



AFSA Retiree and Veteran Affairs Newsletter

- JUNE IS PTSD AWARENESS MONTH

Besides many other monthly activities and events during the month of June when summer kicks into full swing; it is also Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Month. Those connected to the military community most likely know someone whose life has been impacted by PTSD.

PTSD, which is a mental health disorder, impacts 11-20% of Iraq and Afghanistan War veterans, approximately 12% of Gulf War veterans, and 15% of Vietnam veterans. An individual might experience PTSD after living through or witnessing a terrifying event, with triggers that can lead to intense emotional and physical reaction. As Cohen Veterans Network has said in the past, there's a lack of understanding around the condition that creates a stigma. But there is help.

The Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic at Metrocare provides quality, accessible, and comprehensive mental health care to post-9/11 veterans, service members, and their families. Services are available to any person who has served in the U.S. Armed Forces, including the National Guard and Reserves, regardless of role or discharge status.

Established in 2016, our location in Addison, TX was one of the first clinics in Cohen Veterans Network, a national nonprofit philanthropic network of mental health clinics for veterans, service members, and their families. To learn more visit: <https://www.metrocareservices.org/mfc/>

- VA CAREGIVER STIPEND

Veterans Affairs officials will suspend all annual reassessments of families in their caregiver stipend program, citing continued work into revising rules and policies associated with the benefit. The move comes after months of controversy over the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers, which provides monthly financial support to about 33,000 veterans in need of full-time at-home care. VA officials also repeated their promise not to discharge or reduce stipends for any families based on earlier reassessments.

Currently the program is open only to veterans who served after 2001 or before 1976, but it is scheduled to expand it to all veterans this fall. In preparation for that, officials last year began a review of all existing post-9/11 veteran participants to ensure they still qualified for the stipend under amended rules. In March, in response to complaints from families about the process, VA leadership acknowledged that roughly 90% of families who underwent the reviews were scheduled to be booted from the program based on decisions by administrators. That would have dropped almost half of all current families from the program.

Advocates have said that losing the stipend could force infirm veterans and their families into financial distress, since many spouses and parents cannot work full-time and care for their loved ones. McDonough's announcement in March was met with praise from families, but the reassessments continued in the following weeks, causing confusion among families about whether the promise not to process out participants was still in effect. In addition, several groups reported families had received notices that they could still be kicked out of the program in coming months.

The 9 June 22 announcement ended those reviews. In a statement, VA Deputy Secretary Donald Remy said the move was made to ensure that veterans and their families were not being hurt by the process. "Although we've come a long way in supporting caregivers, we have much more work to do," he said. "In our effort to uphold our sacred obligation to families of veterans, VA continues its review of PCAFC to ensure department requirements and procedures meet the needs of caregivers and veterans participating in the program." No timeline has been announced for when that review will be complete.

VA officials said caregiver support staff will continue to initiate reassessments for veterans and family caregivers for some purposes, such as when they request to be considered for an increase in stipend levels or if there is evidence of an increased need for personal care services. And staff will continue to conduct "wellness visits" to ensure that veterans are receiving the care needed to address their medical needs. In a statement to program participants, officials wrote that they are "listening to concerns and working diligently to address them as we continue to ensure veterans and their caregivers get the support they need and deserve." The program expansion is scheduled to go into effect on 1 October 22.

- VETERANS CAN NOW FILE AN APPEAL ONLINE WITH THE BOARD OF VETERANS' APPEALS

The Board of Veterans' Appeals (Board, BVA) continues to modernize to meet Veterans' needs. The Board recently updated and improved its website to make sure all the information you need is available and easy to understand. It also includes what the Board does and what to expect during an appeal. Biggest news of all? Veterans can now file their request to appeal to the Board online!

How do you request a Board Appeal online?

If you disagree with a decision VA made on your claim, you can log into VA.gov and electronically file the VA Form 10182.

The process is simple!

- Navigate your browser to <https://www.va.gov/decision-reviews/board-appeal/>.
- Select "Request a Board Appeal" to go to the VA.gov login screen. You must have a VA.gov account.
- The appeal tool will walk you through the process of filing an appeal correctly online.
- You can select which type of appeal you would like: Direct Review, Evidence Submission, or Hearing. You can also find more information about all these options and what to expect during your appeal on the Board's homepage.

The ability to file an appeal online is just one of the many technology modernizations the Board has made to ensure Veterans have easy access to the Board. This initiative supports VA's commitment to help Veterans receive faster resolutions to their disagreements with VA claims decisions.

Did you know that you can also have a Virtual Tele-Hearing?

In addition to filing an appeal online, Veterans who selected a hearing can have those hearings online. No need to report in person to a local VA office. All you need is a Wi-Fi connection. Additional information about virtual tele-hearings can be found here. Visit www.bva.va.gov for more information.

- VET UNEMPLOYMENT 2022

Veterans unemployment continued its steady recent decline in May, falling below 3% for the third consecutive month. The employment statistic hasn't been under that mark for three months since late 2019, a few months before the coronavirus pandemic disrupted the American economy and set veterans (and other workers) unemployment to historically high levels. In May 2020, just a few weeks after the coronavirus pandemic started in America, the veterans unemployment rate was at 9%. Since then, the number of veterans struggling to find work has dropped by about 550,000 individuals.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, about 2.7% of veterans looking for steady employment last month were unable to secure jobs, down from 2.9% in April. The figure translates to just under 250,000 veterans across the United States receiving joblessness benefits. Among post-9/11 veterans, the figure was slightly higher — 3.2% — but still significantly below the 3.6% unemployment rate for the nation as a whole. May was the fourth consecutive month that the post-9/11 unemployment number was less than 3.5%. The last time that happened was early 2019.

About 8.5 million veterans are participating in the American workforce today. Of that group, about 3.8 million served during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars era, the largest of any single generation of veterans. Roughly 900,000 veterans who served in the Vietnam War or earlier eras are still employed full time, according to federal estimates.

- VA HOME LOAN BENEFIT CAN SAVE YOU MONEY

For more than 75 years, the VA home loan benefit has helped millions of eligible Veterans and service members buy a home. A VA home loan means lower-than-average interest rates, limited closing costs and no down payment.

For more information, contact VA (<https://www.va.gov/homeloans> or 1-800-MyVA411 press 5 for benefits, then 3 for home loans) or talk to a lender of your choice.

- TRAIN FOR A NEW JOB WITH VRAP

If you're a Veteran who lost your job due to the COVID-19 pandemic, VA may have a solution for you. The Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program (VRRAP) offers education and training for a variety of high-demand jobs so you can get back to work.

Qualifying Veterans can receive up to 12 months of tuition and fees along with a monthly housing allowance.

To be eligible for VRRAP, you must be between 22 and 66 years of age, unemployed due to COVID-19, able to work, and not eligible for education or unemployment benefits.

If you do qualify, apply soon! We'll stop accepting new VRRAP enrollments on December 11, 2022—or when we reach either the funding or participant limit, whichever comes first.

Visit: <https://www.va.gov/education/other-va-education-benefits/veteran-rapid-retraining-assistance/>

- TRANSITIONING VETERANS CONSULTATION

Transitioning Veterans is a free Military OneSource specialty consultation designed for service members returning to civilian life. You may be eligible for this personalized support if you are planning to separate or retire from service in the next 12 months or you are within 365 days of your last day of service. Through a series of sessions, a professionally trained consultant can help you identify goals and navigate benefits and resources. Call 800-342-9647

- VOLUNTEER DRIVERS NEEDED

The VA Health Care System (VAHCS) is seeking dedicated volunteer drivers to transport Veterans to VA medical appointments at local VA Medical Centers.

We are looking for volunteers who have flexible schedules, safe driving records and can commit to volunteering for a minimum of one year.

Staff will provide all required training as well as the vehicles used for transportation. Volunteer drivers are required to have a valid state issued driver's license, proof of personal auto insurance, COVID-19 vaccinations and pass a physical provided by the VA Medical Center. All volunteer drivers working a minimum of four hours or more are eligible for a free meal at most VA Medical Center.

For more information on becoming a volunteer driver, please contact your local VAHCS Center.

- HOW DOES TRICARE CHANGE WHEN YOU RETIRE FROM ACTIVE DUTY?

If you retire from active duty, you and your family will still qualify for TRICARE, but you must actively enroll into a TRICARE health plan if you want coverage for civilian care. Learn about health plans for retirees and their family members.

Need help managing your health and wellness? Humana Military offers webinars and virtual community groups to help improve your health and quality of life. Learn how to sign up for an online session visit www.tricare.mil for more information.

- MENTAL HEALTH DISPARITIES AMONG RACIAL AND ETHNIC MINORITIES AND LGBT VETERANS AND THE IMPACTS OF EXPERIENCING DISCRIMINATION

Veterans who are members of minority groups – whether racial or ethnic minorities, or identify as LGBT, experience mental health disparities and discrimination at higher rates than Veterans who aren't members of these groups. Learn more about addressing these mental health disparities, the impacts of discrimination on Veterans' mental health, efforts to improve these disparities, and best practices for helping to ensure that these Veterans receive the mental health services they need.

Visit: <https://www.hsrdr.research.va.gov/cyberseminars/catalog-upcoming-session.cfm>

- 2022 AFSA INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION & FAMILY REUNION

The AFSA delegates, general membership, and International Committees share invaluable information, discuss, and ratify, such things as, AFSA's Legislative Platform for the coming year and other goals and objectives.

In addition to the AFSA's general membership business, the AFSA is proud to host the Military Enlisted Leadership Conferences. These conferences convene simultaneously with the AFSA to discuss Air Force-specific business. However, these separate conferences come together during Professional Development forums.

AFSA manages these forums with coordination through many of the military conferences. These forums consist of keynote addresses from senior congressional decision makers, Department of Defense and Department of the Air Force senior leadership, war historians, and other professional speakers, just to name a few. Each speaker provides a rich insight to the Air Force's past, its present and its future. Moreover, these forums continue to build on the strong solid foundation of our professional enlisted corps.

This year, the 2022 AFSA International Convention & Family Reunion will convene Sunday, August 7 through Thursday, August 11 at the Convention Center Tropicana in Las Vegas, Nevada.

The Professional Education and Development Symposium (PEDS22) begins Saturday, August 13 through Thursday, August 18, 2022 at the Grand Hyatt San Antonio River Walk and the San Antonio Marriott River Center in San Antonio, Texas.

All Professional Development Forums are open to all military members on Active Duty and DoD civilian personal at no cost. Visit our website @ www.hqafsa.org and click on the **CONVENTION 22** box on the top menu under **MORE** for additional exciting information about the hotel and surrounding area. Hotel reservations are on our website and registration for the Professional Education & Development Symposium and Convention.

- 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 70,000 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: Visit: 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.)