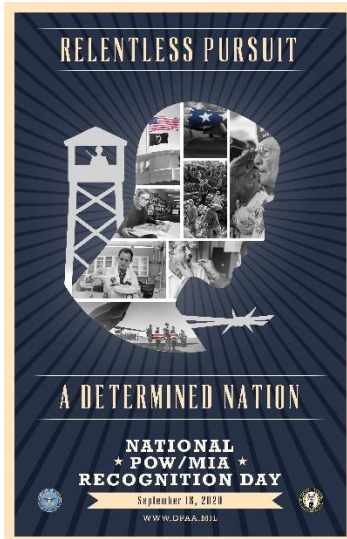




## AFSA Retiree and Veteran Affairs Newsletter

### - NATIONAL POW/MIA RECOGNITION DAY ~~~ FRIDAY, 18 SEPTEMBER 2020



National POW/MIA Recognition Day was established in 1979 through a proclamation signed by President Jimmy Carter. Since then, each subsequent president has issued an annual proclamation commemorating the third Friday in September as National POW/MIA Recognition Day.

A national-level ceremony is held on every National POW/MIA Recognition Day. Traditionally held at the Pentagon, it features members from each branch of military service and participation from high-ranking officials.

In addition to the national-level ceremony, observances of National POW/MIA Recognition Day are held across the country on military installations, ships at sea, state capitols, schools and veterans' facilities.

No matter where they are held, these National POW/MIA Recognition Day ceremonies share the common purpose of honoring those who were held captive and returned, as well as those who remain missing.

### - BREAKING AFSA LEGISLATIVE NEWS

Since 1984, AFSA's Legislative Awareness Week program has increased member involvement in the legislative process and has helped to establish our Association as each community's leading advocate for service members past and present and their families.

This year, from October 4 to October 10, the AFSA Military and Government team will be presenting to members the FIRST EVER Virtual Legislative Awareness Week; "vLAW" for short!

Leading up to the vLAW, our legislative team will be unveiling additional details to help YOU effectively participate in and engage with the BRAND NEW resources that will be provided during the vLAW.

If you have any questions as more information is made available via social media and our Military and Government Brief, please don't hesitate to reach out to our Military and Government team at [milgov3@hqafsa.org](mailto:milgov3@hqafsa.org).

## **- IMPORTANT INFORMATION ON GI BILL PEAK ENROLLMENT**

Every fall and spring, VA sees an increase in education claims due to peak enrollments. This is an expected increase and we are positioned to handle the work. We will be working with schools to make sure the increase in work is aligned with the typical timeliness of this season. We are reaching out to your schools and asking them to submit enrollment certificates as soon as possible, so we can ensure payments are issued in a timely fashion.

VA works claims in the date order they are received. Without a need for schools to either hold or resubmit previous enrollments, we expect to continue working the majority of original (first time) enrollment and applications within 28 days and the majority of supplemental (re-enrollments) within 14 days during the fall 2020 term. Unique factors may cause some students claims to fall outside of these parameters. VA is committed to working these claims as expeditiously as possible.

### ***Tips for Success***

- Plan ahead of time
- Enroll as early as you can
- Get to know and stay in contact with your School Certifying Officials
- Be sure you understand your school's procedures regarding requests for certification to VA
- Avoid changing your schedules as much as possible once you are enrolled
- If you do drop/add hours, contact your School Certifying Official immediately to mitigate potential overpayment.

## **- INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE PROGRAM**

In the United States, about 1 in 4 women and 1 in 10 men report experiencing Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). Veterans may be at a higher risk, with some studies suggesting up to 70% of women Veterans receiving health care in VA experiencing IPV.

Research has shown that relationship conflict or even abuse occurs or escalates during times of crisis. When experiencing IPV, any disruption to normal life or access to services can mean an increased potential for harm.

The IPV Assistance Program is available at the VA Health Care System to help Veterans who are experiencing violence in their intimate partner relationships.

## **- EXPANDED COMPREHENSIVE ASSISTANCE FOR FAMILY CAREGIVERS**

To support those who support our Veterans, VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers is expanding in October to include: eligible WWII, Korean, and Vietnam Veterans, eligible Veterans with a service-connected disability rating of 70% or higher, and access to financial planning and legal services. Moreover, all Caregivers have access to many supportive resources, such as workshops, a Support Line, and Peer Support Mentoring.

Apply after the official launch of the expanded Program. Stay tuned for a VA announcement in later this month in September.

## **- PREPARING FOR THE END OF VA'S DEBT RELIEF PROGRAM**

Back in July 2020, VA extended its debt relief program to Veterans who were adversely impacted by COVID-19 to the end of 2020 by suspending certain debt collection actions.

As a reminder, the VA's debt relief program is not a cancellation of debt owed to the VA. While your debt will not accrue interest during the suspension period, you will receive a bill for the entire amount owed after December 31, 2020.

To avoid receiving a larger than normal bill, you can take the following steps now:

- If you are able to make payments, you can.
- After the debt relief period has ended, and you are unable to pay your debt. You can either set up a payment plan or request debt forgiveness.

For benefit debts, Veterans can contact the VA Debt Management Center at 1-800-827-0648 for more information. For health care debts, Veterans can contact the Health Resource Center at 1-866-400-1238 for more information or visit <https://www.pay.gov> to make payments.

## **- HOW TO APPEAL YOUR VA COMPENSATION CLAIM**

Veterans have three paths for easier and faster appeal of VA's decision on their compensation claim.

Find out, which is right for you: Supplemental Claim, Higher-Level Review, or an Appeal to the Board of Veterans' Appeals.

**Decision Review Option: Supplemental Claim** You can file a Supplemental Claim if you have new and relevant evidence that we didn't have when we reviewed your case before.

**Decision Review Option: Higher-Level Review** Ask for a more senior reviewer to look at your case. You can't submit new evidence with a Higher-Level Review.

**Decision Review Option: Board Appeal** If you don't agree with the decision on your Supplemental Claim or Higher-Level Review, you can appeal to a Veterans Law Judge at the Board of Veterans' Appeals.

**After You Request a Decision Review** Find out what happens after you request a decision review.

## **- VA HOME LOANS, NO MONEY DOWN & COST SAVINGS FOR VETERANS & THEIR FAMILIES**

The VA home loan is available for eligible Veterans, service members, and certain surviving spouses. No money down and no private mortgage insurance! The VA home loan guaranty can help save you thousands of dollars on the purchase or refinancing of your home.

Need more information then visit: <https://www.va.gov/housing-assistance/home-loans/loan-types/>

## **- PRACTICING SELF CARE**

During these unprecedented times, we have forced people to change their lives and daily routines. For many, that means hunkering down in their homes, limiting trips to stores, and learning to distance themselves from

their families and friends. However, even when we are called on to keep our physical distance; it's important to prevent social isolation from setting in. During these stressful times, it's more important than ever to find ways to connect emotionally with others, which is an essential part of self-care.

Protect your social connections. Social connections can enhance our physical and emotional health. It's important to sustain strong relationships by interacting with family members and friends in positive ways and asking them for help when you're feeling overwhelmed or in need of support. Even while physically distancing, you can build your support network and social connections by taking classes online or joining a group that shares your interests on social media. Follow Make the Connection on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube to hear inspiring stories of recovery from Veterans and to find an online community of support.

Practice self-care. Maintaining social connections is one of several basic forms of self-care recommended by the National Institutes of Health. Combined with a variety of VA resources and advice from fellow Veterans, these self-care practices can support your mental health during challenging times.

Manage your stress. This advice always sounds easier said than done, but it's one of the most important factors in protecting both your mental and physical health. Lean on your social network for support. Prioritize your current responsibilities, and don't take on new ones if they will overload you. Focus on the positive and find a relaxation method that works for you. Hear from other Veterans who worked through their stress to learn how they did it.

Get good sleep. Sleep trouble, including nightmares, can be common among Veterans, especially during uncertain times. Sleep affects your mental and physical well-being. To get the most out of sleep, try to go to bed at the same time each night and get up at the same time each morning. Limit the things that can interfere with quality sleep. Relax before bedtime with a bath or a book. If you have trouble sleeping, explore these tips to help get a good night's rest.

## **- 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 100,000 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](http://WWW.HQAFSA.org) for more information and to join.

## **- 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 across the country? Contact the Veterans Crisis Line (1-800-273-8255 and press 1, Chat, or Text 838255.)