



IOWA COUNTY VETERANS NEWSLETTER

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SUMMER, 2018

RAPID APPEALS MODERIZATION PROGRAM (RAMP)

19 YEAR OLD PAIN PRECEDENT OVERTURNED

Thousands of veterans previously denied disability benefits for pain related to their military service **may** now be eligible for compensation, thanks to a federal court ruling. On 4 Apr 2018, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit overturned a 19 year old precedent used in more than 11,000 VA claims denials that stated veterans have to have a clear medical diagnosis connected the their pain in order to be eligible for service connected disability.

A seven years active veteran that had injuries to both knees during service brought the case with the assistance of the National Veterans Legal Services Program. The injuries were noted in the veteran's service treatment records, without ever providing a specific medical diagnosis. The veteran filed for disability compensation after discharge and the claim was denied. VA officials acknowledged the problem stemmed from the veteran's time in service but the Board of Veterans Appeals cited a 1999 Veterans Court decision stating that "pain alone is not a disability for the purpose of VA disability compensation".

This court ruling negates that precedent, at least for now. The veteran still has to show a clear connection between their pain and their military service to be eligible, but there is no longer the need to have a specific medical reason for the pain to apply for benefits. The VA can appeal this ruling, though there has not been an appeal filed at this time. Veterans that have been denied benefits based on pain only previously, or who had chosen not to file a claim at all, should consider reapplying or starting a claim.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has launched the Rapid Appeals Modernization Program (RAMP) with the goal of providing veterans with the earliest possible resolution of their disagreement with VA benefits claims decisions.

RAMP involves three distinct "lanes" for appeals; these lanes are identified as "Higher Level Review", "Supplemental Claim" and "BVA Appeal". The difference between the first two lanes is the "Higher Level Review" does not allow the submission of additional evidence in support of the claim and the "Supplemental Claim" track does. The first two lanes have a turnaround goal of 125 days. The "BVA Appeal" lanes is very similar to the current appeals process. The Appeals Resource Center in Washington, D.C. is the centralized intake point for all disagreements in which RAMP is elected. RAMP was initially by invite only, it is now open to any veteran with a claim disagreement. The appeals procedure changes will apply to all disagreements starting February, 2019.

SBP PREMIUM UPDATE CRSC DEDUCTIONS

If you receive Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) and have the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP), you may have noticed a change in your net pay beginning in April, 2018. DFAS began deducting SBP premiums from CRSC when retirement pay is not sufficient to cover the full amount of the premiums. The new deduction is due to a change in the law, which requires DFAS to deduct premiums from CRSC. This change affects

retirees that receive CRSC and currently pay SBP premiums via direct remittance. Retirees that have their SBP premiums deducted from their VA pay are not affected.

NEW MEDICARE CARD SCAM ALERT

Distribution of new Medicare cards began in April, 2018 and will continue through April, 2019. The new cards will not use the beneficiary's social security number. These cards are being sent out automatically, there is no need to contact Medicare to request a new card.

Please be cautious of calls from individuals claiming to represent Medicare or the Social Security Administration. These callers have been telling beneficiaries that they need a new Medicare card, and may threaten loss of benefits if you do not comply. Throughout this call, beneficiaries are being requested to provide personal information such as their Medicare number and bank account information; some are offering gifts or money for compliance. Others are stating beneficiaries have to pay for the new Medicare card. It is important to remember the following items:

- Medicare beneficiaries will receive a new Medicare card automatically.
- Medicare cards do not expire.
- Medicare will not call beneficiaries to offer a new card or request information in order to issue a new card.
- Beneficiaries who lose their Medicare card can request a new one with a new Medicare ID number from the Social Security Administration.

Learn to prevent, detect, and report possible Medicare fraud. To report possible fraud or for more information call: 1(877)272-8720

VA MISSION ACT

The "VA Mission ACT" a \$52 billion veterans legislative package passed the Senate after a 92-5 vote on Wednesday, 23 May 2018. The legislation easily passed the House the week before. The legislation will now head the White House, where President Trump has indicate he will sign it into law. This legislation will have wide-ranging effects on service members of every generation though most of

the impact will not be seen for several years. One of the early goals of the legislation is to improve community care rules within the next year. Working out eligibility standards for which veterans can receive outside care and how those decisions will be made is not expected to be completed until Spring, 2019. Some of the other provisions of the legislation, which are expected to take longer yet, include new caregiver stipends and VA asset reviews.

A FEW VA BENEFITS OF WHICH YOU MAY NOT BE AWARE

1. Any veteran who is service-connected for a disability for which he or she uses prosthetic or orthopedic appliances may receive an annual clothing allowance.
2. VA provides pensions to low-income surviving spouses and unmarried dependent children of deceased veterans with wartime service.
3. A surviving spouse age 57 and older who remarries after December 15, 2003, is entitled to continue to receive benefits.
4. Passports are available to family members free of charge for the purpose of visiting their loved one's grave or memorialization site at the American military cemeteries on foreign soil.
5. A rating percentage is considered "protected" once it is in place for 20 years. There would be no danger of a decreased disability rating after the 20 year mark.
6. Disabled Veterans may be eligible to claim a federal tax refund based on: an increase in the Veteran's percentage of disability from the Veteran's Administration (which may include a retroactive determination) or the combat-disabled Veteran applying for, and being granted, Combat-Related Special Compensation, after an award for Concurrent Retirement and Disability.
7. Veterans who are 100% service-connected IU may be eligible for an additional monthly entitlement of \$62.50/mo for catastrophic injury.
8. Any veterans rated 10% or more for service-connection may have the home loan fee waived.

MILWAUKEE COUNTY “3-DAY PASS” EVENTS

Some Milwaukee County attractions are offering special active duty/ veteran admission during the weekend leading up to Independence Day. This is the fifth time the “3-day pass” has been offered by the attractions listed below. You will have to provide proof of service; acceptable forms of service proof are DD-214, NGB22, VA Healthcare ID, WI driver license with VETERAN identifier, veterans’ organization membership card or the Purple Heart Pass.

- June 29 – Mitchell Park Domes, free admission, Vet +5
- June 30 – Milwaukee Public Museum, free admission, Vet +5
- July 1 – Milwaukee County Zoo, tickets required, limit of ten for immediate family only.
- Milwaukee Art Museum – veteran/military +5 Memorial Day through Labor Day

July 1 at the Milwaukee County Zoo is the annual Military/Veterans Family Day. The zoo offers free admission for military/veterans and their families. Admission tickets will be available at the end of May at the County Veterans Service Office (CVSO).

MILWAUKEE BREWERS OFFER FREE TICKETS TO VETERANS FOR SUNDAY HOME GAMES

The Milwaukee Brewers organization is again offering free Terrace Level seats for veterans for Sunday home games. The tickets are available by presenting proof of military service at windows 7-12 at the box office on the day of the game. These tickets cannot be reserved in advance.

MILITARY APPRECIATION DAY AT THE “DUCK POND”

The Madison Mallards have scheduled their annual “Military Appreciation Day” for July 4th. Game time is 1:05 p.m. and the gates open at 11:30 a.m. In addition to ticket discounts, they will have a pre-game tribute to and recognition of veterans and Presentation of the Colors. Contact Matt Champeau

at (608)246-4277 with questions or to purchase tickets in advance.

PTSD PEER SUPPORT GROUP

A peer support group for those with PTSD has started at Upland Hills Health. The meetings are scheduled for the 3rd Thursday of every month from 9 to 10:30 a.m. The meetings are held in the Upland Hills Medical Center Conference room, which is across from the cafeteria. The meetings are being led by David “Hosko” Hosking from the Madison Vet Center. The Vet Centers are a nationwide program that provide free counseling assistance to any combat veteran from any campaign. For more information, you can contact the Vet Center in Madison at (608)264-5342.

HOGS FOR HEROES

Hogs For Heroes is a Wisconsin nonprofit dedicated to healing the mental and physical wounds suffered by our Wisconsin Veterans during the course of active duty through the therapeutic benefits of owning and riding a Harley. They raise funds to purchase Harleys for Veterans who once enjoyed a passion for riding and now find themselves without the means or the ability to have a Bike in their lives. Eligibility criteria for this program is:

*an honorably discharged Wisconsin Veteran resident,

*with a service-connected injury/disability/disease,

*a current motorcycle license and an established history of motorcycle riding enthusiasm,

*who is experiencing a hardship that prevents them from purchasing a bike themselves.

Applications for this current opportunity must be postmarked by June 30, 2018. Visit www.hogsforheroeswi.org for more information and to obtain application materials.

THAT OLD, TATTERED FLAG

It is time again to retire the flags that have become too worn and faded to remain in service. The Mineral Point American Legion provides the location for the county-wide flag retirement ceremony. This year’s ceremony will be on June 19th at 7:00 p.m. If you have flags you would like to have retired, you can drop them off at several locations around the county as well as at the Veterans Service Office.

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

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IMPORTANT DATES

May 19 th	Armed Forces Day
May 28 th	Memorial Day
June 14 th	Flag Day
June 19 th	Flag Retirement – Mineral Point American Legion - 7:00 p.m.
July 2 nd	Free Admission for Active Military and Veterans at Milwaukee Co. Zoo
July 4 th	Independence Day

VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE CLOSINGS IN 2018

Memorial Day	Monday, May 28 th
Independence Day	Wednesday, July 4 th
Service Officer Vacation	August 10-20, 2018
Labor Day	Monday, September 3 rd
Thanksgiving Holiday	Thursday/Friday, November 22 nd & 23 rd
Christmas Holiday	Monday/ Tuesday, December 24 th & 25 th