” said VA

Secretary Robert Wilkie. “It will also put Veterans at the center of their care and offer options, including expanded telehealth and urgent care, so

they can find the balance in the system that is right for them.”

Under the new Veterans Community Care Program, Veterans can work with their VA health care provider or other VA staff to see if they are

eligible to receive community care based on new criteria. Eligibility for community care does not require a Veteran to receive that care in the

community; Veterans can still choose to have VA provide their care. Veterans may elect to receive care in the community if they meet any of the

following six eligibility criteria:

1. A Veteran needs a service not available at any VA medical facility.
2. A Veteran lives in a U.S. state or territory without a full-service VA medical facility. Specifically, this would apply to Veterans living in

Alaska, Hawaii, New Hampshire and the U.S. territories of Guam, American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

3. A Veteran qualifies under the “grandfather” provision related to distance eligibility under the Veterans Choice Program.

4. VA cannot furnish care within certain designated access standards. The specific access standards are described below:

#### **Drive time to a specific VA medical facility**

Thirty-minute average drive time for primary care, mental health and noninstitutional extended care services.

Sixty-minute average drive time for specialty care.

**Note:** Drive times are calculated using geomapping software.

#### **Appointment wait time at a specific VA medical facility**

Twenty days from the date of request for primary care, mental health care and noninstitutional extended care services, unless the Veteran agrees to a later date in consultation with his or her VA health care provider.

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Twenty-eight days for specialty care from the date of request, unless the Veteran agrees to a later date in consultation with his or her VA health care provider.

5. The Veteran and the referring clinician agree it is in the best medical interest of the Veteran to receive community care based on defined factors.

6. VA has determined that a VA medical service line is not providing care in a manner that complies with VA's standards for quality based on specific conditions.

In preparation for this landmark initiative, senior VA leaders will visit more than 30 VA hospitals across the country to provide in-person support for the rollout.

**The VA MISSION Act:**

Strengthens VA's ability to recruit and retain clinicians.

Authorizes "Anywhere to Anywhere" telehealth across state lines.

Empowers Veterans with increased access to community care.

Establishes a new urgent care benefit that eligible Veterans can access through VA's network of urgent care providers in the community.

VA serves approximately 9 million enrolled Veterans at 1,255 health care facilities around the country every year.

For more information, visit [www.missionact.va.gov](http://www.missionact.va.gov).

**FARGO NATIONAL CEMETERY UPDATE**

The National Cemetery was to open up this spring for burials and when the opening did not happen I talked to the VA National Cemetery Administration at Fort Snelling and their best estimate for burials is now into the fall of 2019.

**Fargo National Cemetery**

40th Avenue NW, County Road 20, Cass County, North Dakota

• Fargo National Cemetery is a new 4.82 acre Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) national cemetery located in southeast North Dakota. The cemetery will serve the burial needs of more than 30,000 Veterans, their spouses and eligible family members.

• This is the first national cemetery built in North Dakota and is part of the VA National Cemetery Administration Rural Initiative to provide access to VA burial benefits for Veterans who reside in rural areas and who have not previously had reasonable access to a national or state Veterans cemetery.

• VA purchased the land for \$93,444.98 in June 2016.

• The design-build contract was awarded in July 2017 to Valiant Construction, LLC, located at 4229 Bardstown Road, Suite 206, Louisville, Kentucky, 40218. Anderson Engineering, located in Plymouth, Minnesota, is the design consultant.

• Cemetery construction is currently underway. When completed, Phase I will offer more than 3,000 casket and cremation spaces to accommodate burials for the next 10 years.

The cemetery will provide casket burials, in-ground cremation burials, columbarium niches for cremation burials, and a memorial wall.

## BEMIDJI VETERANS NURSING HOME UPDATE

**St. Paul, Minn.** – Aging Veterans and other eligible family members from Bemidji and the surrounding region may have a new option for residential skilled nursing care by 2022. For more than 12 years, local officials and Veterans' advocates have lobbied for the addition of a new Minnesota State Veterans Home in their community. Plans are moving forward, according to officials from the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA).

Bemidji is one of three Minnesota cities pursuing a future Minnesota Veterans Home. The Bemidji project received a boost with Sanford Health's donation of 15 acres on the grounds of their Northern Minnesota campus. In 2018, the Minnesota Legislature allocated \$12.4 million toward the cost of the project which will be funded by a combination of federal-granted (65 percent), state-bonded and pending community-provided monies (35 percent). In March of this year, MDVA submitted an application for Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; that funding will not be confirmed until early 2020.

While Federal funds are not guaranteed, there is optimism among the planning team. "MDVA looks forward to approval of our Federal funding request and breaking ground on this new Veterans Home next year," said Douglas Hughes, Deputy Commissioner for Veterans Healthcare, MDVA.

The project is a group effort. "We greatly appreciate the involvement of the many communities, organizations and individuals who have donated toward this very important project," stated Scotty Allison, Veterans Service Officer for Beltrami County.

Kay Mack, Beltrami County Administrator, added: "The Veterans Home Committee is grateful to Beltrami County for their very generous donation to the Bemidji Veterans Home. All the donations have made a big impact on the design and what we will be able to provide Veterans."

Representatives from MDVA, the Minnesota Department of Administration and the architecture/engineering firms of Wold and Perkins Eastman visited Bemidji on May 14 to provide an update. Local leaders were eager to learn more about the proposed Veterans Home and how their fall 2018 feedback was incorporated into the facility's design.

The Bemidji Home's design reflects a North woods cabin feel for the public spaces that include a Town Center featuring a small coffee shop/cafe, theater/meeting room, family dining room, meditation room/chapel, and club room. The 72 residential units are split into two sections and four "neighborhoods," avoiding long institutional-feeling hallways.

Other local officials invited to the May 14 meeting included Craig Gray, Director of Public Works, City of Bemidji; Sam Anderson, Assistant City Engineer, City of Bemidji; Casey Mai, Planning Director, City of Bemidji; Scotty Allison, Veterans Service Officer, Beltrami County; Kay Mack, Administrator, Beltrami County; Joe Vene, Former Commissioner, Beltrami County, and U.S. Army Veteran; Jim Lucachick, Commissioner, Beltrami County; and Richard Anderson, Commissioner, Beltrami County.

Construction on the Veterans Home will be led by a general contractor which will strive to hire a significant percentage of sub-contractors from the local community. The new Minnesota Veterans Homes will also support the local economies long-term by offering employment opportunities to those who share the MDVA mission to care for Veterans.

Reflected Joe Vene: "It has been a long time coming. A lot of work by many people over the years is about to pay off. I can't wait until construction begins!"

## Desk of the Commissioner-*LARRY HERKE* - July, 2019 Veterans are an asset to Minnesota's workforce



Summer in Minnesota. Many of you are probably enjoying some vacation time, fishing, relaxing at a lake cabin, camping and spending time with family.

While vacations are wonderful breaks, meaningful employment is important to our quality of life, especially for Minnesota Veterans who may need support transitioning from active duty in the military to a civilian career.

I'm happy to report that as of June 2019, the Minnesota Veteran unemployment rate was 3.2 percent, down from 3.3 percent in June 2018. This represents the lowest Veteran unemployment rate in the month of June since 2001. And June 2019 marks the 14th consecutive month where the Veteran unemployment rate was equal to or lower than the non-Veteran unemployment rate.

While the current economy has created a high demand for employees, that's not always the case. Whether in good economic times or bad, MDVA is here to support Minnesota Veterans prepare for and find solid employment. The MDVA website is a good starting point; check our [our employment page here](#). Or call LinkVet at 1-888-LinkVet for more information.

Governor Walz has proclaimed July as "Hire a Veteran Month" and MDVA is participating in the 13th annual Veterans Career Fair on Wednesday, July 24 from 2 to 6 p.m. at the Earle Brown Heritage Center in Brooklyn Center. Hosted by the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), this event is the largest Veterans career fair in Minnesota, and connects current or former Veterans looking for a job or exploring new career options to employers. More information about the [Veterans Career Fair is available here](#).

Minnesota employers have learned that hiring Veterans is a smart decision. Military service transforms young men and women into responsible adults ready to fill Minnesota's talent pipeline. It begins with a commitment. As young as 17, these men and women commit to put service before themselves. Very quickly they learn about responsibility, accountability and being part of a team. They learn basic things that employers are looking for, such as completing a job to a desired standard and showing up on time. A Veteran returns from duty with leadership skills, technical training, safety training, crisis management skills and the ability to make tough decisions under pressure.

I'm proud to support Minnesota's 327,000 Veterans and the MDVA team is always available to serve those who have served, with employment assistance and much more.

Enjoy the rest of your summer!

# Minnesota State Veteran's Benefits & Discounts

2017



The state of Minnesota provides several veteran benefits. This section offers a brief description of each of the following benefits.

- Housing Benefits
- Financial Benefits
- Employment Benefits
- Education Benefits
- Recreation Benefits
- Other State Veteran Benefits

## Housing Benefits

### **Minnesota Homeless Veteran Registry**

The Registry connects Veterans experiencing homelessness with housing and services in their community. It also helps programs serving Veterans to coordinate their efforts. Participation is voluntary for Veterans. Anyone can refer a Veteran to join.

### **MOVE Program**

The Minnesota Operation for Veterans Empowerment (MOVE) program temporarily assists homeless Veterans at the Union Gospel Mission in St. Paul, MN. Assistance includes one-on-one case management with an MDVA Outreach Representative and a paid bed at the mission during case management. Veterans work with the case manager to select the various types of resources needed in order to help empower them to move beyond their current situation.

### **Minnesota Veterans' Homes**

Minnesota Veterans' Homes are located in Fergus Falls, Hastings, Luverne, Minneapolis and Silver Bay. There is also an Adult Day Center located in the Minneapolis Veterans' Home. The Adult Day Center provides a broad array of therapeutic health care services – delivered by trained, highly dedicated professionals. It is a Veteran-based community that allows participants to connect with other Veterans in a safe, comfortable environment. The Adult Day Center allows participants to achieve the highest attainable level of physical, mental and social well-

being – with the independence of living at home. It also provides much-needed respite – and a full array of support services – for Veterans’ caregivers.

Admission to Minnesota Veterans Homes is available to honorably discharged veterans who entered service from Minnesota, or are current residents, who served 181 consecutive days on active duty, unless discharged earlier because of disability incurred in the line of duty. The spouse of an eligible Veteran who is at least 55 years old and meets residency requirements. The applicant must also be able to demonstrate a medical or clinical need for admission. Residents contribute to the cost of their care according to their means.

## **SOAR**

The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) has partnered with the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) and the United States Social Security Administration (SSA) to provide Minnesota’s homeless and at-risk Veterans with expanded access to Social Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits.



SOAR, which stands for SSI/SSDI, Outreach, Access, and Recovery, is a program designed to increase access to SSI/SSDI for those who are eligible who are experiencing or at-risk of homelessness and have a mental illness, medical impairment, and/or co-occurring substance use disorder. Eligible Veterans are able to work with a trained MDVA SOAR advocate who will assist them with collecting the necessary information (personal and medical records), completing necessary SSA forms to file a comprehensive application packet to SSA, and aiding them through the determination process. For more information about the MDVA SOAR process, please contact Paul Williams at (651) 201-8233. To refer someone to receive assistance under the SOAR Program, please contact LinkVet at 1-888-LinkVet

## **Financial Benefits**

### **State Income Taxes**

Military pay and retirement pay are not taxed.

### **Short Term Financial Assistance (Subsistence)**

The Subsistence program provides temporary assistance with shelter payments (rent/mortgage), current utility bills and health insurance premiums to eligible Veterans and their Dependents. This benefit is income and asset based, and is designed to assist Veterans for up to six months for those who are unable to work his/her normal occupation due to a temporary disability, or who are permanently disabled and are waiting to receive a permanent disability benefit from VA Compensation, VA Pension, Social Security or other long term benefit.

## **Employment Benefits**

### **MN Veterans Preference Act**

MN Veterans Preference Act (VPA) grants veterans a limited preference over non-veterans in hiring and promotion for MN public employment and also provides protection against unfair dismissals and demotions. VPA grants veterans the right to a hearing, prior to dismissal.

## Education Benefits

### **Minnesota GI Bill**

The Minnesota GI Bill is available to Minnesota Veterans who served honorably in any branch of the armed forces at any time; non-veterans who served honorably for a cumulative total of five years or more as a member of the MN National Guard or any other active or reserve component and had active service after September 11, 2001; or eligible spouses, surviving spouses, and children of permanently and totally disabled veterans who are eligible for the Federal GI Bill under Chapters 33 or 35.

Full-time undergraduate or graduate students may be eligible to receive up to \$1,000 per semester and part-time students can receive up to \$500 per semester (up to \$3,000 per academic year and \$10,000 per lifetime). OJT and Apprenticeship individuals are eligible for up to \$2,000 per fiscal year for either program. Approved employers are eligible to receive \$1,000 placement credit payable upon hiring a person under this program and another \$1,000 after 12 consecutive months of employment. Recipients must be a Minnesota resident under the age of 62, and enrolled at a Minnesota institution.

### **Surviving Spouse & Dependent Education Benefit**

Surviving Spouse and Dependent Education assistance is provided to spouses and dependents, including adopted and step-children, whose Veteran spouse and/or Veteran parent died while on active duty, or as a result of a service-connected condition. The Veteran must have been a resident of Minnesota when entering the U.S. military, or have been a resident of Minnesota for at least six months prior to passing away due to a service connected disability as determined by the USDVA. Applicants must be Minnesota residents and the spouse cannot be remarried. There is no age limitation for eligible survivors.

If found eligible, survivors are allowed admission to Minnesota postsecondary education institutions either operated by this state or is operated publicly or privately and maintains academic standards substantially equivalent to those of comparable institutions operated in this state. Surviving spouses and dependents will be able to attend free of tuition until he/she obtains a bachelor's degree. In addition, MDVA will pay \$750 per fiscal year for fees, books and supplies, and/or room and board.

## Veteran Recreation Benefits

### **Veterans Campground on Big Marine Lake**

The Veterans Campground on Big Marine Lake is a family campground that provides facilities and opportunities for recreation, rest, and recovery for all who have served in the Armed Forces of the United States, whether still serving or have served in the past, their Families, and sponsored friends.

### **Minnesota State Park Vehicle Permits**

Any active military service personnel stationed outside of Minnesota within the past 90 days can get a free one-day Minnesota state park vehicle permit. Bring your current military orders and military ID, and let the park attendant know your military status when you arrive.

Military personnel or their Dependents who have a Federal government access pass to Federal recreational sites can get a free one-day Minnesota state park vehicle permit. Bring your Federal access pass and military ID, and let the park attendant know your military status when you arrive.

Any resident Veteran with any level of service-connected disability can get a free one-day Minnesota state park vehicle permit. Bring a copy of your determination letter and a photo ID, and let the park attendant know your military status when you arrive.

Any Veteran who has a permanent and total service-connected disability can get a free annual Minnesota state park permit. Present a copy of your determination letter or VA ID card to the park attendant for the free annual sticker, which must be placed on a vehicle that is owned by the Veteran. If the Veteran with the permanent service-connected disability does not own the vehicle transporting the Veteran, you can still get a free one-day Minnesota state park permit.

### **Cross Country Ski Pass Exemptions**

Minnesota residents who have served at any time during the preceding 24 months in federal active service outside the United States and has been discharged from active service is exempt from the pass requirement if the resident possesses official military discharge papers (DD214). Minnesota residents in the US Military who are stationed outside the state and home on leave are also eligible for a pass exemption, (must have leave form).

### **Fishing Licenses**

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, (DNR) has a number of benefits for military Service members and Veterans:

- A person in the U.S. Armed Forces who is stationed or training in the state may purchase a resident fishing license. (Includes those in training at Camp Ripley.)
- A resident who has served at any time during the preceding 24 months in federal active service outside the United States and has been discharged from active service may take fish without a license. Discharged residents must carry proof of Minnesota residency and official military discharge papers. Trout stamps are not required. (Note: Free sturgeon tags are available only from the DNR License Center in St. Paul.)
- Any Minnesota Veteran with a 100% service-connected disability may obtain a permanent angling license. These permanent licenses are available only from the DNR License Center. A trout stamp is not required with this license.

The following are Exempt from Fishing License Requirements:

- Minnesota residents in the U.S. Military who are stationed outside the state and home on leave. Military staff must carry leave or furlough papers.
- Patients of a U.S. Veterans Administration hospital (with written permission of the superintendent or chief executive of the institution).

### **Residents on Leave Hunting License**

Those who have maintained legal residency in Minnesota (must have a valid MN DL or Public Safety ID) and who are serving in the U.S. Military and stationed outside the state may:

- Hunt small game without a license while on leave. No Minnesota Waterfowl Stamp or Pheasant Stamp is needed but must have a Federal Migratory Bird Stamp to hunt waterfowl.
- May hunt deer (Firearms: Code 232; Archery: Code 233, Muzzleloader: Code 234), bear (Code 663), and wild turkeys (Spring: Code 615; Fall: Code 654) and Wolf (Early Season Firearm: Code 691; Late Firearm Code 692; Trapping Code 693) without charge after obtaining the appropriate licenses and tags from an ELS license agent by presenting official leave papers.
- Does not include Moose, Elk or Deer bonus permits. Such service personnel must carry proof of Minnesota residency and official leave papers on their person while hunting. Licenses are valid immediately upon issuance.

### **Residents Discharged Hunting License**

Minnesota residents discharged from the U.S. Armed Forces within 10 days of the start or during the Firearms Deer Season may purchase a Firearms Deer License during the season upon showing official discharge papers. The license is valid immediately after purchase.

Veterans who have served at any time during the preceding 24 months in federal active service outside the United States and have been discharged from active service may:

- Take small game without a license. Discharged residents must carry proof of Minnesota residency and official military discharge papers. No state stamps required. (Federal stamp required for migratory waterfowl hunting.)
- Obtain a free deer license. Eligibility is limited to one deer license per person per year. Discharged residents must provide proof of residency and a copy of their official military discharge papers. (Firearms: Code 232, Archery: Code 233, Muzzleloader: Code 234).
- Obtain a free wolf license. Eligibility is limited to one wolf license per person per year. Discharged residents must provide proof of residency and a copy of their official military discharge papers. (Early Firearms Season: Code 694, Late Firearm Season Code 695; Trapping Code 696)

Veterans who have served at any time during the past 24 months, in active service as a member of the United States armed forces, including the National Guard or other military reserves will receive first preference in drawings for special deer hunts, bear and turkey permits.

#### **Resident 100% Disabled Veterans Hunting License**

With proof of a 100% service-related disability may obtain a free Small Game License (241) and a free Firearms (242), or Muzzleloader (240), or Archery (243) Deer License from an ELS license agent. In addition, a disabled Veteran is exempt from purchasing state pheasant or waterfowl stamps, but must purchase a turkey stamp and license to hunt turkeys and a federal duck stamp to hunt waterfowl. Disabled Veterans with 100% service connected disability will receive first preference in drawings for special deer hunts, bear and turkey permits.

**Note:** Military personnel and Veterans who are issued firearms deer licenses under these provisions may take antlerless deer, but are restricted to bucks-only hunting in those lottery deer permit areas that have an either-sex permit quota of zero. To participate in special deer hunts, they must apply and be drawn. They may also purchase bonus permits.

#### **Resident Veteran 100% Permanent Card**

Resident Veterans who have 100% permanent service-connected disability as defined by the United State Department of Veterans Affairs may apply for a permanent card that may be presented to an agent annually to receive a free Small Game and/ or a Deer License. This card will assist with the process of receiving these types of license's, however all eligibility requirements must be met prior to receiving the license(s).

#### **Resident Purple Heart Recipients**

Purple Heart recipients must purchase licenses, but will receive first preference in drawings for antlerless deer permits, bear and turkey permits.

#### **Nonresident Hunting and Fishing Licenses**

- Nonresident Spouses of residents on active military duty may purchase resident hunting and fishing licenses. Nonresidents must provide proof of Spouse's residency and active military duty.
- A person in the U.S. Armed Forces who is stationed in the state may purchase resident hunting and fishing licenses, but not moose or elk licenses.

#### **Firearms Safety Training**

Military personnel who are on active duty and has successfully completed basic training in the US armed forces, reserve component, or National Guard may obtain a hunting license or approval authorizing hunting regardless of whether the person is issued a firearms safety certificate. Note: They must be on active duty, home on leave with

leave papers (they then qualify only for that time frame). Once discharged or no longer on active duty, they must complete the firearms safety training course or online adult course the same as all others born after Dec 31, 1979.

### **Other Minnesota State Veteran Benefits**

#### **Guardianship Division**

The Guardianship Division provides financial case management services to incompetent veterans, their dependents, and survivors, who may be vulnerable to exploitation by others or by their own inability to manage their funds.

#### **Minnesota State Veterans Cemetery**

The Minnesota State Veterans Cemeteries provide dignified burial services to Minnesota veterans and their eligible dependents and survivors. They are located 7 miles north of Little Falls, on the banks of the Mississippi River, and in Preston in southeastern Minnesota. Both cemeteries are managed and maintained by the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs. They provide:

- Gravesite or Columbarium Niche
- Pre-placed Grave liner (Standard Size)
- Headstone/Niche Cover
- Perpetual Care
- Veteran Cost is \$0 all burial options
- Spouse/Eligible Dependent cost is \$745 (all burial options)

***Pre-Registration*** -- Pre-registration ensures your eligibility in advance and eliminates delays in providing military documents to the cemetery. Pre-registration applications are available at the cemetery office or at your local County Veterans Service Office (CVSO). Contact your CVSO at [www.macvso.org](http://www.macvso.org) or by calling 1-888-LinkVet (546-5838) MDVA's one-stop customer service line for all Minnesota Veterans and their families.

***Burial Arrangements*** -- The funeral director or the next of kin makes burial arrangements for an eligible Veteran, spouse or dependent at the time of need by contacting the Minnesota State Veterans Cemetery. A spouse or dependent is buried based upon the eligibility of the Veteran. To establish the Veteran's eligibility, a copy of the Veteran's military discharge document or a DD214 must be provided. If these documents are not available, the cemetery must be provided with sufficient military information to allow the cemetery to access federal U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and/or military records to establish eligibility. The cemetery staff will set a tentative date for the committal service pending verification of service and character of discharge, and will notify the applicant when the committal service is scheduled. The proposed date and time will be approved only when the cemetery verifies eligibility and confirms the arrangements.

***Floral Policies*** -- Fresh cut flowers may be placed on graves at any time. Temporary containers and water are provided in locations around the main cemetery drive. Floral items will be removed from graves by cemetery personnel as soon as they become faded or unsightly. Artificial flowers may be placed on graves during the periods specified on the floral regulation signs located around the main cemetery drive. Plantings, statues, vigil lights, breakable objects of any nature and any other type of commemorative items are not permitted on the graves. Full floral policy available here.

***Committal Services*** -- The cemetery can do seven committal services per day, Monday - Friday, on a first-come first served basis, every hour from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. (3 p.m. is cremation only). Committal services are limited to 20 minutes. All committal services should be brief and need to start on the hour at the scheduled time. Families who extend their services can greatly affect others who have reserved the following time. All committal services are held in the committal service building rather than at the actual gravesite because of burial rates and operational considerations. This ensures the family's safety and provides a fitting location for military honors and the ability of

our staff to continue cemetery operations. The remains are removed from the committal service building for burial following the family's departure and are never left unattended by cemetery staff. Clergy services and other arrangements are the responsibility of the family or family representative. These arrangements are normally coordinated through the chosen funeral director.

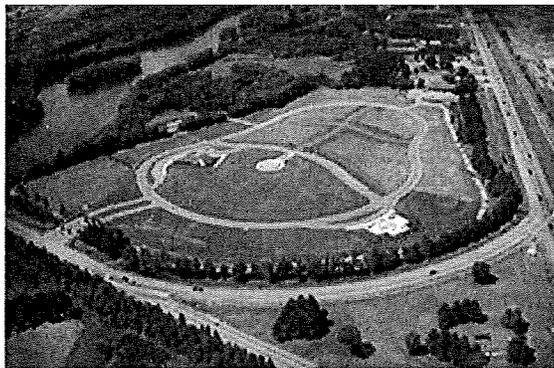
**Casket** -- A pre-placed grave liner will be provided, by the cemetery, for all casket burials. Traditional gravesites are available for individuals who choose to purchase a sealed burial vault from their chosen funeral director.

**Cremation (In-ground)** -- In-ground cremation gravesites provide a traditional burial option for cremated remains. In-ground cremation gravesites are marked with an upright granite headstone. The choice for the placement of cremated remains either in-ground or above-ground will need to be determined by the next-of-kin.

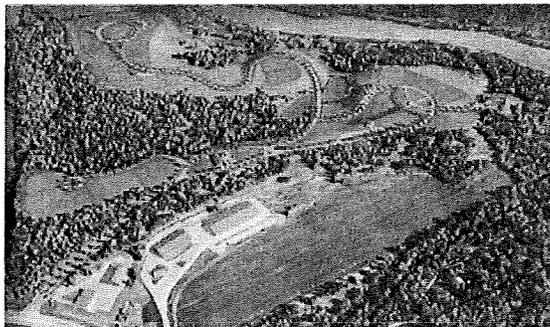
**Cremation (Columbarium)** -- The columbarium provides an above-ground option for cremated remains. Columbarium niches are marked with a granite niche cover. The choice for the placement of cremated remains either in-ground or above-ground will need to be determined by the next-of-kin.

#### Contact Information

- Hours of Operation: Both cemetery offices are open from 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Monday - Friday (closed on State Holidays). Visitors may visit the cemetery grounds during daylight hours, seven days per week.
- Minnesota State Veterans Cemetery - Little Falls: 15550 Hwy 115. Little Falls, MN 56345 Phone: (320) 616-2527 FAX: (320) 616-2529 Email: [info.cemlf@state.mn.us](mailto:info.cemlf@state.mn.us).



- Minnesota State Veterans Cemetery - Preston: 715 Highway 52, Preston, MN 55965 Phone: (507) 765-7320 Fax: (507) 765-3793 Email: [Info.CemPR@state.mn.us](mailto:Info.CemPR@state.mn.us).



- Hours: Both cemetery offices are open from 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Monday - Friday (closed on State Holidays). Visitors may visit the cemetery grounds during daylight hours, seven days per week.

### **Bronze Star Grave Markers**

The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs offers bronze stars to mark the grave site of any veteran buried in the state, where permitted. Bronze Star Markers are available through your local county veterans service officer.

### **Services Program**

The Department of Veterans Affairs Services Program provides claims representation and fiduciary guardianship services.

### **Veterans claims Advocacy**

Staff at our Veterans Claims Offices, located at Fort Snelling and at Fargo/Moorhead, act as advocates for veterans and their dependents who are trying to get their benefits from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (the VA). The staff will assist and represent veterans, their dependents, and survivors with applications for compensation, pension, home loans, educational, and medical treatment. The offices also provide environmental hazards information and assistance (Agent Orange issues, for example). See your County Veterans Service Officer to request this representation.

### **Discharge Certificates**

Veterans' benefits require that applicants provide a copy of their form DD 214 or discharge record, which is evidence of their veteran status. This is an important document and must be safeguarded. If you do not have a copy of your DD 214, contact your County Veterans Service Officer for assistance in obtaining it. If you have a copy of your DD 214 it is recommended that it be recorded in your county courthouse, or at the very least be sure to keep it in a safe place and inform a family member or trusted individual of its location.

Visit the Minnesota Department of Veterans Services website <http://mn.gov/mdva> for contact information and benefits assistance.

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-benefits/minnesota-state-veterans-benefits> AUG 2017 ++]

## **Military Discounts in Minnesota**

1. MVDC has a list of close to 6,700 locations in Minnesota that have discounts for military personnel or veterans. Similar to businesses, the state of Minnesota provides discounts for its veterans and military population.
2. State of Minnesota discounts for veterans and military personnel
3. Veterans Designation on drivers license: Yes
4. **Discounted Fees and Taxes**
  - Free high school transcripts provided to veterans
  - Returning veterans may participate in a special military hunt at Camp Ripley.
  - Free small game and fishing license for 24 months following deployment
  - Free fishing and game licenses for 100% service connected disabled veterans
  - Discounted license plates based upon the conflict you served in
  - \$750 tax credit for retirees or 100% service connected disabled veterans. Must meet income qualifications

### **5. Education Discounts**

Education Benefit for Minnesota Veterans: Educational benefits are provided in the form of a one-time grant to Veterans who have exhausted their federal benefits, and to war orphans of Veterans who died as a result of a service

connected injury or disease. Your County Veteran Service Officer can assist you in applying for these education benefits.

Eligibility: To be eligible, the applicant must meet the following criteria:

- Must have served for at least 181 consecutive days of active military service and have been separated from active duty under honorable conditions. The length of service requirement does not apply if active service was terminated earlier by reason of disability incurred while serving on active duty. The disability must be recognized and rated by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).
- The Veteran shall have been a resident of the State of Minnesota at the time of entry into the Armed Forces, and for six months immediately preceding entry.
- The Veteran must be a citizen of the United States and a current resident of Minnesota.
- The Veteran must have completely exhausted his/her federal educational benefits prior to the delimiting date or within the eligibility period during which benefits were available. Veterans who have allowed their educational benefits to expire without completely using them do not qualify for this program.

Minnesota National Guard Tuition and Textbook Reimbursement: The National Guard Tuition and Textbook Reimbursement Program reimburses Minnesota Guard member up to 100% of the tuition cost at any VA approved school. The maximum benefit is 100% of the undergraduate per credit rate at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities Campus.

- Eligibility: Minnesota National Guard members.

War Orphan Education Program: This program serves children of Minnesota Veterans who died while on active duty military service or as a result of injuries or disease incurred while on active duty military service. Children are eligible for "tuition free status" at any state college level institution except the University of Minnesota. In addition, \$750.00 per year is available for school related expenses.

- Eligibility: The deceased Veteran parent must have been a resident at the time of entry into active duty military service and the dependent child must have been a resident for two years immediately prior to application.

State Tuition Reimbursement (STR): Minnesota State Tuition Reimbursement (STR) will pay for 100% of your tuition (not including student fees) up to the undergraduate rate at the University of Minnesota for 144 semester credits. This benefit is available to current members of the Minnesota Army and Air National Guard and may be used in conjunction with the GI Bill and Federal Tuition Assistance (again, FTA and STR can be combined but only to equal 100% of tuition). This benefit is paid to the military member after a final grade is received for the course. Submission of required materials, including tuition fee statement and semester grade report, goes through the designated unit official.

- Eligibility: Minnesota National Guard members.

6. To find businesses that provide military and veteran discounts refer to <http://militaryandveteransdiscounts.com>.

[Source: <http://militaryandveteransdiscounts.com/location/minnesota.html> Aug 2017 ++]