



IOWA COUNTY VETERANS NEWSLETTER



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Office Hours: M-F 8:00 am-4:30 pm Phone: 608/930-9865 Fax: 608/935-0358 Email: vet@iowacounty.org
Jeffrey T. Lindeman, County Veterans Service Officer

WINTER, 2017

Federal Veteran ID Card

All honorably discharged active duty veterans of any era will be able to get a photo identification card from the Department of Veterans Affairs starting in November 2017 due to a law passed in 2015. The law, known as the Veterans Identification Card Act of 2015, orders the VA to issue a hard-copy photo ID to any honorably discharged active duty veteran who applies. The card must contain the veteran's name, photo and a non-social security identification number. A VA official confirmed in early October that the cards were on track to be available nationwide in November. As of this edition of the newsletter, the only way to apply for the ID card is on-line by utilizing your logon information for eBenefits or MilConnect, you will not be able to obtain the ID card by going to at VA Medical Center or Regional Office. Veterans that currently have a VA Healthcare Card, retirement ID or the "Veteran" identifier on their driver's license do not need to obtain this card as they can use those other forms of identification to establish military service to access goods, services and promotional activities offered through public and private institutions. Feel free to contact the Veteran Service Office if you would like to obtain the "Veteran" identifier on your Wisconsin driver's license.

VA Rating Criteria

After more than 70 years, the VA is reviewing and updating the rating criteria for all 15 body systems. Previously, updates have been done as needed; this is the first comprehensive review of the VA Schedule

for Rating Disabilities (VARSD). The first completed body system, for dental and oral conditions went into effect on September 10, 2017. The update includes updated medical terms, new diagnostic codes for conditions previously rated under other conditions and added disability levels. No existing dental or oral conditions were removed. The VARSD or rating schedule, directs claims processors on how to assess the severity of various disabilities related to military service. The VA has routinely updated parts of the VARSD, this is the first update of the entire rating schedule since 1945. The VA has been working with subject matter experts, including physicians, to more accurately reflect modern medicine advances in the treatment of disabilities of the various body systems. The VA will not change your disability rating just because of the update to the rating criteria. In the coming months, more body systems will be updated until all 15 are modernized.

Statement from VA Secretary Shulkin on Agent Orange Presumptive Conditions

On 1 Nov 2017, U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. David Shulkin announced that he is considering possible new presumptive conditions that may qualify for disability compensation related to Agent Orange exposure.

"After thoroughly reviewing the National Academy of Medicine (NAM)'s latest report regarding Veterans and Agent Orange, and associated data and recommendations from the NAM Task Force, I have

made a decision to further explore new presumptive conditions for service connection that may ultimately qualify for disability compensation,” Secretary Shulkin said. “I appreciate NAM’s work and the commitment and expertise of VA’s NAM Task Force, and look forward to working with the Administration on the next steps in the process.”

The Department of Veterans Affairs will now begin work with the Administration to conduct a concurrent legal and regulatory review of these potential presumptive conditions for awarding disability to eligible veterans.

BLUE WATER VETERANS UPDATE

A plan to extend disability benefits to veterans exposed to Agent Orange while on ships off the Vietnam coastline was sidelined on October 31 over the ongoing dispute about how to pay for it. At issue is a change in VA policy 15 years ago that excluded veterans serving on ships off the coast of Vietnam from being included with in-county veterans presumed to have been exposed to Agent Orange.

A House bill to have offshore veterans included as presumptive exposure has 317 co-sponsors, more than enough to advance if it reaches the House floor. Leaders of the House Veterans Affairs Committee have not moved the legislation forward due to disagreements over how to pay for the change, estimated to be \$1.1 billion over 10 years. At a hearing on Oct. 31, Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN), the committee chair proposed rounding down veterans’ cost-of-living increases to cover the cost. The move would cost individual veterans no more than \$12 a year in benefits, but would generate around \$2 billion in savings that could be reinvested in other veterans programs.

Veteran advocates are also lobbying VA Secretary Shulkin to restore the benefits under existing VA authorities. Last month, in a hearing before the committee, Sec. Shulkin stated he is committed to finding an answer, but wants to work with lawmakers instead of acting on his own. Several pending lawsuits could also force a change as well.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL BILL CLAIMS

The following is an update to an on-going case in the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. Background

information is available in the Summer and Fall 2016 editions of the Veterans Newsletter.

A Minnesota veteran’s precedent setting legal case is forcing the VA to change course after denying payment of veterans; emergency medical bills for years. In June 2017, VA Secretary Dr. David Shulkin announced that the VA would “voluntarily withdraw” the appeal in the Staab case. This is a huge victory, not only for Staab, but also for veterans all across the nation.

It is a victory with significant financial ramifications as there are 370,000 previously denied veteran’s claims, which could total more than \$2 billion by the VA’s own estimates. The VA has drafted a regulation to authorize payment for Staab-related claims. This regulation has been sent to the Office of Management and Budget. This draft regulation must clear OMB and be published in the Federal Register before the VA can begin reimbursements. This process is estimated to take between 9 and 24 months. If you have had a reimbursement claim for emergency medical treatment outside the VA denied due to having additional insurance, feel free to contact the service office and we can review the available options. This decision only effects those claims denied due to other insurance availability, other denial reasons still remain valid and will not be overturned due to this turn of events.

VETERANS SCAM ALERTS

Following are a couple concerning scams:

Scammers are contacting veterans claiming to be from the VA and stating they are updating VA records. The caller states it is a new policy of the VA to reach out to veterans via telephone to make the VA a more user-friendly organization. The scammer will attempt to verify current address, military branch and employment status. These “soft questions” can lead up to the caller asking for the veteran’s social security number, credit card information or direct deposit information (for VA compensation). Please note the VA already has the information the scammers are trying to “verify” aside from credit card information.

Another scam involves trying to get veterans to trade their VA benefits for fast cash, often at a fraction of the true value of the monetary benefit. VA officials

have stated unequivocally that such a deal is always bad for the veteran. A hotline has been set up to contact “Operation Protect Veterans” at 855-800-9023 to verify legitimacy and help prevent the growth of this scam, this hotline is managed by AARP.

VA Dental Insurance Program (VADIP) Update

The VA Dental Insurance Reauthorization Act of 2016 extended the VADIP program through Dec 31, 2021. The VA has awarded MetLife and Delta Dental of California the contract to offer private dental insurance coverage to veterans enrolled in VA healthcare and beneficiaries of CHAMPVA. The VADIP program has not been accepting new enrollees since Jan 1, 2017 due the original provider contract expiring. I am pleased to state that the program is once again accepting new enrollees. Veterans and CHAMPVA beneficiaries that enrolled in the VADIP pilot program period (2013-2016) must select and enroll in one of the new plans offered by Delta Dental of MetLife. The plan providers have remained the same, plan options, fees and other factors may have changed from those offered during the pilot period.

VETERANS CHOICE UPDATE

The Department of Veterans Affairs sent a bill proposal to Congress in mid-October that would overhaul how veterans receive health care in the private sector and do away with the “30-day/40-mile” rule. The proposal, titled the Veterans Coordinated Access & Rewarding Experiences Act (CARE), promises to give veterans and their VA physician flexibility in choosing between care at a VAMC or in the private sector.

Under the proposed changes, veterans would be eligible to receive private sector healthcare if the VA cannot schedule an appointment within a “clinically acceptable time period”, or if the veterans and their VA physician decide it is in the best interest of the veteran to receive care outside the VA. It would also consolidate the VA’s multiple community care programs and allow veterans access to walk-in clinics to be treated for minor illness or injury.

The VA stated the new CARE proposal contains measures to “strengthen the VA’s world-class medical staff” and “ensure VA is improving medical

facilities and staffing levels to meet veteran needs in areas where VA care is substandard”.

Congress is working on a deadline, as the Choice program is expected to run out of funding at the end of the year. President Trump signed legislation in August that provided \$2.1 billion in immediate fund to the Choice program to prevent a funding shortfall. These funds were originally expected to last until February 2018. Unfortunately, the funds are being spent more rapidly than expected. The new CARE Act contains “business process enhancements” that the VA states would improve financial management.

Veteran Service Organization Happenings

This is a new section of the veteran’s newsletter I thought might be worth trying out. In this section, I am hoping to be able to get the word out about various events and activities the Veterans Service Organizations of Iowa County are hosting. These events can include but are not limited to appreciation nights, fundraisers (both for the posts and charities) or any special programs the various posts may be hosting. Please note however that this is a quarterly newsletter so I will need a fair amount of lead time to have events included in the newsletter. As a section opener:

Winter Steak Feed Season Is Upon Us:

Both Arena VFW Post #9336 and Ridgeway American Legion Post #257 have Steak Feeds throughout the winter months. Details for each are listed below:

Arena VFW Post #9336

December 9, 2017
January 13, 2018
February 10, 2018
March 10, 2018
April 14, 2018
May 12, 2018

Ridgeway American Legion Post #257

November 18, 2017
February 17, 2018
March 17, 2018
April 21, 2018

Head over to Arena or Ridgeway and enjoy some good food with our fellow veterans.

Iowa County Veterans Service Office
303 W. Chapel Street – Suite 1300
Dodgeville, WI 53533

**Veterans
Newsletter**

IMPORTANT DATES

Thursday, November 23rd – Thanksgiving Day
Sunday, December 24th – Christmas Eve
Monday, December 25th – Christmas Day
Sunday, December 31st – New Year’s Eve
Monday, January 1, 2018 – Happy 2018

VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE CLOSINGS

Thanksgiving Holiday
Christmas Eve Holiday
Christmas Holiday
New Year’s Day

Thursday & Friday, November 23rd & 24th
Friday, December 22nd
Monday, December 25th
Monday, January 1, 2018