



AFSA Retiree and Veteran Affairs Newsletter



- MEMORIAL DAY

Memorial Day, 29 May 2023 is just a few weeks away. Remember, Memorial Day commemorates the men and women who died while in the military service of their country, particularly those who died in battle or because of wounds sustained in battle. In other words, the purpose of Memorial Day is to memorialize and remember the veterans who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country. We spend time remembering those who lost their lives and could not come home, reflecting on their service and why we have the luxury and freedom that we enjoy today. We might consider how we can support and safeguard their grieving families and loved ones who are left behind. Lest we forget...

- PRESUMPTIVE TOXIC EXPOSURE ELIGIBILITY

VA has expanded the list of health conditions that we assume (or “presume”) are caused by exposure to hazardous substances. This update helps generations of Veterans, and their survivors receive the care and benefits they’ve earned and deserve. If you have a presumptive condition, you don’t need to prove that your service caused it. You only need to meet the service requirements for the presumption.

To get a VA disability rating, your disability must connect to your military service. For many health conditions, you need to prove that your service caused your condition. But for some conditions, we automatically assume (or “presume”) that your service caused your condition. We call these “presumptive conditions.”

We consider a condition presumptive when it’s established by law or regulation. If you have a presumptive condition, you don’t need to prove that your service caused the condition. You only need to meet the service requirements for the presumption.

We’ve added more than 20 burn pit and other toxic exposure presumptive conditions based on the PACT Act. The full name of the law is the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address

Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act of 2022. This change expands benefits for Gulf War era and post-9/11 Veterans.

To find out more information visit: <https://www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits/>

- MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH MONTH, SUPPORT VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH

May is Mental Health Awareness Month. To commemorate the month, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is encouraging Veterans, along with their families and friends, to visit and view recovery journey stories on the website, MakeTheConnection.net.

Make the Connection is a national awareness program operated by VA aimed at reducing the negative perceptions and stigma associated with seeking mental health care. Through the Website, Veterans and their loved ones hear from hundreds of other Veterans who may be experiencing similar challenges, learn strategies for support and recovery, along with local resources available through a resource locator.

Since the launch of the Make the Connection campaign in November 2011, there have been more than 7 million visits to the website, and more than 2.8 million people have joined the Facebook community or subscribed to the YouTube channel. The resource locator on the site, with information on VA and community-based treatment services around the country, has been used more than 220,000 times.

“We all have the ability to influence a friend or loved one in a positive way – that’s why Make the Connection was created,” said VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald. “We want Veterans to tell their personal stories of mental health treatment and recovery to as many of their peers as possible. Those stories can be great sources of strength for Veterans in need of hope.”

Information about all VA mental health efforts may be found at www.mentalhealth.va.gov.

- HOW WOMEN VETERANS CAN LEARN ABOUT VA HEALTH CARE SERVICES

A majority of women Veterans are not utilizing their earned benefits. As a result, they do not have access to the VA health care system or the low- or cost-free care it offers.

Health care decisions can be overwhelming, and women Veterans might ask themselves “Where do I start?” Check out these tips on staying informed about VA health care as a woman Veteran. It's never too late to enroll in VA health care services.

Only 44% of women Veterans are enrolled in VA health care. To learn more about the health benefits that you have earned and deserve, sign up for these training sessions through the VA Women's Health Reengagement Training (heaRT).

Information about all VA women’s healthcare efforts may be found at www.womenslhealth.va.gov.

- GET PRESCRIPTION REFILLS QUICK AND EASY WITH THE VA HEALTH AND BENEFITS APP

Veterans can now refill their prescriptions (Rx) using the VA Health and Benefits mobile app. Existing users will need to download the latest version of the app to gain access to new features. If you don’t see the

Prescriptions feature in the “Health Care” tab after you download the latest version, completely quit the application and open it again.

The Health and Benefits mobile app is VA’s official, all-in-one, on-the-go, easy-to-use, accessible, on-demand app enabling Veterans to manage both their VA health care and benefits services at their fingertips.

Adding Rx refill makes the VA Health and Benefits mobile app more useful and multi-functional for the over 1 million Veterans who have downloaded and are using the mobile app, plus those who will do so.

The new Rx refill feature allows Veterans to:

- View your VA active and non-active Rx history (up to 180 days)
- Filter and sort Rxs
- View Rx details
- Request refills of your refillable VA-dispensed Rxs
- View pending (recently submitted or refill in-process) refills; and
- View tracking information, through delivery, for trackable refills.

The app provides a native mobile interface, like the “Rx refill” feature of My HealtheVet. You can easily track refill requests submitted through the app or the My HealtheVet website and dispensed by a VA Consolidated Mail Outpatient Pharmacy using the app’s “Track Delivery” feature.

This new feature means you can easily (with your phone’s biometric face recognition or thumb login capability) and securely log into the VA Health and Benefits mobile app to manage your VA prescriptions quickly and safely from anywhere. If you don’t have a compatible mobile device, don’t worry! You can still access web-based Rx refills at VA.gov or My HealtheVet.

Note: VA is undergoing an Electronic Health Record Modernization (EHRM) effort, which may impact whether the My HealtheVet and Rx refill feature on the VA Health and Benefits mobile app are operational in your area.

Need more information: <https://news.va.gov/117508/prescription-refill-now-available-mobile-app/>

- CHANGES TO THE SURVIVOR BENEFIT PLAN FOR SBP ANNUITANTS IN 2023

This year brought big changes to the Survivor Benefit Plan for surviving spouses who were also receiving Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) payment from the VA. It also brought big changes for surviving spouses and children of members who died on active duty or inactive duty, in the line of duty, and chose the Optional Annuity for Dependent Children.

SBP-DIC Offset Elimination

Beginning with the 1 February 2023, payday, the SBP-DIC Offset was fully eliminated. That means spouses now receive their full SBP monthly payments from DFAS and their full Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) payments from the VA.

The Special Survivors Indemnity Allowance (SSIA) will no longer be paid after the January 2023 payment, because SSIA is only paid to spouses who have their SBP payment offset by DIC.

Please note the change in the law does NOT affect the amount of DIC you receive from the VA. You should continue to receive your full DIC amount from the VA.

Find out more on our special focus webpage: <https://www.dfas.mil/sbpdicnews>

- GRAY AREA RETIREE SPOTLIGHT: WHAT IS RCSBP?

The Reserve Component Survivor Benefit Plan (RCSBP) enables members who served in Reserve Components and qualify for retired pay to leave the people they care about with a benefit called an “annuity.” You can choose a benefit for: “Spouse Only;” “Spouse and Child(ren);” “Child(ren) Only;” “Natural Interest Person;” “Former Spouse;” or “Former Spouse and Child(ren).”

An annuity is a monthly payment that lasts the lifetime of your beneficiary after you pass away. The amount of the monthly payment is a percentage of your retired pay, and that percentage depends upon the election you make if you sign up for RCSBP.

Is RCSBP the Same as SBP?

RCSBP is like the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) that covers non-reserve components of the armed services. However, there are several differences in eligibility, coverage and cost that reflect the unique nature of Reserve and Guard service.

Special Note for Gray Area Retirees About the SBP and RCSBP Open Season

The SBP Open Season allows for retirees receiving retired pay, eligible members, or former members awaiting retired pay who were NOT enrolled in SBP or RCSBP (Reserve Component Survivor Benefit Plan) as of December 22, 2022, to enroll. For a member who enrolls during the SBP Open Season, the law generally requires that the member will be responsible to pay retroactive SBP premium costs that would have been paid if the member had enrolled at retirement (or enrolled at another earlier date, depending on the member’s family circumstances).

The SBP Open Season runs from 23 December 2022 to 1 January 2024. Gray Area Retirees and Reserve/Guard component members should contact their Branch of Service for information on how to enroll or discontinue SBP or RCSBP coverage during the SBP Open Season. Members of the Reserves, Guard, or members who are awaiting retired pay (Gray Area Retirees) should contact their Branch of Service.

Visit the DFAS Gray Area Retiree webpage at <https://www.dfas.mil/grayarea>).

- NEW VERSION: VETERANS GEOGRAPHY OF OPPORTUNITY TOOL

Social determinants of health (SDOH) are factors beyond genes and lifestyle choices that impact our health. SDOH are the social, economic, and physical conditions in the environments where people live, work, and play. Social and economic disadvantages such as poverty, lack of educational opportunity, food insecurity, or neighborhood crime can result in poor health outcomes and health disparities.

The VHA Office of Health Equity's Veterans Geography of Opportunity Tool combines publicly available county-level health data and Veteran data from VHA and the American Community Survey to provide a snapshot of how healthy the communities where Veterans live are. This tool can help users identify the

communities where Veterans live and the social, economic, and physical and mental health needs of those communities. It also provides information about what percentage of Veterans in the community are enrolled with the VHA.

Users can customize what they see on the map by selecting various health factor focus areas and measures and Veteran populations on the right side of the visualization. To learn more about a specific county, hover over the dot with your mouse, and exact numbers and their meanings will appear. It is important to note that the county-level health data are community-wide and do not contain Veteran-specific information.

The updated version of the tool provides more in-depth information about the sex and race/ethnicity information about Veteran populations by county and state. County health data were obtained from the 2023 County Health Rankings & Roadmaps.

Need more information: https://www.va.gov/HEALTHEQUITY/Veterans_Geography_of_Opportunity_Tool.asp

- VOLUNTEER TO 'CARRY THE LOAD' AND HONOR VETERANS, SERVICE MEMBERS DURING 'MEMORIAL MAY'

VA encourages volunteers to join cross-country march honoring Veterans, service members during 'Memorial May.' Between April 27 and May 29, the Department of Veterans Affairs will support a 20,000-mile march with more than 214,000 volunteers in honor of Veterans and service members.

The annual collaboration between VA's National Cemetery Administration and Carry the Load will host rallies at 38 national cemeteries along five separate routes covering 48 states. All five routes converge on Memorial Day weekend for a final rally in Dallas, Texas — the culminating event for "Memorial May."

Those who wish to participate in a march are asked to register with Carry the Load in advance. No donation is required to participate. Carry The Load is a non-profit organization providing active ways to connect Americans to the sacrifices of the nation's military, Veterans, first responders, and their families.

The list of national cemeteries, along with the dates and times Carry the Load marchers will visit the cemeteries, can be found at: <https://www.cem.va.gov/Memorial-May/>

- REQUEST A VA HOME LOAN CERTIFICATE OF ELIGIBILITY

If you're interested in a VA direct or VA-backed home loan, the first step is to access a Certificate of Eligibility (COE). VA home loans help Veterans, active-duty service members, and eligible survivors to buy, build, improve, or refinance a home with little or no down payment. Request your COE online with a new user-friendly portal on VA.gov.

- APPLY FOR BENEFITS AS YOU TRANSITION TO CIVILIAN LIFE

When separating or retiring from the military, it is important to consider your time-sensitive VA benefits, starting with the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). The program helps provide the skill-building, resources, and tools needed to achieve emotional health, physical health, and economic stability in civilian life. Learn about TAP and other time-sensitive benefits you may apply for visit: <https://benefits.va.gov/transition/tap.asp>

- HOW TO GET YOUR FREE VETERAN ID CARD

A Veteran ID Card (VIC) is a digital form of photo ID you can use to get discounts offered to Veterans at many restaurants, hotels, stores, and other businesses. Find out if you're eligible for a Veteran ID Card—and how to apply.

You may be eligible if you meet both requirements:

- You served on active duty, in the Reserves, or in the National Guard (including the Coast Guard), and
- You received an honorable or general discharge (under honorable conditions)

If you received another than honorable, bad conduct, or dishonorable character of discharge, you're not eligible for a Veteran ID Card. If you have an uncharacterized or unknown discharge status, we'll have to verify your eligibility before we approve your application.

You'll need to provide a copy of your discharge papers when you apply for a VIC to prove your character of discharge.

For more information visit: <https://www.va.gov/records/get-veteran-id-cards/vic/>

- REMINDER: FACE MASKS ARE CURRENTLY REQUIRED AT VAHCS HEALTH CARE FACILITIES

The VA Health Care System (VAHCS) continues to put the safety and health of our Veterans, their families, and staff first. To comply with the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) guidelines, face masks are currently required due to local community transmission levels.

We encourage all Veterans, their family members, and visitors to bring a face mask when you visit a VA health care facility. If you do not have a face mask, we can provide one for you. If you are hearing impaired and need to read lips, please let a VA staff member know, and we will accommodate your needs.

- AFSA MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Founded in 1961, the Air Force Sergeants Association (AFSA) legislates, advocates, and educates America's elected, military and community leaders in support of the quality of life for our military members and their families. AFSA continues to work long and hard to ensure the many benefit reductions being proposed are minimized or nullified. Your membership will continue to pay dividends in terms of fair and equitable pay increases, retirement programs, educational benefits, and affordable and available health care.

AFSA MEMBERSHIP is open to all: UNIFORMED SERVICES: Active Duty, Guard, Reserve, Retired and Veteran Military Members (Joint Services Enlisted and Commissioned Officers), Public Health Services (PHS), and National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) personnel; FAMILY MEMBERS of Uniformed Service Members, and ASSOCIATE MEMBERS: DoD Civilians, Civil Air Patrol, JROTC, Mission Partners/Sponsors and all Military Supporters. Visit: WWW.HQAFSA.org for more information and to join.

- AFSA'S SUMMIT REGISTRATION

We are incredibly excited to let you know that Registration is now OPEN for The SUMMIT23: AFSA International Convention and Professional Education & Development Conferences. We are anticipating a full house with AFSA members, families, and guests, along with other Active Duty, Retired and Veteran military personnel.

DATES: You have TWO CHOICES when registering for the AFSA-International Conference (AFSA-IC):

- AFSA-IC Only: Friday, August 4 to Sunday, August 6. (Arrive Fri., Aug 4, Depart Mon., Aug 7) Cost \$275. Includes all AFSA special event meal functions.
- AFSA-IC PLUS the PEDS and the Air & Space Force Honors Banquet: Friday, August 4 to Wednesday, August 9. (Arrive Fri., Aug 4, Depart Thurs., Aug 10) Cost: \$325 Includes all AFSA special event meal functions, plus the Air & Space Honors Banquet.

REGISTER ONLINE

Important: Your confirmation/receipt will be sent to the email that you use here to register today.

- Go online to: <https://www.thesummitafsa.org/AFSAInternationalConvention>
- Review the page, scroll down to learn about your 2 choices, events, schedules and more.
- Click on the “REGISTER NOW” Button
- Choose the AFSA International Convention (AFSA-IC) 2-Day Only –OR -- the AFSA-IC plus PEDS/Air & Space Honors Banquet Registration.
- Select the quantities (-/+) to register with spouses, family, etc. & hit “CONTINUE”
- Complete the registration form (Name, Email, Mobile, Rank, AFSA Member ID, Division, Chapter, Seating request, etc.) & hit “CONTINUE”
- Complete payment info (credit card number, Exp date, CVV code
- Hit “PAY”
- You can print a copy/screen shot for your records if preferred.
- Watch your email for the Confirmation/Receipt from ZOHO Checkout/AFSA Summit

HOTEL/ROOM Reservations are open for your stay at the beautiful Hilton Anatole in Dallas at our special \$154 a night rate. Make your reservations here now: <https://book.passkey.com/event/50377324/owner/863/home>

PLAY GOLF AND SUPPORT MILITARY SPOUSE/S SCHOLARSHIPS Join us at the Uniformed Services Foundation (AFSA’s 501©3 organization) Charity Golf Scramble, Friday, August 4 at the Irving Golf Club in Irving, Texas. \$125 per golfer/\$500 Team of 4. Note, you’ll need to arrive a day early as the shotgun start beginning at 9:00 am! Play or sponsor here at: <https://www.thesummitafsa.org/USFGolfOuting#/?lang=en>

- ARE YOU A VETERAN IN CRISIS OR CONCERNED ABOUT ONE?

Did you know that VA offers same day services in Primary Care and Mental Health at 172 VA Medical Centers? Contact the Veterans Crisis Line (1-800-273-8255 and press 1, Chat, or Text 838255 or call 988.)