

VARIOUS GULF WAR RELATED TOPICS

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Briefing to the Research Advisory
Committee on Gulf War Illnesses
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U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

- “The PACT Act (the full name of the law is The Sergeant First Class (SFC) Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act. is a historic new law that will help VA deliver for millions of Veterans — and their survivors — by empowering us to presumptively provide care and benefits to Vets suffering from more than 20 toxic exposure-related conditions.
- It will also bring generations of Veterans into VA health care, which will improve Veteran health outcomes across the board.
- “We at VA are ready to implement the PACT Act and deliver for toxic-exposed Veterans and their survivors”
<https://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=5815>

The PACT ACT

The PACT Act will bring these changes:

- Expands and extends eligibility for VA health care for Veterans with toxic exposures and Veterans of the Vietnam, Gulf War, and post-9/11 eras
- Adds more than 20 new presumptive conditions for burn pits and other toxic exposures
- Adds more presumptive-exposure locations for Agent Orange and radiation
- Requires VA to provide a toxic exposure screening to every Veteran enrolled in VA health care
- Helps us improve research, staff education, and treatment related to toxic exposures
- <https://www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits/>

ADDED PRESUMPTIVE CONDITIONS FOR GULF WAR and LATER

- **These cancers are now presumptive due to burn pit or other exposures (GWI and many Post-911 Conflicts)**
- Brain cancer
- Gastrointestinal cancer of any type
- Glioblastoma
- Head cancer of any type
- Kidney cancer
- Lymphatic cancer of any type
- Lymphoma of any type
- Melanoma
- Neck cancer
- Pancreatic cancer
- Reproductive cancer of any type (breast and prostate will be included)
- Respiratory (breathing-related) cancer of any type (note VA had approved 9 rare respiratory cancers previously)

- **These illnesses are now presumptive:**
- Asthma that was diagnosed after service
- Chronic bronchitis
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Chronic rhinitis
- Chronic sinusitis
- Constrictive bronchiolitis or obliterative bronchiolitis
- Emphysema
- Granulomatous disease
- Interstitial lung disease (ILD)
- Pleuritis
- Pulmonary fibrosis
- Sarcoidosis



Some VHA HOME and PACT Act Implementation

- Sec. 102: Definition for “toxic-exposed veterans” under review by OGC. This definition determines the number of eligible Veterans under the PACT Act.
- Sec. 202: Presumption Decision Process approved by SecVA will be reviewed by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM).
- Sec. 302: Working with DoD to define substances and chemicals that would constitute a “toxic exposure”.
- Sections 502-510: Multiple Veteran cohort studies.
- Sec. 509: A website to compile Federal research on health outcomes of military environmental exposures.
- Sec. 603: Military Environmental Exposure (MEE) Screening Tool (Primary Care leads)
- Sec. 604: Mandatory WRIISC MOD 1 – Assessing Deployment Related Exposures TMS ID # 32195; training is in progress and to be completed by December 31, 2022, for all VHA clinicians/providers. Overview of MEE. Will be required for new clinicians.
 - For all VA staff there is a PACT Act 101
- Sec. 808: Website to display Airborne Hazards Open Burn Pit data by state and Congressional district.



Progress to Date

- Agreements in progress with National Academies on several Reports.
- Training of clinicians on military exposures requirement in Section 604 will be completed by next year.
- Efforts to hire staff and begin required studies actively underway.
- Coordination underway on Section 509 (web site on federal government military exposure or funded research) and will hiring key staff.
- An improved presumption process is underway (fulfills much of Section 202).
- Workgroup (VHA/VBA) designated to meet other law requirements of Section 202 – Military Environmental Exposures Sub-Council.
- Coordination with VBA and DoD on other sections or sub-sections actively in progress.
- Collaborating with Primary Care on key Section 603 (see separate slide)

Section 603 - HOME Advisory Role

- This ACT section is led by Primary Care; but HOME has had major input. It is a required screening of Veterans for military exposures being done by a clinical reminder system.
- HOME is leading the patient handout (also required by the ACT) team (Dr. Lisa McAndrews, Education Director, NJ WRIISC)
- This part of bill will likely have a big day to day impact on medical facilities as Veterans will be asked four questions on military exposure issues and may seek or need follow-up.
- Some might desire registry exams or other follow-up or seek information on how to file a claim for a presumption.

VBA Led Requirement – Section 405

- *“(d) If a Persian Gulf veteran at a medical facility of the Department presents with any one symptom associated with Gulf War Illness, the Secretary shall ensure that health care personnel of the Department use a disability benefits questionnaire, or successor questionnaire, designed to identify Gulf War Illness, in addition to any other diagnostic actions the personnel determine appropriate.”*
- VBA (Keith Hancock leading group) will be reaching out to HOME for some advice on how to implement this requirement.

CASE DEFINITION PROJECT

- NJ WRIISC sophisticated database and chart review – done
- WVU – AI/Machine Learning Completed
 - Found groups of symptoms more in deployed than non-deployed
 - Next step is a validation in patient records
 - Will also be looking at testing a modified definition

VET-HOME

- VA soon to launch national telehealth to do registry exams virtually.
- Dr. Anisa Moore named Director, HQ Golden, Colorado.
- Will also provide information to providers on toxic exposures.
- Will have initially about 50 providers but may increase with PACT ACT funding

ACPM: Level I and Level II Military Environmental Exposures Certifications

- The American College of Preventive Medicine (ACPM) has partnered with the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide Level I and Level II certification training programs in Military Environmental Exposures. The Level I certification, now available, is a five-module program that provides a basic level of competence for all providers and will equip each participant with the skills and knowledge needed in order to effectively identify, treat and manage the effects of environmental exposures for this significant population.
- The advanced Level II certification, to be released soon (case based advanced topics), builds on this knowledge and expertise.
- Two level one modules are GWI and CMI.

<https://www.acpm.org/education-events/military-environmental-exposures-certification/>



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Gulf War Registry

- **Background:** Registry created under the authority of : Public Laws 102-585, 103-446 and Title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) 1117
- **Size:** 198,000 Veterans enrolled, 8,300 had Phase II exam
- **Exam:** Can be repeated with new information or symptoms
- **Eligibility:** Veterans who served in the Gulf during Operation Desert Shield, Operation Desert Storm, Operation Iraqi Freedom, or Operation New Dawn are eligible for the Gulf War Registry exam
- **More Information:**
<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/gulfwar/benefits/registry-exam.asp>



Airborne Hazards Open Burn Pit Registry

Background: Registry created at the direction of Congress.

This is an online questionnaire and allows eligible Veterans and service members to document their exposures and report health concerns.

Eligibility: Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn, Djibouti, Africa on or after September 11, 2001, Operations Desert Shield or Desert Storm, Southwest Asia theater of operations on or after August 2, 1990

Note: Includes GWR eligible Veterans

Size: About 300,000 and growing rapidly.

Exam: Optional, VA has worked on increasing participation rate. Can be combined with a GWR exam if eligible.

More information:

<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/burnpits/registry.asp>



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Questions or Follow-up

- Please reach out to Dr. Peter Rumm at Peter.Rumm@va.gov
- Thank you to the Committee and to all the Veterans for their noble service.