



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

New Congressional Member Information Packet

114th Congress - *First Session*





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www.VA.gov/oca





MyVA Initiative

We are transforming the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) through the *MyVA* initiative, a Veteran-centric process that is both top-down and bottom-up driven. We are moving quickly to fulfill our mission and demonstrate our VA Values by putting Veterans in control of *how*, *when*, and *where* they want to be served, by measuring success through Veterans' outcomes, and by optimizing our productivity and efficiency. *MyVA* is *100 percent* focused on best serving our Nation's Veterans. That is what we are about, and that's why we exist.

On December 17, 2014, VA announced the establishment of an Advisory Committee under the Federal Advisory Committee Act. This newly established committee, once formed, will advise the Secretary and the *MyVA* Task Force Executive Director on enacting the Department's reorganization and culture change. The committee members will be formally appointed by the Secretary in 2015, and will bring outside change-management expertise to the process.

The *MyVA* Task Force led by Executive Director Bob Snyder, previously the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of VA's Office of Policy and Planning, and Scott Blackburn, who recently came to VA with a rich background in organizational change management, will oversee our initiative until the organizational changes are completely integrated into daily operations.

The *MyVA* Task Force will evolve and grow—that is what all exceptional, dynamic organizations do. Initially the functions of The Task Force will work within four broad work streams to:

- Design and implement a Veteran experience organization. This organization will set and monitor the performance standards for customer service; provide training and resources for VA employees who interact with Veterans; establish processes to assist Veterans with needs that require special handling or attention; establish authoritative data sources so that we can more effectively engage Veterans; and lead continuous efforts to listen to the Voice of the Veteran.
- Improve our internal support functions to ensure that our processes support VA employees serving Veterans and that we effectively balance exceptional Veteran-centric service with operational efficiency.
- Launch Performance Improvement Teams that will help VA facilities increase performance, determine metrics for measuring success, solve problems, and share ideas across VA that demonstrate excellence in serving Veterans.
- Explore opportunities to enhance Strategic Partnerships that ensure the best and most effective organizations—public, private, non-profits, and volunteer—work with VA to best serve Veterans.





Opportunity to Change and Improve

(Continued)



The active support of our Congressional stakeholders as we move forward is essential. We value your feedback, your ideas, and your perspectives. We recognize you will have questions as we go through this dynamic process and we will update you as we progress.

Change is always hard. But productive change is necessary in every great customer service operation, and this change will allow us to utilize all our resources in the most efficient and effective manner to best serve Veterans.

To keep up with all of the changes taking place at the Department please check-out the following News Releases and VA publications:

2014 Year End News of Interest:

- [VA to Pilot IBM Computer Technology to Assist Physicians in Caring for Patients](#)
- [VA's Top Doctor Named Among Top 20 Most Influential People in Healthcare](#)
- [VA Expands Eligibility for VA Health Care Related to Military Sexual Trauma](#)
- [VA to Accept Proposals for New Scheduling System](#)
- [Veterans Affairs Secretary McDonald Updates Employees on MyVA Reorganization Plans](#)
- [Veterans Day Progress Report: Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act 2014](#)
- [Road to Veterans Day Action Review - November 6, 2014](#)
- [An Open Letter to America's Veterans from Secretary Bob McDonald ~ November 5, 2014](#)

VA Publications:

- [Vanguard - VA's Employee Magazine](#)
- [VHA Office of Research & Development Newsletter](#)
- [Speeches of Secretary Robert A. McDonald](#)
- [Whistleblower Rights and Protections](#)
- [Federal Benefits for Veterans Dependents and Survivors Booklet - 2014 PDF Edition](#)
- [Celebrating America's Freedoms - a collection of stories about some of America's most beloved customs and national symbols](#)
- [Department of Veterans Affairs YouTube Channel](#)
- [Vantage Point - Official Blog of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs](#)



VA Pocket Card

<http://www.va.gov/vetdata/pocketcard/index.asp>

VA Pocket Cards, created by VA's National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, are a compilation of facts related to the number of Veterans receiving VA benefits and utilizing VA health care. Additionally, the pocket card provides Veteran demographics, including the current projection of Veteran population complete with percentages relating to race and ethnicity. The number of VA employees and the number of VA facilities are also provided. Finally, a three-year budget is provided for the entire VA and broken out by the three VA Administrations: the Veterans Health Administration, the Veterans Benefits Administration, and the National Cemetery Administration. Please refer to <http://www.va.gov/vetdata/pocketcard/index.asp> for updated versions each fiscal year.

		Updated 12/23/14
 VA Benefits & Health Care Utilization		
Number of Veterans Receiving VA Disability Compensation (as of 09/30/14):		3.95 M
Number of Veterans Rated 100% Disabled (as of 09/30/14):		439,461
Number of Veterans Receiving VA Pension (as of 09/30/14):		304,579
Number of Spouses Receiving DIC (as of 09/30/14):		364,946
Number of Total Enrollees in VA Health Care System (FY 13):		8.92 M ¹
Number of Total Unique Patients Treated (FY 13):		6.48 M ¹
Number of Veterans Compensated for PTSD (as of 09/30/14):		722,044
Number of Veterans in Receipt of IU Benefits (as of 09/30/14):		326,688
Number of VA Education Beneficiaries (FY 14):		1.09 M
Number of Life Insurance Policies Supervised and Administered by VA (as of 09/30/14):		6.59 M
Face Amount of Insurance Policies Supervised and Administered by VA (as of 09/30/14):		1.27 T
Number of Veterans Receiving Voc Rehab (Chapter 31) Benefits (FY 14):		99,839
Number of Active VA Home Loan Participants (as of 09/30/14):		2.14 M
Number of Health Care Professionals Rotating Through VA (FY 13):		118,799
Number of OEF/OIF Amputees (as of 12/01/14):		1,652 ²
<small>Source: DVA Information Technology Center; Health Services Training Report; VBA Education Service; VBA Office of Performance Analysis & Integrity; ¹VHA (10A5); ²DoD. Produced by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics.</small>		
Veterans Demographics		
Projected U.S. Veterans Population:	21,999,000	{Female 2,020,000 9%}
Projected Number of Living WW II Veterans (as of 9/30/2014):		1,017,000
Estimated Number of WW II Veterans Pass Away Per Day:		514
Percentage of Veteran Population 65 or Older:		45.23%
Veteran Population by Race:	White 82.3%	Black 12.2%
	Asian/Pacific Islander 1.6%	Other 3.2%
	American Indian/Alaska Natives 0.8%	Hispanic 6.8%
About VA		
Number of VA Employees in Pay Status:		347,883
Number of Full Time VA Employees:		321,378
Number of VA Hospitals:		150
Number of VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinics:		819
Number of VA Vet Centers:		300
Number of VBA Regional Offices:		56
Number of VA National Cemeteries:		131
FY13 Appropriations (actual)¹	FY14 Appropriations (enacted)¹	FY15 Appropriations (requested)¹
VA: \$139B	VA: \$153.9B	VA: \$163.9B
VHA: \$56B ²	VHA: \$57.88B ²	VHA: \$59.66B ²
VBA-GOE: \$2.16B ³	VBA-GOE: \$2.47B ³	VBA-GOE: \$2.49B ³
NCA: \$260M	NCA: \$249M	NCA: \$257M
OIT: \$3.52B	OIT: \$3.70B	OIT: \$3.90B
<small>Source: Veteran Population as of 09/30/14; VA Employ Pay Status Count 09/30/14; Veterans Affairs Site Tracking (VAST) 03/31/14; NCA as of 09/30/14; Office of Budget; Health Services Training Report FY13; ¹ Includes MCCF; ² Medical Care w/ MCCF and medical research; ³ Discretionary Spending Only.</small>		

**Print, cut-out, fold down the middle, and carry in your pocket for everyday use*



VA Important Phone Numbers

Quick Reference Card

(For use when assisting constituents)

US Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration (VHA): Our Nation's largest integrated health care system - Operates more than 1,600 sites of care (Medical Centers, Outpatient Clinics, Vet Centers, Mobile Vet Centers and more); 8.9 million enrollees (as of end of FY 13); 283,000 employees (as of September 30, 2014); 3 Nobel Prizes

Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA): Backlog Progress Continues - The number of claims pending over 125 days and considered part of the claims backlog has decreased by 60 percent; from a peak of 611,000 claims in March 2013, to 242,000 claims (as of September 30, 2014).

National Cemetery Administration (NCA): VA manages over 20,000 acres of land including maintaining 8,800 developed acres with 3.4 million gravesites in 131 national cemeteries and 33 other sites.

Veterans Crisis Line: **1-800-273-8255 (Press 1)**

Women Veterans Call Center: 1-855-VA-WOMEN (829-6636)

VA Healthcare Enrollment: Mon-Fri, 8AM-8PM (EST) 1-877-222-VETS (8387)

Veteran Employment Resources: (VA for Vets) 1-855-824-8387

Veterans Benefits Administration National Call Center: 1-800-827-1000

Education (GI Bill): 1-888-442-4551

Pension Benefits: 1-877-294-6380

Life Insurance: 1-800-419-1473

Home Loans: 1-877-827-3702

VA National Cemetery Burial Request: Daily, 7AM-6:30 PM (CST) 1-800-535-1117

Memorialization Applicant Assistance: Mon-Fri, 8AM-5PM (EST) 1-800-697-6947

Presidential Memorial Certificate Request: Fax VA Form 40-0247 to 1-800-455-7143

Bereavement Counseling: 202-461-6530

National Call Center for Homeless Veterans: 1-877-424-3838

VA Gulf War Information Helpline: 1-800-749-8387

VA Caregiver Support Line: 1-855-260-3274

Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs:

Policy Questions 202-461-6490

Casework - House 202-225-2280

Casework - Senate 202-224-5351

*Print, cut-out, fold down the middle, and carry in your pocket for everyday use



Veterans Health Administration

Snapshot

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA), one of three administrations within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), is responsible for providing a continuum of comprehensive care that includes primary care, specialized care, and related medical and social support services. VA strives to ensure that Veterans have access to all needed services wherever they receive their VA health care. This may be on-site during inpatient hospitalization, at one of our primary or specialty care clinics, at a community-based outpatient clinic (CBOC), in a Community Living Center (formerly known as a VA nursing home), or in a residential care facility. However, all services may not be available at every location.

Eligibility Requirements

Most Veterans who enlisted after September 7, 1980, or entered active duty after October 16, 1981, must have served 24 continuous months or the full period for which they were called to active duty in order to be eligible. This minimum duty requirement may not apply to Veterans who were discharged for a disability incurred or aggravated in the line of duty, for a hardship or “early out,” or those who served prior to September 7, 1980. Since there are a number of other exceptions to the minimum duty requirements, VA encourages all Veterans to apply so that we may determine their enrollment eligibility.

It is recommended that former Servicemembers fill out the application online and electronically submit it to the VA for processing. Applying online is faster and significantly reduces the processing time for enrollment. Complete [VA Form 10-10EZ, Application for Health Benefits](#) online.

- **Application Process:** http://www.va.gov/HEALTHBENEFITS/apply/application_process.asp
- **Returning Service Members:** http://www.va.gov/HEALTHBENEFITS/apply/returning_servicemembers.asp
- **Family Members of Veterans:** http://www.va.gov/HEALTHBENEFITS/apply/family_members.asp
- **Women Veterans:** http://www.va.gov/HEALTHBENEFITS/apply/women_veterans.asp
- **Patient Access Data:** <http://www.va.gov/health/access-audit.asp>
- **VA Hospital Performance:** <http://www.hospitalcompare.va.gov/>
- **VHA Locations:** http://www.va.gov/directory/guide/division_flash.asp?dnum=1
- **Prescriptions:** <http://www.va.gov/HEALTHBENEFITS/access/prescriptions.asp>
- **Veterans Health Identification Card:** <http://www.va.gov/HEALTHBENEFITS/vhic/index.asp>
- **Patient-Centered Community Care (PC3):** <http://www.va.gov/PURCHASEDCARE/programs/veterans/nonvacare/pccc/index.asp>
- **Veterans Crisis Line:** <http://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>
- **Mental Health:** <http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/VAMentalHealthGroup.asp>



Veterans Benefits Administration

Snapshot

The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) provides a variety of benefits and services to Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families. VBA has been undergoing a major transformation that is people-centric, results-oriented, and a forward-looking integration of solutions that will ensure total lifelong engagement with Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families. Below are some of the major program offices of VBA. To learn more please go to <http://www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/media-publications.asp>

Office of Disability Assistance:

- **Compensation Service:** Oversees the delivery of disability compensation, a tax-free monetary benefit paid to Veterans with disabilities that are the result of a disease or injury incurred or aggravated during active military service.
- **Pension and Fiduciary Service:** Provides program oversight that helps wartime Veterans, their families, and survivors with financial challenges by providing supplemental income through Veterans Pension, Death Pension, and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation. Protects the benefits paid to our most vulnerable beneficiaries who, because of disease, injury, or infirmities of advanced age, are unable to manage their VA benefits.
- **Insurance Service:** Maintains life insurance programs that give financial security and peace of mind to Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families.
- **Benefits Assistance Service:** Facilitates client services and outreach, web communications, and ensures quality and training for VBA employees who engage Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families through client services such as the National Call Center.

Office of Economic Opportunity:

- **Education Service:** Administers VA's education programs that provide education and training benefits to eligible Active Duty, National Guard, and Reserve Servicemembers, Veterans, and dependents.
- **Loan Guaranty Service:** Provides oversight of the VA Guaranteed Home Loan Program that guarantees home loans in varying amounts. Ensures Veterans' rights are protected when purchasing a home under this program. Oversees administration of specially adapted housing grants for certain severely disabled Servicemembers and Veterans so they can adapt or acquire suitable housing.
- **Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment (VR&E) Service:** Assists Servicemembers and Veterans with service-connected disabilities to prepare for, obtain, and maintain suitable employment; start their own business; or receive independent-living services. Oversees their education and provides career counseling to help guide career paths and ensure the most effective use of VA benefits.

Office of Field Operations:

- **Four area offices:** Eastern Area, Philadelphia, PA; Southern Area, Nashville, TN; Central Area, St. Louis, MO; Western Area, Phoenix, AZ
- **Regional offices (ROs):** Under the area offices, 56 ROs within the United States, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines administer benefits to Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families.
- **Records Management Center:** Houses most service treatment records forwarded by the Department of Defense (DoD) to VA
- **Appeals Management Center:** Processes most appeals that have been returned to VBA by the Board of Veterans' Appeals

VBA-DoD Program Office:

- Serves as the link between DoD, partner agencies, and VBA, while ensuring transitioning Servicemembers and Veterans have access to all the benefits and services they have earned.

Office of Strategic Planning:

- **Office of Business Process Integration:** Ensures VBA's strategic needs and requirements for business and data systems are properly documented, integrated, and communicated.
- **Veterans Benefits Management System Program Office:** Developing an end-to-end paperless claims processing system that incorporates improved business processes with technology.
- **Veterans Relationship Management Program Office:** Engages, empowers, and serves Veterans and other clients with seamless, secure, and on-demand access to benefits information and services.



National Cemetery Administration

Snapshot

The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) honors Veterans, members of the Armed Forces, and their eligible family members with final resting places in national shrines and with lasting tributes that commemorate military service and sacrifice to our Nation. The office of the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs (USMA) is responsible for the leadership and direction of NCA. The USMA is assisted by a Principal Deputy USMA and a Chief of Staff.

Some of the major program offices of NCA are listed below. Please refer to the NCA website to learn more:
<http://www.cem.va.gov>

Field Programs: Managed by a Deputy Under Secretary for Field Programs (DUSFP) who is assisted by a Director of Field Programs and Memorial Service Network Coordinators. The DUSFP supervises five Memorial Service Network Directors and cemetery directors across 131 national cemeteries. The following program offices fall under the office of field programs:

- **National Cemetery Scheduling Office** - call center for all requests for VA national cemetery burial and eligibility.
- **Memorial Programs Service** - memorialization benefit requests (headstones, flat markers, medallions), Presidential Memorial Certificate program, First Notice of Death.
- **Integrated Operations Center**
- **Cemetery Development and Improvement Service**

Finance and Planning: Managed by a Deputy Under Secretary for Finance and Planning and is NCA's Chief Financial Officer. The following program offices fall under the office of finance and planning:

- **Budget Service**
- **Finance Service**
- **Business Process Improvement Service** - cemetery organization assessment and improvement program, gravesite assessment, inscription accuracy.
- **Legislative and Regulatory Service** - liaison with Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs and Office of the General Counsel
- **Policy and Planning Service** - strategic planning, statistics

Management: Led by the Deputy Under Secretary for Management and covers the following program offices:

- **Management and Communications Service** - public affairs and outreach
- **Design and Construction Service** - master planning, space planning, construction specifications, design criteria, interment area layout
- **Contracting Service**
- **Information Technology, Business Requirements, and Administration Service**

Veterans Cemetery Grants Program: Managed by a Director that works with State and Tribal grant applicants to establish, expand, improve, or operate and maintain veterans' cemeteries.

NCA FY 2014 Highlights:

- 125,188 burials in 131 VA national cemeteries
- 365,582 headstone and marker applications processed
- 618,750 Presidential Memorial Certificates provided
- \$51.9 million in grants
- 93 state or tribal VA-funded Veterans cemeteries conducted 32,000 burials



The entire new member welcome packet (including both the previous sections and the additional sections listed below) can be found on our OCLA landing page for your easy reference

www.VA.gov/oca

- VII. Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act 2014
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Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act 2014

Veterans Day 2014 Progress Report:

President Obama signed into law the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 ([Public Law 113-146](#)) (VACAA) on August 7, 2014. Technical revisions to VACAA were made on September 26, 2014, when the President signed into law the Department of Veterans Affairs Expiring Authorities Act of 2014 ([Public Law 113-175](#)).

The Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) goal is to provide timely, high-quality health care for Veterans. The Department's focus and priority is on efficient and effective implementation of this highly complex law. The legislation included requirements to implement 21 program modifications or expansions, complete 3 required assessments, and to produce 12 reports.

VA has been making progress along the path to implementation. In addition to implementing the Choice Program, VA's actions on these requirements to date include the following:

Increasing Access and Program Expansions:

- Section 101: VA announced that in partnership with two health care companies, it has begun implementing the Choice Program to provide eligible Veterans non-VA care. VA also published an Interim Final Rule in the Federal Register to define and authorize the Choice Program. The Choice Program is a new, temporary benefit allowing eligible Veterans to receive health care in their communities from eligible non-VA providers, rather than waiting for a VA appointment or traveling to a VA facility. The rule defines a number of parameters of the Choice Program including: establishing the scope of the Choice Program, aligning VA's existing copayment rates with those for the Choice Program, defining eligibility criteria for Veterans, and explaining the process for authorizing non-VA care under the Choice Program.
- Section 104: VA extended the Project Access Received Closer to Home ([Project ARCH](#)) pilot program to continue to provide expanded access to health care for eligible Veterans in rural areas. In accordance with law, Project ARCH is currently being piloted in Veterans Integrated Service Networks: 1, 6, 15, 18, and 19.
- Section 204: Representatives from VA's Office of Rural Health, Office of Policy and Planning, Office of Information and Technology, Veterans Health Administration Operations, VA field staff, and others are developing standardized requirements for Mobile Medical Centers and mobile health operations.
- Section 402: VA has begun collaborating with Department of Defense Health Affairs to discuss the implementation of section 402 of VACAA. Section 402 authorized VA to provide Military Sexual Trauma –related health care services to active duty Servicemembers without a referral from TRICARE or a military treatment facility. This collaboration will require continued and close collaboration between VA and DoD.
- Section 501: VA extended the national [Assisted Living Pilot Program for Veterans with Traumatic Brain Injury](#) (AL-TBI). The legal authority for this pilot program was set to expire in October 2014, and has been extended through October 6, 2017. The AL-TBI pilot program provides comprehensive rehabilitation care and services in a residential setting for eligible Veterans.



- Section 601 and 602: VACAA authorized VA to enter into 27 Major Facility Leases. VA's Office of Construction & Facilities Management (CFM) has begun work on seven of the lease projects as "Phase 1" and resumed two additional projects that had been on hold pending Congressional authorization. The remainder of the projects will follow in three subsequent phases.
- Section 701: VACAA expanded the eligibility criteria for the [Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship \(Fry Scholarship\)](#) to include the surviving spouses of Servicemembers who died in the line of duty after September 10, 2001. VA began accepting applications by mail for the Fry Scholarship under the newly expanded eligibility criteria on November 3, 2014.
- Section 702: VA has sent letters to all state Governors informing them that, as required by VACAA, VA will disapprove programs of education under the Post-9/11 GI Bill and Montgomery GI Bill at a public institution of higher learning if the school charges qualifying Veterans and dependents tuition and fees in excess of the rate for resident students. This change is effective for terms beginning after June 30, 2015.

Additional Actions, Collaborations, and Business Process Improvements:

- Section 201: On October 2, 2014, VA announced it had awarded the [MITRE Corporation](#), a not-for-profit company that operates multiple federally funded research and development centers, a contract to support the independent assessments of VA health care processes that were required by law. These independent assessments will provide the Department a way to transparently review vital programs, organizations, and business practices to make VA more accountable to Veterans. The MITRE Corporation, in partnership with CMS Alliance to Modernize Healthcare, will serve as program integrator and will report the results of the independent assessments to VA, the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate, the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives, and the separate Commission on Care created by VACAA within 60 days of conclusion.
- Section 203: VA signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the Northern Virginia Technology Council (NVTC) to establish a pro-bono technology task force. On October 30, 2014, NVTC provided VA and Congress a report on opportunities to improve the scheduling of medical exams. VA is evaluating the recommendations and is in the process of assessing those that are feasible, advisable, and cost-effective for implementation.
- Section 205: VA has reviewed 88,000 fiscal year 2014 employee performance plans. Upon review, 13,000 plans were modified to remove scheduling and wait time metrics or goals. In accordance with VACAA, these factors have been removed from inclusion in employee performance evaluations and when calculating whether to pay performance awards. VA will continue to review and modify employee performance plans for future years.
- Section 206: VA has begun to post wait time data, which reflects VA's ability to schedule an appointment within 30 days of the date a Veteran wishes to be seen or the date determined medically necessary by their physician. This new wait time standard will be applied to determine a Veteran's eligibility to elect to receive non-VA care through the Choice Program. In keeping with the commitment to improve transparency in the Department's processes, VA has provided ongoing facility level patient access data updates since June 9, 2014. The latest update further increases transparency by expanding nationwide patient access data releases to include updates at the Community-Based Outpatient Clinics



level. The data are updated on a regular basis and are available at <http://www.va.gov/health/access-audit.asp>.

- Section 209: VA revised Human Resources handbook 5021 to include provisions related to penalties for employees who falsify data regarding access to care or quality measures. The policy has been updated to list, “Willfully submitting or directing others to submit false data concerning wait times for health care or quality measures related to health care,” as an offense related to falsification. The explicit inclusion of the terminology “wait times” and “quality measures” will reinforce the expectation of the Department that no employee shall manipulate or falsify data regarding wait times or quality measures.

Caring for our Nation’s Veterans, their Survivors, and dependents continues to be the guiding mission of VA. We are enhancing our health care system and improving service delivery to better serve Veterans and set the course for long-term excellence and reform. VA has made significant progress in various areas of the legislation, but more work remains to expand timely access to high-quality health care for Veterans. Again, the Department’s focus and priority is on the efficient and effective implementation of this highly complex law. As we work to meet the requirements of VACAA, you can follow our progress at www.va.gov/opa/choiceact.





U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs



2015 Congressional Customer Guide

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs (OCLA) is broken up into specialized teams focused on the different VA administrations and program offices, as well as our Capitol Hill Liaison Offices which serve as convenient on-site locations to assist you.

<u>VA Central Office</u>	810 Vermont Ave, NW, Washington, DC <i>(Policy and Legislative Questions)</i> Phone (202) 461-6490
<u>House Liaison Office</u>	Rayburn House Office Building, Room B328 <i>(Constituent Casework and Notifications)</i> Phone (202) 225-2280 Fax (202) 453-5225
<u>Senate Liaison Office</u>	Russell Senate Office Building, Room 189 <i>(Constituent Casework and Notifications)</i> Phone (202) 224-5351 Fax (202) 453-5218

Best Practices: Requests for Information (RFI) and Correspondence

RFIs:

Please call or email the Congressional Relations Officer that handles the issue area (list with issue area can be found on the accompanying page of this document).

Correspondence:

Please **transmit all letters by email in a PDF format** to OCLA-CLS@va.gov. Please note - we cannot begin to help you until we receive your request.

VA Congressional Distribution Lists:

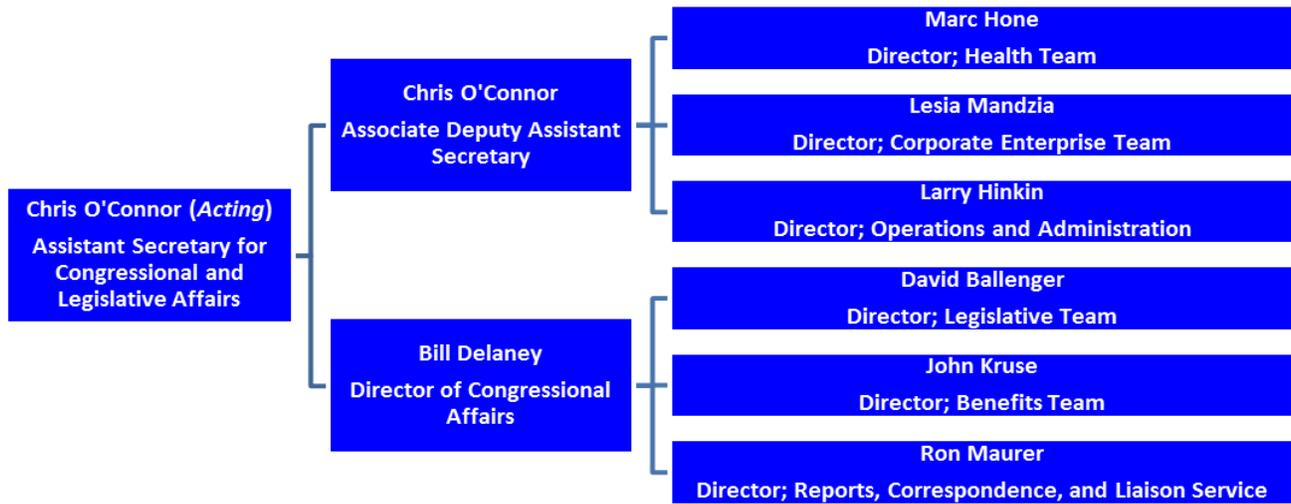
Please email your name, the name of your member office, and your position to VACongressionalNotifications@VA.Gov to receive notifications and news releases regarding VA issues.

Casework Inquiries:

Please contact our House or Senate liaison office by phone or fax (numbers listed above) or by email at OCLA-CLS@va.gov.



OCLA 2014/15 Congressional Customer Guide Continued:



Health Team		Benefits Team	
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Michael Huff (USAF 1998 - 2002) 202-461-6474 Michael.Huff2@va.gov	CBOCs/VHA Leasing; Pharmacy; Dental; VISN 2, 3, 10, 18	Joe Sixeas (USNR 1988 - present) 202-461-5899 Joe.Sixeas@va.gov	Benefits Assistance Service (Outreach); Transition GPS (TAP); Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment Service; Pension & Fiduciary Service; Loan Guaranty Service; Central Regional Offices; Southern Regional Offices; NCA (Cemeteries, Burial Benefits, Memorial Service Networks)
Mandy Hartman (USA/R 1994-1998, 2000- 2004) 202-461-6416 Mandy.Hartman@va.gov	Homelessness; Veterans Justice Programs; Women Veterans; Mental Health/Vet Centers; PTSD/Suicide Prevention; Substance Abuse; VISNs 6, 11, 12, 20, 22	Derrick Nunn (USANG 1986-1990/USAF 1990- 2010) 202-461-5750 DerrickDwayne.Nunn@va.gov	Education Service (GI Bill, VRAP); Veterans Relationship Management Program Office (Call Centers); Office of Business Integration (Scanning); Veterans Benefits Management System Office (VBMS); Appeals (BVA, AMC, ROs); Chapter 33 LTS Program Management Office; Eastern and Western Regional Offices
Susan Kelly 202-461-6408 Susan.Kelly3@va.gov	Geriatrics/State Veterans Homes; Prosthetics; Caregivers; Chaplaincy; Academic Affiliations; VA Medical Research; Service Dogs; TBI/Spinal Cord Injury/Polytrauma; Diabetes/dialysis; VISNs 7, 8, 16, 17	Jason Lindsay (USAR 2001-Present) 202-461-6441 Jason.Lindsay@va.gov	Compensation Service (incl. AO, MST benefits); Benefits Assistance Service (eBenefits); Office of Field Operations (VBA Transformation)
Tony Adams (USA/R 1992-2002) 202-461-6473 Tony.Adams@va.gov	Rural Health Care; Telehealth; Eligibility & Enrollment; Nursing; Privileging; VISNs 1, 15, 19, 23	Christine Thomas 202-461-0353 Christine.Thomas@va.gov	Program Analyst; Insurance Service (VGLI/ SGLI)
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U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs
Liaison Service

Casework Guide

“...to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan...”

Abraham Lincoln



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Introduction

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) maintains a presence on Capitol Hill to provide a convenient on-site location where Members can obtain assistance on casework and other VA-related issues for their veteran constituency. The Congressional Liaison Service (CLS) offices are located in the Russell Senate Office Building and the Rayburn House Office Building.

The Senate Liaison Service was commissioned by Congress on December 10, 1922 and the House Liaison Service was commissioned on February 13, 1925. These offices were brought under the jurisdiction of the Department of Veterans Affairs in 1930 and remain so today.

I hope that you will find this Guide helpful. The goal of the CLS is to provide your office with prompt, efficient, and professional service and I invite you to contact us whenever you can use our assistance.

Dr. Ron Maurer
Director

Congressional Liaison Service Office Contact Information

Director: Dr. Ron Maurer

Assistant Director: Anmarie Amaral

Hours of Operation: Monday - Friday 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.

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VA Congressional Liaison Service
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Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Phone: (202) 224-5351
Fax: (202) 453-5218
E-mail: OCLA-CLS@va.gov

Senate Liaison Representative

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VA Congressional Liaison Service
Room B328
Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Phone: (202) 225-2280
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House Liaison Representatives

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Tasha Adams – Tasha.Adams@va.gov



How Can the VA Congressional Liaison Service Help Your Office?

The CLS offers assistance on a wide range of issues important to your constituents to include:

- Compensation and pension benefits
- Survivor benefits
- Medical treatment for Veterans and dependents
- Life insurance benefits
- Educational benefits
- Vocational rehabilitation and employment benefits
- Burial and death benefits
- Headstone and memorial marker applications
- Presidential Memorial Certificates
- VA forms and publications
- Locating Veterans
- Doing business with VA
- Purchasing a home or VA-acquired property
- VA employee questions regarding employment
- VA policies, regulations, and legislation
- Statistical data concerning Veterans, VA programs, and expenditures
- Briefings - Congressional Liaison Service personnel can brief caseworkers on services available through our office as well as on certain programs and benefits administered by our agency.



What Veteran Issues Are Not Administered By the Department of Veterans Affairs?

Issue	Responsible Agency
Arlington National Cemetery	Department of the Army
Combat-Related Special Compensation	Department of Defense (Branch of Service)
Concurrent Receipt	Department of Defense - Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS)
Discharge upgrade	Department of Defense (Branch of Service)
Employment and Training	Department of Labor - Veterans' Employment & Training Service (VETS)
Military medals Military records Military discharge documents (DD-214)	National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) Online access: http://vetrecs.archives.gov/
Small Business Loans	Small Business Administration
Survivors' Benefits Program	Department of Defense
TriCare	Department of Defense
Veterans Preference	Office of Personnel Management (OPM)
Vietnam Memorial Wall	Department of Defense: Compiles the casualty list National Park Service: Maintains the Wall
Records destroyed in the 1973 fire at the National Personnel Records Center	National Personnel Records Center

Directory of Veteran Service Organizations: <http://www1.va.gov/vso/index.cfm>

This directory is published annually and lists Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) as well as State, Commonwealth, and Territorial Directors of Veterans Affairs.



Written Inquiries

How Written Casework Inquiries Are Processed:

1. Letters can be faxed, mailed, or e-mailed to the CLS.

Please note – All correspondence sent by traditional mail is subject to security screening and the decontamination process which will delay receipt. Please fax all inquiries requiring immediate attention.

2. CLS sends the Member office a letter acknowledging receipt of the inquiry.
3. CLS assigns the inquiry to the appropriate VA office to obtain the response.
4. The assigned office's response is directed to the Member or the constituent if requested by the caseworker and when deemed appropriate.
5. VA retains a copy of the response for record.

How to Prevent Unnecessary Delays:

1. Make certain that all names on the correspondence are legible.
2. Confirm that all enclosures referred to in the letter are included. If enclosures are not included, it's helpful to provide an explanation as to why they are not.
3. Include a privacy release from the Veteran authorizing access to and release of information from his/her VA file. The privacy release will authorize VA to give information to the Member. VA will not release information to a third party (spouse, family member, friend, etc.) without the expressed consent of the Veteran.
4. Entitlement to VA benefits is based on the Veteran's service and the VA file is established under the veteran's name. Therefore, any related correspondence should include the following information:
 - a. The Veteran's full name
 - b. The Veteran's VA claim number or Social Security number
 - c. The name of the VA medical center where treatment has been provided, when appropriate
 - d. The Dependent's name, when appropriate
 - e. When the Veteran's VA claim number or Social Security number is not available, other pertinent information should be provided, such as date of birth, date of death, dates of military service, branch of service, military service number.



Telephonic Inquiries

How Telephonic Casework Inquiries Are Processed:

1. A Congressional Liaison Representative (CLR) will attempt to obtain from the caseworker, all necessary information in order to best respond to the inquiry.
2. The CLR will take the necessary steps to obtain the most complete and accurate response as quickly as possible for the caseworker.

Response time:

1. Whenever possible, the CLR will provide an immediate response.
2. When dealing with more complex inquiries, further research is often necessary. The CLR will attempt to provide an educated approximation of when the caseworker can expect the response.

What does a caseworker do if they haven't received a response within the estimated time given by the CLR?

1. CLS is always available to discuss with your caseworker, an inquiry and/or the status of a response to an inquiry.
2. The CLR who managed the inquiry will attempt to contact the caseworker to provide the status of an inquiry when a response takes longer than originally anticipated.

How to Prevent Unnecessary Delays:

Entitlement to VA benefits is based on the Veteran's service and the VA file is established under the Veteran's name. Caseworkers should have the following information available when calling for assistance:

- a. The Veteran's full name
- b. The Veteran's VA claim number or Social Security number
- c. The name of the VA medical center where treatment has been provided, when appropriate
- d. The Dependent's name, when appropriate
- e. When the Veteran's VA claim number or Social Security number is not available, other pertinent information should be provided, such as date of birth, date of death, dates of military service, branch of service, military service number.
- f. If the caseworker contacts CLS regarding a case with which he/she has been in contact with another VA office, please provide the name of the previous VA point of contact, and which office or department they work in.



Additional Resources:

Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1

The VA Web Site: We encourage all Congressional staff to explore www.VA.gov. Our website contains a wealth of information about programs and benefits administered by the Department. It also offers the convenience of applying for many benefits through the use of on-line applications. In addition to VA services and programs, the VA website also contains links to [other federal](#) and [state agencies](#) that administer benefits for Veterans and their dependents.

Please visit http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/opalist_listserv.cfm and subscribe to receive e-mail from VA with the latest news releases and updated fact sheets.

Health Care Eligibility: Veterans of recent conflicts are eligible for 5 years of healthcare from VA - regardless of the status of any disability claim submitted. For more information: http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/apply/returning_servicemembers.asp

VA Transformation to Digital Claims Process: Veterans can now use *eBenefits*, a joint VA-DoD client services portal with over 55 self-service options, to file benefit claims online in an easy-to-use, prompt-based system. Veterans can also upload supporting claims information that feeds into VA's paperless claims processing system; check the status of claims or appeals; review their VA payment history; and obtain military documents, among other actions. www.eBenefits.VA.gov

Fully Developed Claims: Fully developed claims offer Veterans and survivors faster decisions on disability compensation, pension, and survivor benefit claims. Veterans and survivors submit all of the claim-specific information and evidence needed to substantiate a disability. At the time of applications, claimants certify they have nothing further to give VA regarding the claim, thus eliminating the need for VA to undertake a lengthy search for any missing information or evidence. For more information, please visit: <http://www.benefits.va.gov/fdc/>.

Workload and Performance Reports: You can view the current inventory of claims, backlog, and other workload measures for both the national level and at the regional office level by visiting <http://www.vba.va.gov/reports>.

VA's National Cemetery Administration: NCA's **Funeral Director Resource Kit** can be found at <http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/funeraldirector.asp>.





HELPFUL VA TERMS AND STATS



The following are some common VA terms that we hope will be helpful to you in your interactions with your constituents and VA.

VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION (VHA) - One of three administrations within VA, the Veterans Health Administration is home to the United States' largest integrated health care system consisting of medical centers, community-based outpatient clinics, community living centers, Vet Centers and Domiciliaries.

Healthcare System (HCS) - In many areas of the country, several medical centers and clinics may work together to offer services to area Veterans as a HCS in an effort to provide more efficient care. By sharing services between medical centers, Healthcare Systems allow VHA to provide Veterans easier access to advanced medical care closer to their homes.

Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) - VHA utilizes CBOCs across the country. These clinics provide the most common outpatient services, including health and wellness visits, without the need for visiting a larger medical center. VHA continues to expand the network of CBOCs to include more rural locations, working to put access to care closer to home.

Community Living Centers (CLC) - These skilled nursing facilities, often referred to as nursing homes, care for Veterans with chronic stable conditions such as dementia, those requiring rehabilitation, or those who need comfort and care at the end of life.

Domiciliary - These facilities provide a variety of care to Veterans who suffer from a wide range of medical, psychiatric, vocational, educational, or social problems and illnesses in a safe, secure homelike environment.

Vet Center - Vet Centers provide readjustment counseling and outreach services to all Veterans who served in any combat zone. Services are also available for family members dealing with military related issues. VHA operates Vet Centers in all fifty states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands.

Veterans Integrated Services Network (VISN) - The U.S. is divided into 21 VISNs – regional systems of care working together to better meet local health care needs and provides greater access to care.

Patient Advocates - Available at every medical center, Patient Advocates are highly trained professionals who can help resolve a patient's concerns about any aspect of their health care experience, particularly those concerns that cannot be resolved at the point of care. Patient Advocates listen to any questions, problems, or special needs our Veterans have and refer their concerns to the appropriate Medical Center staff for resolution.



VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION (VBA) - One of three administrations within VA, VBA provides benefits and services to Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families in recognition of their service to the Nation. Within VBA, there are three Deputy Under Secretaries led by the Under Secretary for Benefits. Their organizations provide oversight for Disability Assistance, Economic Opportunity, and Field Operations.

Regional Offices (RO) - There are 56 ROs including offices in Puerto Rico and the Philippines.

VBA program offices:

Compensation Service - Oversees the delivery of disability compensation, a tax-free monetary benefit paid to Veterans with disabilities that are the result of a disease or injury incurred or aggravated during active military service.

Pension and Fiduciary Service - Provides program oversight that helps wartime Veterans, their families, and survivors with financial challenges by providing supplemental income through Veterans Pension, Death Pension, and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation. Protects the benefits paid to our most vulnerable beneficiaries who, because of disease, injury, or infirmities of advanced age, are unable to manage their VA benefits.

Insurance Service - Maintains life insurance programs that give financial security and peace of mind to Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families.

Benefits Assistance Service - Facilitates client services, outreach, and web communications, and ensures quality and training for VBA employees who engage Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families through client services such as the National Call Center.

Loan Guaranty Service - Provides oversight of the VA Guaranteed Home Loan Program that guarantees home loans in varying amounts. Ensures Veterans' rights are protected when purchasing a home under this program. Oversees administration of specially adapted housing grants for certain severely disabled Servicemembers and Veterans so they can adapt or acquire suitable housing.

Education Service - Oversees the administration of VA's education programs that provide education and training benefits to eligible Active Duty, National Guard, and Reserve Servicemembers, Veterans, and dependents.

Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment (VR&E) Service - Assists Servicemembers and Veterans with service-connected disabilities to prepare for, obtain, and maintain suitable employment; start their own business; or receive independent-living services. Oversees their education and provides career counseling to help guide career paths and ensure the most effective use of VA benefits.



Helpful VA Terms and Stats (cont.):

Monday Morning Workload Report - Provides workload indicators reported by VBA regional offices and updated weekly. The home page for MMWR contains current and historical information as well as definitions for data provided in the reports (<http://www.benefits.va.gov/reports/>).

ASPIRE Dashboard - Provides monthly information on how VBA and regional offices are doing in relation to 2015 aspirational goals. To find data for your regional office in ASPIRE (<http://www.benefits.va.gov/reports/>):

- Find your state on the map, place your cursor within the state, and click.
- This will open the Veterans Benefits Administration ASPIRE Benefits site; click “enter.”
- You will see a split table; on the left table click on “compensation.”
- This will expand the table.
- Follow the table to the right until you locate the column of your regional office.

Disability Compensation - A tax-free monetary benefit paid to Veterans with disabilities that are the result of a disease or injury incurred or aggravated during active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty for training. A disability can apply to both physical and mental health conditions. The benefit amount is graduated according to the degree of the Veteran's disability on a scale from 10 percent to 100 percent (in increments of 10 percent). Compensation may also be paid for disabilities that are considered related or secondary to disabilities occurring in service and for disabilities presumed to be related to circumstances of military service, even though they may arise after service. Generally, the degrees of disability specified are also designed to compensate for considerable loss of working time from exacerbations or illnesses.

Appeal - Any Veteran or beneficiary who receives a decision on a VA claim has the right to appeal that decision. The VA appeals process is unique from other standard appeals processes across federal and judicial systems. It has multiple steps, and a Veteran, survivor, or other appellant can submit new evidence or make new arguments at any time during the appeal process. As a result, an appeal does not simply progress from start to end, but may involve many cycles of additional development and adjudication as it evolves.

eBenefits - A joint VA-DoD client services portal with over 55 self-service options that allow users to file benefit claims online in an easy-to-use, prompt-based system. Veterans can also upload supporting claims information that feeds into VA's paperless claims processing system; check the status of claims or appeals; review their VA payment history; and obtain military documents, among other actions. (www.eBenefits.VA.gov)

Fully Developed Claims (FDCs) - Disability compensation, pension, or survivor benefit claims that are submitted with all of the claim-specific information and evidence needed to substantiate a disability. At the time of applications, claimants certify they have nothing further to give VA regarding the claim, thus eliminating the need for VA to undertake a lengthy search for any missing information or evidence. (www.benefits.VA.gov/fdc)



Helpful VA Terms and Stats (cont.):

Disability Benefits Questionnaires (DBQs) - DBQs are designed to capture all the needed medical information relevant to a specific condition for a disability claim at once and up front. Veterans can use 71 different DBQs with private physicians to more efficiently gather medical evidence in support of their claim. (www.benefits.VA.gov/compensation/dbq_disabilityexams.asp)

NATIONAL CEMETERY ADMINISTRATION (NCA) - One of three administrations within VA, NCA honors Veterans and their eligible family members with final resting places in national shrines and with lasting tributes that commemorate military service and sacrifice to our Nation.

National Cemeteries - Include cemeteries operated and maintained by VA and the Departments of Defense and Interior. VA maintains 131 national cemeteries in 40 states (and Puerto Rico) that honor Veterans and their eligible family members with final resting places in national shrines and with lasting tributes that commemorate military service. *Non-VA National Cemeteries:* The U.S. Department of the Interior operates 14 national cemeteries and the American Battle Monuments Commission operates 25 overseas military cemeteries.

Burial in a VA National Cemetery - Anyone may request burial in a VA national cemetery with available space for deceased Veterans and Servicemembers, spouses, and dependents who meet VA eligibility requirements. VA provides at no expense to families the opening/closing of the grave, perpetual care of the gravesite, and memorialization benefits.

Memorialization - VA furnishes upon request and at no charge to the applicant, a Government-furnished upright headstone or flat marker for the unmarked grave of any deceased eligible Veteran or Servicemember in any cemetery. Applicants may request a bronze medallion in lieu of a Government headstone or marker to mark a privately-marked gravesite of deceased eligible Veterans interred in private cemeteries. Eligible spouses and dependents of Veterans or Servicemembers are only eligible for memorialization if they are interred in a VA national cemetery, VA-funded State or Tribal Veterans' cemetery, or military post/base cemetery. Placement of a Government-furnished headstone, marker, or medallion is the applicant's responsibility and any setting fees are at private expense.

Outer Burial Receptacle Allowance - VA furnishes outer burial receptacles (or graveliners) for new graves in VA national cemeteries. Families that use privately-purchased outer burial receptacles rather than the Government-furnished graveliner may receive a monetary allowance.

Casket/Urn Reimbursement Allowance - Applicants may request VA reimbursement for the cost of a casket or urn purchased for interment in a VA national cemetery of a burial eligible Veteran who has no known next of kin and insufficient resources for burial.

Presidential Memorial Certificate - Anyone may request an engraved paper certificate, signed by the current President, to honor the memory of honorably discharged deceased Veterans.



Helpful VA Terms and Stats (cont.):

VA-Funded Veterans' Cemeteries - Administered by NCA's Veterans Cemetery Grants Program, VA funds veterans cemeteries in states, territories, and tribes using federal grant funds administered by NCA's Veterans Cemetery Grants Program. Eligibility is for burial in a VA-funded veterans' cemetery is similar to VA national cemetery burial, but may include residency requirements. VA-funded veterans' cemeteries are operated solely by the state, tribal organization, or territory and they are responsible for responding to inquiries and providing information about their programs. Please contact the specific cemetery for information.

Burial Benefits - Benefit available to eligible Veterans that includes a gravesite in any of our national cemeteries with available space, opening and closing of the grave, perpetual care, a government headstone or marker, a burial flag, and a Presidential Memorial Certificate, at no cost to the family. Some Veterans may also be eligible for Burial Allowances. Cremated remains are buried or inurned in national cemeteries in the same manner and with the same honors as casketed remains.

OTHER HELPFUL VA TERMS:

The Board of Veterans' Appeals (also known as "BVA" or "the Board") - Part of the VA, located in Washington, D.C. Members of the Board review benefit claims determinations made by local VA offices and issue decision on appeals. These Law Judges and attorneys experienced in veterans law and in reviewing benefit claims, are the only ones who can issue Board decisions. Staff attorneys, also trained in Veterans law, review the facts of each appeal and assist the Board members. {38 U.S.C. §§ 7103, 7104}

United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims - A national court of record, established under Article I of the Constitution of the United States. The Court has exclusive jurisdiction to provide judicial review of final decisions by the Board of Veterans' Appeals, an entity within the Department of Veterans Affairs. The Court provides veterans an impartial judicial forum for review of administrative decisions by the Board of Veterans' Appeals that are adverse to the Veteran-appellant's claim of entitlement to benefits for service-connected disabilities, survivor benefits and other benefits such as education payments and waiver of indebtedness. In furtherance of its mission, the Court also seeks to help ensure that all Veterans have equal access to the Court and to promote public trust and confidence in the Court. The Court's principal office is in Washington, D.C., but the Court is authorized to sit anywhere in the United States and does so a limited number of times each year. A Veterans must have a final decision from the Board of Veterans' Appeals - not the Regional Office - before they can appeal to this Court.

Veteran Service Organizations (VSO) - Private non-profit groups that advocate on behalf of Veterans. Some VSOs are "chartered", which means they are federally chartered and/or recognized or approved by the VA Secretary for purposes of preparation, presentation, and prosecution of claims under laws administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs

VA Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs (OCLA) - The focal point for Department management and coordination of all matters involving the Congress. Assistance to Members of Congress and their staff is available through offices located at the Department of Veterans Affairs Central Office and on Capitol Hill.



HELPFUL VA STATISTICS

(As of 12/23/2014)

3,950,000	Veterans Receiving VA Disability Compensation <i>(as of 9/30/2014)</i>
32%	VA Employees - Veterans <i>(FY 2013)</i>
8,920,000	Veterans Enrolled in VA Health Care System <i>(end of FY 2013)</i>
21,999,000	Projected U.S. Veterans Population
2,020,000	Projected U.S. Female Veteran Population

DAILY AVERAGE OF VA BENEFITS

(Based on FY2014 Department-wide Statistics)

1,100	Medical Surgeries
1,025	Veterans Crisis Line Calls
\$388 million	in VA Housing Loans Guaranteed
\$34.1 million	in Educational Assistance Benefits
\$2.9 million	in Vocational Rehabilitation Benefits
\$176.4 million	in Disability Compensation and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation
\$14.4 million	in Pensions for Low Income Beneficiaries
475	Interments in National Cemeteries
3,300,000	Gravesites Maintained as National Shrines

For the latest updated information please go to VA's National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics: <http://www.va.gov/vetdata/index.asp>

Additional questions? Please go directly to the Frequently Asked Questions section: http://www.va.gov/vetdata/Frequently_Asked_Questions.asp





COMMON VA-RELATED SUBJECT MATTER



Adaptive Sports Program

<http://www.va.gov/adaptivesports>

Disabled Veterans of all ages and abilities report better health, new friendships, and a better quality of life when participating in adaptive sports. Disabled Veterans who are physically active simply have more fun! Veterans can learn more about sports opportunities available by reaching out to their VA clinical team or checking out our [website](#).

Agent Orange

Health Care

<http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/benefits/registry-exam.asp>

VA established the Agent Orange Registry to track the special health concerns of Veterans who may have been exposed to Agent Orange during their military service. This program includes a comprehensive medical examination, including exposure and medical histories, laboratory tests, and a physical exam.

Benefits

http://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/claims-postservice-agent_orange.asp

Veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange or other herbicides during military service may be eligible for a variety of VA benefits, including disability compensation for diseases associated with exposure. Their dependents and survivors also may be eligible for benefits. VA and federal law presume that certain diseases are a result of exposure to herbicides. This "presumptive policy" simplifies the process for receiving compensation for these diseases since VA foregoes the normal requirements of proving that an illness began during or was worsened by military service.

Burial Benefits

http://www.cem.va.gov/burial_benefits

Burial benefits available to [eligible Veterans](#) include a gravesite in any of our 131 national cemeteries with available space, a Government headstone or marker, a burial flag, and a Presidential Memorial Certificate, at no cost to the family. Some Veterans may also be eligible for [Burial Allowances](#).

Burn Pits

<http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/burnpits/>

Burn pits have operated widely at military sites in Iraq and Afghanistan. At this time, research does not show evidence of long-term health problems. The Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry will help us learn more about potential health effects.



Claims Process

<http://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/process.asp>

There are eight distinct steps that most claims for disability compensation follow. These phases may vary in time depending on the complexity of the claim, the amount of evidence that must be gathered to support the claims, and the type of evidence. You are strongly encouraged to submit as much evidence as possible with your claim to help minimize processing time.

Claims Types

<http://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/types-claims.asp>

There are numerous types of claims that apply to disability compensation. They can be based on disabilities that existed when entering military service, but were made worse, disabilities that occurred during service, or disabilities that arose after you left military service. Additionally, there are claims that are filed for special circumstances.

Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC)

http://benefits.va.gov/COMPENSATION/types-dependency_and_indemnity.asp

- Tax-free benefit paid to Survivors for death during military service, post-service death related to service-connected disability, or death after extended period of 100-percent disability
- In FY 2014, VA paid \$6 billion in DIC benefits to 369,000 Survivors

Disability Benefits Questionnaires (DBQs)

www.benefits.VA.gov/compensation/dbq_disabilityexams.asp

DBQs are designed to capture all the needed medical information relevant to a specific condition for a disability claim at once and up front. Veterans can use 71 different DBQs with private physicians to more efficiently gather medical evidence in support of their claim.

Disability Compensation

<http://www.benefits.va.gov/COMPENSATION/types-disability.asp>

Disability compensation is a monthly tax-free benefit paid to Veterans who are at least 10% disabled because of injuries or diseases that were incurred in or aggravated during active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training. A disability can apply to physical conditions, such as a chronic knee condition, as well as a mental health conditions, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).



Doing Business with VA

<http://www.va.gov/oal/business/dbwva.asp>

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) operates a nationwide system of hospitals, clinics, Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISN), data processing centers, and National Cemeteries which require a broad spectrum of goods and services. We purchase these goods and services on a national, regional, and local level. So no matter how large or small your business is, VA is a potential customer. VA purchases a majority of its requirements for direct delivery through its local Acquisition and Materiel Management office. Businesses are encouraged to contact [each facility](#) for inclusion in its procurement process.

Education Benefits

<http://www.gibill.va.gov/>

- Over \$13.5 billion is provided annually to over one million Veterans and eligible family members
- VA is working with schools, community organizations, and other partners to ensure beneficiaries have all the information they need to best utilize their VA education benefits to graduate and find a good job. The President's Principles of Excellence offer guidelines that promote transparency and student success.
- VA launched new tools to help beneficiaries learn more about their vocational aptitudes and select an education institution.
 - The second edition of the '[Factors to Consider When Choosing a School](#)' offers guidance to future students when researching and choosing a school.
 - [CareerScope](#)® is a free new tool featured on benefits.va.gov/gibill that measures a student's aptitude and interests through a self-administered online test, identifying potential career paths.
 - The [GI Bill® Comparison Tool](#) displays median borrowing amounts, graduation rates, and loan default rates by school and indicates whether or not the school participates in the Yellow Ribbon Program or has agreed to adhere to the Principles of Excellence. The tool also allows Veterans, Servicemembers, their spouses, and dependents to estimate the amount of funding they may receive under the Post-9/11 GI Bill.
 - The [GI Bill® Feedback System](#) is a centralized online reporting system allowing Veterans, Servicemembers, and eligible dependents to report negative experiences with educational institutions. Complaints may be reviewed by State and Federal law enforcement agencies including the Department of Justice.



Electronic Claims Process

www.eBenefits.VA.gov

Instead of filling out and mailing paper forms to VA, Veterans can now use *eBenefits* to submit disability claims. A step-by-step online application—with pre-populated data fields similar to popular tax-preparation software—allows Veterans to upload digital images of records and evidence to support their claims. Over 93 percent of our disability claims inventory is now processed electronically.

Employment (Veterans Employment Center)

<https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/jobs>

On April 23, 2014, the Veterans Employment Center launched on eBenefits for:

- Veterans looking for new career opportunities in the private and public sectors,
- Servicemembers transitioning to the civilian workforce,
- Military and Veteran spouses and dependents looking for employment opportunities,
- GI Bill beneficiaries transitioning from training to the job market, and
- Public and private sector employers looking to connect with high-quality applicants.

This is the first interagency tool bringing a variety of career tools together in one place, rather than different agency websites.

Facilities Locator (and State and Local Resources)

http://www.va.gov/landing2_locations.htm

VA has many resources available for Veterans and family members. See our locations listings for nearest facilities.

Fiduciary Services

<http://www.benefits.va.gov/FIDUCIARY/>

In FY 2014, VA protected more than 172,800 beneficiaries, who due to injury, disease, or age, are unable to manage their financial affairs.

Fully Developed Claims (FDCs)

www.benefits.VA.gov/fdc

Disability compensation, pension, or survivor benefit claims that are submitted with all of the claim-specific information and evidence needed to substantiate the claim. At the time of application, claimants certify they have nothing further to give VA regarding the claim, thus eliminating the need for VA to undertake a lengthy search for any missing information or evidence.



Grants Management Services (GMS)

<http://www.va.gov/finance/policy/gms.asp>

The Department of Veterans Affairs, Grants Management Services was established in 2011 to address the need to create an overarching office which would provide for collaboration among the individual Grant Program Offices. GMS develops policies and provides guidance on grants management issues to grants and affected offices at all organizational levels within the Department. Responsibilities of GMS include, but are not limited to:

- Developing and updating grants policy chapters, which are included in Volume X of the Office of Financial Policy (OFF) Policy Volumes
- Providing guidance to Grant Program Offices regarding the implementation of new guidance and regulations
- Developing administrative tools and templates for individual program offices to leverage

(Veteran) Homelessness

<http://www.benefits.va.gov/PERSONA/veteran-homeless.asp>

Many Veterans face challenges throughout their lives that may lead them to lose their home, eventually becoming homeless. VA recognizes that every homeless Veteran's story is different, including their specific needs to help them get back into permanent and stable housing. There are many VA benefits that may support your specific needs, so it is important you know what benefits you may be eligible for.

Homeless Veterans (Assistance for)

<http://benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets/limitedincome/Homeless.pdf>

VA has many benefits and services to assist homeless Veterans. Disability benefits, education, healthcare, housing assistance, rehabilitation services, employment assistance, residential care, and compensated work therapy are among the many services VA offers to eligible Veterans.

Home loans

<http://www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans/>

- VA-guaranteed loans have maintained the lowest foreclosure rate among all categories of mortgage loans for 25 or the last 26 quarters.
- 2.1 million home loans outstanding, totaling \$388 billion
- Since 2009, nearly 400,000 Veterans experiencing financial difficulties were assisted in staying in their homes
- Specially Adapted Housing grants are provided for severely disabled Veterans
- Direct loans are offered to Native American Veterans living on Federal Trust land



Interagency Collaboration and Integration

http://www.va.gov/op3/office_of_va_dod_collaboration_and_interagency_integration.asp

The Office of Interagency Collaboration (OICI) is responsible for facilitating the development of joint policies and programs between VA and the Executive branch of government. The Office provides oversight for the implementation of interagency programs and policies as they relate to activities of the Joint Executive Council (JEC), and coordinates VA-Interagency activities. To facilitate VA's relationship with other government agencies, the VA/DoD Collaboration office became the Office of Interagency Collaboration and Integration to reflect the office's responsibility to interface with other agencies and to assist the Department in producing better outcomes in health care and benefit service delivery for Veterans. OICI coordinates VA responses to external requirements, synchronizes VA's efforts in preparing for quarterly meetings between the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the Secretary of Defense, and provides a VA-wide perspective in all VA-Interagency collaboration activities and initiatives.

I CARE

<http://www.va.gov/icare/>

No organization can succeed without values to match its mission. Our mission, as the Department of Veterans Affairs, is to care for those “who shall have borne the battle” and for their families and survivors. Our core values focus our minds on our mission of caring and thereby guide our actions toward service to others. These values — Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence — define our culture and strengthen our dedication to those we serve. They provide a baseline for the standards of behavior expected of all VA employees.

Life Insurance

<http://www.benefits.va.gov/insurance/>

- Four life insurance programs are currently available, with traumatic injury protection also available for certain severe in-service injuries and illness
- During FY 2014, 6.5 million clients were insured with a face value of \$1.3 trillion

Locate Nearest Veteran Health Administration (VHA) facility

<http://www.va.gov/directory/guide/division.asp?dnum=1>

Mental health and Suicide

<http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/index.asp>

VA offers a range of treatments and services to improve the mental health of Veterans. For Veterans with serious mental illness, VA offers care tailored to help with their specific problem and to promote recovery. Treatments and services for these disorders are provided in a variety of settings.



News Releases

- To join or be removed from VA's news release distribution list: http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/opalist_listserv.cfm
- For a listing of past VA national releases: <http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/>

Pension

<http://www.benefits.va.gov/pension/>

- Tax-free benefit paid to eligible wartime Veterans with limited or no income who are age 65 or older or determined permanently and totally disabled, as well as to eligible spouses and children
- In FY 2014, \$5.2 billion in pension benefits were paid to 308,000 Veterans and 209,000 Survivors

(Veteran) Population

<http://www.va.gov/vetdata/>

The [National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics \(NCVAS\)](#) supports planning, analysis, and decision-making activities through the collection, validation, analysis, and dissemination of key statistics on Veteran population and VA programs.

Prioritization of Claims:

VA continues to prioritize specific categories of claims, including:

1. Claims of seriously wounded, ill, and injured Servicemembers separating through the Integrated Disability Evaluation System
2. Medal of Honor recipients
3. Former Prisoners of War
4. Homeless
5. Terminally ill
6. Those experiencing extreme financial hardship and
7. Fully Developed Claims

Research and Development

<http://www.research.va.gov/about/default.cfm>

The Office of Research and Development (ORD) aspires to discover knowledge, develop VA researchers and health care leaders, and create innovations that advance health care for our Veterans and the Nation.



Rural Veterans

<http://www.ruralhealth.va.gov/>

Through collaborations with other VA program offices, Federal partners, state partners, and rural communities, the VHA Office of Rural Health works to optimize the use of available and emerging technologies, establish new access points to care, and employ strategies to increase health care options for all rural Veterans.

Small & Disadvantaged Business Utilization

<http://www.va.gov/osdbu/verification/index.asp>

Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU), to include the Center for Verification and Evaluation (CVE), works to help Veteran-Owned and Small businesses contribute most effectively to the important mission of VA. Veteran-Owned Small Businesses (VSOB) interested in contracting with VA should visit the links for [Subcontracting](#) and [Forecast of Contracting Opportunities](#). For Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses (SDVOSB) and VOSBs, be sure to carefully review the information about the Vendor Information Pages (www.VetBiz.gov) database. In order to take advantage of procurement preferences provided to Veteran-Owned and controlled Small Businesses, the business must be Verified as an eligible firm and be registered in the VIP database. For questions regarding the VA VOSB Verification Program or for a business to check the status of their Verification, please call (202) 618-3765.

State By State Summary Sheets

<http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/factsheets.asp>

These summary sheets are updated each year to reflect VA's impact in each state for the previous fiscal year.

Status of a Pending Disability Claim

Veterans can use the eBenefits portal to check the status of a claim online if they are an eBenefits Premium (Level 2) account holder.

- To determine the status of a pending claim, the Veteran should login to eBenefits (<https://www.ebenefits.va.gov>) and select "My eBenefits." On the "Compensation" tab, select *Compensation & Pension Claims Status*. Veterans can also call 1-800-827-1000 and follow the recorded instructions, or contact VA online (<https://iris.custhelp.com>) and fill out the [Ask a Question form](#). If a Veteran is not an eBenefits account holder, the Veteran can visit the eBenefits registration page at <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov> for information on how to establish an account. Congressional offices can contact VA's Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs - Liaison Service on a constituent's behalf, and one of our liaisons can assist you.



Strategic Capital Investment Plan (SCIP)

<http://www.va.gov/oaem>

SCIP is an innovative Department-wide process designed to improve the delivery of services and benefits to Veterans, their families, and their survivors, with the safest and most secure infrastructure possible, by addressing VA's most critical needs first; investing wisely in VA's future and significantly improving the efficiency of VA's far-reaching and wide range of activities. VA uses the best infrastructure planning practices from both the private and public sectors to integrate all capital investment planning for major construction, minor construction, non-recurring maintenance and leasing. SCIP provides a comprehensive plan to improve the quality, access, and cost efficiency of the delivery of VA benefits and services through modern (i.e., newer and/or better conditioned) facilities that match the location and needs of current and future demand - locating VA facilities where our Nation's Veterans live.

Transition GPS (Goals, Plans, Success)

<http://www.benefits.va.gov/VOW/tap.asp>

- In FY 2014, VA provided over 48,000 benefits briefings, career technical training courses, and military life cycle and capstone events to support approximately 559,000 of our Nation's Servicemembers transitioning to work and home after the military. Servicemembers may choose to attend briefings and training more than once; this count does not represent unique Servicemembers.
- VA has deployed over 300 Benefits Advisors worldwide to support transitioning Servicemembers through Transition GPS activities. Benefits Advisors provide VA benefits briefings and career technical training, and also support Capstone events and requests for individualized assistance.

Tribal Government Relations

<http://www.va.gov/TRIBALGOVERNMENT/>

The Office of Tribal Government Relations (OTGR) supports Government-to-Government relationships between VA and Tribal Governments by assisting VA with implementing the VA Tribal Consultation Policy. OTGR also facilitates communications and outreach focused on strengthening VA's relationships with Tribal Governments. Specific programs include activities that facilitate increased access to health care and benefits, promoting utilization of education benefits, and communicating Federal contract opportunities and use of home loan programs such as the Native American Direct Loan program. These activities inform the agency's efforts to effectively reach and serve Veterans living in Indian Country.



Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment

<http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/vre/>

- In FY 2014, \$1.1 billion in VR&E benefits were paid to an estimated 93,363 participants
- VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) program helps ease the transition of Servicemembers to Veteran-status in schools across the Nation

Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs)

<http://www.va.gov/vso>

VA maintains an online [Directory of Veterans Service Organizations for 2013-2014](#) (PDF). This is published as an informational service by the Office of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Inclusion of an organization in the directory does not constitute approval or endorsement by VA or the United States Government of the organization or its activities. Some VSOs are "chartered", which means they are federally chartered and/or recognized or approved by the VA Secretary for purposes of preparation, presentation, and prosecution of claims under laws administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Inclusion of non-chartered organizations does not constitute or reflect VA recognition of said organization and its representatives for purposes of representation of VA claimants. Individuals seeking representation should only rely on information found in the [Office of General Counsel \(OGC\) Search for Accredited Attorneys, Claims Agents, or Veterans Service Organizations \(VSO\) Representatives](#).

Women Veterans

<http://www.womenshealth.va.gov/>

In 1988, the Women Veterans Health Program was created to streamline services for women Veterans in order to provide more cost-effective medical and psychosocial care. Women Veterans Health Care addresses the health care needs of women Veterans and works to ensure that timely, equitable, high-quality, comprehensive health care services are provided in a sensitive and safe environment at VA health facilities nationwide.



Workload and Performance Reports (VBA)

<http://www.vba.va.gov/reports/>

You can view the current inventory of claims, backlog, and other workload measures at both the national and regional office levels by visiting VBA's reports web site.

- The [Monday Morning Workload Report \(MMWR\)](#) provides workload indicators for VBA regional offices that are updated weekly. The home page for MMWR contains current and historical information, as well as definitions for data provided in the reports.
- The [ASPIRE Dashboard](#) provides monthly information on how VBA and regional offices are doing in relation to 2015 aspirational goals.

To find data for your regional office in ASPIRE:

- Find your state on the map, place your cursor within the state, and click
- This will open the Veterans Benefits Administration ASPIRE Benefits site; click “enter”
- You will see a split table; on the left table click on “compensation”
- This will expand the table
- Follow the table to the right until you locate the column of your regional office

