



# Live Whole Health

Official news from VA Puget Sound Health Care System

## The PACT Act expands eligibility

The PACT Act is a historic law that expands VA health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances. The law empowers VA to provide generations of Veterans—and their survivors—with the care and benefits they've earned and deserve.

- Expands and extends eligibility for VA health care for Veterans with toxic exposures and Veterans of the Vietnam era, Gulf War era, and Post-9/11 combat Veterans.
- Adds more than 20 new presumptive conditions for burn pits and other toxic exposures.
- Adds more presumptive locations for Agent Orange and radiation exposure.
- Provides toxic exposure screenings to every Veteran enrolled in VA health care.
- Helps us improve research, staff education, and treatment related to toxic exposures.

VA will execute a comprehensive Veteran outreach plan to make sure that every Veteran and survivor gets the care they need and the benefits they deserve. For now, here are the most important things for to know:

- We at VA want Veterans and survivors to apply now for their PACT Act

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## What you need know about Monkeypox

**What is monkeypox?** Monkeypox is a contagious viral disease. The monkeypox virus is closely related to the one that causes smallpox, but the disease is generally less severe and less contagious. The World Health Organization has declared monkeypox a public health emergency of international concern, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) declared a Public Health Emergency on August 4, 2022. In the United States, almost 14,000 cases have been identified in 49 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

**How is monkeypox transmitted?** Monkeypox is primarily transmitted via direct contact with infectious material from skin lesions or from contaminated surfaces and objects. Transmission from breathing is

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### Observances

#### October

- 13: U.S. Navy Birthday
- 9/15 10/15: National Hispanic Heritage Month
- National Disabilities Month
- Domestic Violence Awareness

#### November

- 10: U.S. Marine Corps Birthday
- 11: Armistice/Remembrance Day
- National American Indian Heritage Month

#### December

- 7: National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day
- 13: U.S. National Guard Birthday

## Reproductive Care

VA is acting to help to ensure that, irrespective of what laws or policies States may impose, eligible Veterans and CHAMPVA beneficiaries will be able to obtain abortions when:

- The life or the health of the pregnant veteran or VA beneficiary would be endangered if the pregnancy were carried to term; or
- The pregnancy is the result of an act of rape or incest.

VA beneficiaries enrolled in CHAMPVA will also have access to these services.

This was a patient safety decision. VA has determined that providing access to abortion services is necessary to protect the lives and health of Veterans.

Access to abortion is particularly critical for protecting the health and life of pregnant Veterans because Veterans are at greater risk than non-Veterans of experiencing pregnancy-related complications.

The bottom line is that pregnant Veterans and VA beneficiaries deserve to have access to world-class, life-saving reproductive care when they need it most — including access to abortion counseling and abortions when needed.

For more information about VA's reproductive health care visit [www.womenshealth.va.gov/WOMENSHEALTH/topics/abortion-services.asp](http://www.womenshealth.va.gov/WOMENSHEALTH/topics/abortion-services.asp) and [www.womenshealth.va.gov/WOMENSHEALTH/topics/reproductive-health.asp](http://www.womenshealth.va.gov/WOMENSHEALTH/topics/reproductive-health.asp).



**You have the power to protect yourself.  
Flu shots coming to a facility near you  
in October!**

### Seattle & American Lake

**October 3-28:** Monday-Friday  
**October 22 & 29:** Saturdays **only**  
 American Lake: 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.  
 Seattle: 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.  
*No appointment needed*

### VA Community Outpatient Clinics

Please *call specific VA outpatient clinic* location  
for flu shot dates and hours of operation

### More Options

#### Community Care Flu Shot options

Eligible Veterans can receive a free flu shot from one of our community partners, find an in-network location near you, please visit:

**[www.va.gov/communitycare/flushot.asp](http://www.va.gov/communitycare/flushot.asp)**

#### During scheduled, primary care and specialty appointments (face-to-face)

For questions and more information about flu and COVID-19 vaccinations, please call  
**VA Vaccine Hotline 1-800-329-8387, ext. 64040.**



# Have an appointment?

Check in with your smartphone

**1** Text **check in**  
to **53079**

To:  
**53079**

Message:  
**check in**

OR scan this code  
with your camera.



**2** Wait until you get a text back with a link.  
This should only take a few seconds.

**3** Tap on the link to start your check-in.  
Data charges may apply.

Can't scan the QR code? Text us instead ✓

Need to update your information? Check in with a staff member instead ✓

## PACT Act (continued from page 1)

benefits.

- Because these conditions have already taken a serious toll on so many Veterans and their families, we are considering all conditions established in the PACT Act to be presumptive on August 10, the date the bill was signed into law.
- Veteran Benefits Administration (VBA) will begin processing those presumptive benefits for Veterans and survivors on the earliest date possible, which is January 1.
- Any Veteran or survivor can learn more about the PACT Act by visiting [VA.gov/PACT](https://va.gov/PACT) or calling 1-800-MY-VA-411.

### Military Environmental Presumptives

For the very first time, VA is also presumptively granting military environmental exposures claims to Gulf War Veterans—specifically to those who suffer from asthma, sinusitis and rhinitis as a result of their service.

This is good news, especially for the 28,623 Veterans and survivors whose claims have already been granted. As of September 6, 2022, VA has completed 38,331 of these claims and granted 28,623, which represents a 74.7 percent grant rate for claims that include asthma, sinusitis, rhinitis, and rare respiratory cancers due to fine particulate matter.

This is just the start. VA is seeking every avenue possible to develop additional processes where a presumptive can be determined in a more expedient and holistic manner for Veterans.

VA is also proactively implementing provisions of the William M. Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 (Public Law 116-283), adding three conditions to the list for Vietnam-era Veterans

presumptively associated with exposure to herbicide agents, more commonly known as Agent Orange. Those conditions are bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, and Parkinsonism.

As of September 6, 2022, 70,981 of these claims have been processed, with over \$518 million in retroactive benefits awarded to Veterans and survivors.

### Disability Claims Backlog

The new Gulf War and Agent Orange presumptive medical conditions—along with the Blue Water Navy (BWN) claims—have led to an increase in the current disability claims backlog.

Fortunately, we're able to respond to these increases. To proactively address the increase, we're:

- Hiring and training of more than 2,000 new positions to process and support Veteran' claims for disability benefits.
- Using American Rescue Plan funding to pay overtime for processors.
- Deploying Fiscal Year 2022 budget resources to expedite toxic exposure claims processing.

Currently, between 20 to 25 percent of VBA's Rating Veteran Service Representatives (RVSRs) are working BWN-Nehmer, NDAA-Nehmer, and BWN claims. Nehmer claims are highly complex and require specialized training to complete.

As part of mitigation measures, VBA has been mandating overtime for all RVSRs as well as aggressively hiring new RVSRs to ensure sufficient rating capacity, both for existing workload and expected future workload related to toxic exposure filing. As of September 5, 2022, the backlog was





# One Seamless Electronic Health Record



**VA**



**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

Electronic Health Record Modernization  
Integration Office

**[www.ehrm.va.gov](http://www.ehrm.va.gov)**

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## PACT Act (continued from page 4)

157,600 claims, 40.5 percent below the recent high on October 24, 2021 (264,236). Backlog is defined as the number of claims pending more than 125 days.

VBA is also leading a comprehensive modernization of the claims process through the utilization of data and automation. Historically manual administrative tasks and workflows will be automated to enable more effective and timely claim decisions.

VBA began a pilot program in December 2021 to automate business processes with certain medical data to eliminate unnecessary examinations, streamline workflows, and reduce manual processes. The pilot is:

- Focusing on claims for increased benefits related to service-connected hypertension.
- Processing claims in approximately five days. A remarkable improvement from the traditional process which is currently taking well over 100 days on average.

Visit VBA Seattle Regional Office's website—<https://www.benefits.va.gov/seattle/>—for more information.

STAY CONNECTED: [www.pugetsound.va.gov](http://www.pugetsound.va.gov)



## Monkeypox *(continued from page 1)*

possible from an individual with lesions in the mouth or throat, but usually requires close, prolonged exposure.

### **Who is at risk of contracting monkeypox?**

Monkeypox can affect people of all ages, sexual orientations and socioeconomic statuses who are exposed to the virus. In the early stages of the current multi-country outbreak, monkeypox has affected a disproportionate number of men who are gay, bisexual or men who have sex with men, but does not imply an increased susceptibility to the infection by this or any other group. While the infection is often passed by close intimate and sexual contact, its mode of transmission is not uniquely or preferentially sexual.

**What are the symptoms of monkeypox?** Monkeypox typically presents with fever, malaise, swollen lymph nodes and a characteristic skin rash. A person with monkeypox may have all or only some of those symptoms, and the rash may be widespread or localized to a part of their skin.

**What is the outlook/prognosis of someone who contracts monkeypox?** Monkeypox normally takes about 2 to 4 weeks to run its course. The rash may be painful and leave scars. Most people will recover on their own and will not need hospitalization or specific treatment. A small proportion of patients, mostly those with multiple preexisting conditions or with weakened immune systems, may develop a more severe disease that could result in death. As of August 18, 2022, there have not been any deaths reported in the United States, although some people have died in other countries.

### **What is VA doing to address and treat monkeypox?**

As of August 15, 2022, 101 Veterans who receive Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) care have been diagnosed with monkeypox at 29 different VA medical facilities. All these Veterans are receiving exceptional care from our medical, nursing and infection control staff. VA follows the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) clinical, infection control and contact investigation guidance. Updated information can be found [here](#).

## COVID-19 vaccines

COVID-19 Pfizer bivalent booster and flu vaccine clinics are offered at our American Lake and Seattle campuses every Saturday in October (1, 8, 15, 22 & 29) and the holiday Monday, October 10. Seattle will have a walk-in clinic 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and American Lake will have a drive thru clinic 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. No appointments needed. No COVID-19 monovalent primary doses will be given in these clinics. Updated information about COVID-19, monkeypox and flu vaccines can be found at [www.va.gov/puget-sound-health-care/](http://www.va.gov/puget-sound-health-care/).

## Upgrade to My HealtheVet Premium

My HealtheVet users can prepare for the new electronic health record by signing up for a free Premium My HealtheVet account. There's a step-by-step guide on [myhealth.va.gov/premium](http://myhealth.va.gov/premium). It's also important to have the most up-to-date web browser (Internet Explorer is not compatible with the new patient portal). And ensure contact information and addresses are up to date in the VA profile at [VA.gov](http://VA.gov) before the new patient portal is launched with the rollout of the new health record in March 2022. To make updates, log in to VA Profile or through VA.gov using their Premium DS Logon account, Premium My HealtheVet account or a verified ID.me account. If you need help, contact the My HealtheVet Help Desk at 877-327-0022 or 800-877-8339 (TTY), Monday through Friday from 5 a.m. to 5 p.m. (PDT).



## Message from our Director



VA Puget Sound Veterans,

Your mental and physical health is our #1 priority, and we are working hard to improve access to the important health programs and services you've all earned.

And a big part of this is our ongoing expansion of primary and specialty care services to areas that make getting care more convenient to you.

Along with continuing to offer virtual care options, we'll have 11 care sites once the doors to our new \$10 million 28,000 sq. ft. Everett Clinic opens doors to patient care October 3. The new clinic was designed with its Patient Aligned Care Teams at the heart of facility.

Our Everett clinic is part of a larger system redesign to better serve Western Washington Veterans. In addition to this new state-of-the-art clinic, last year we opened new clinics in Olympia, Puyallup and Edmonds.

Additionally, we are moving our Mount Vernon clinic to a newer, state-of-the-art site, and will be replacing our existing clinic in Olympia with a larger, more centralized multi-specialty clinic in 2026.

And our new American Lake Specialty Care Building is expected to open in 2028, creating more capacity for primary and specialty care programs and services.

Together, our new clinical footprint allows VA Puget Sound to directly serve Everett and Olympia, two major metropolitan areas in Western Washington that did not previously have VA facilities.

These efforts also create new capacity for our areas of highest growth in South King and Pierce counties as well as provide better outreach to rural Veterans in North King County with clinics planned in Auburn and the Northeast King County areas.

The expanded primary and specialty care services across our Western Washington care sites are designed to complement the community care options available to you under the MISSION Act.

Most important, our new clinics and enhancements to existing facilities are designed to place the needs of you—our Veterans—front and center and underscores our commitment to providing you with the best health outcomes.

Thank you for allowing us to be your health care system.

Warmest regards,

Thomas Bundt, PhD., FACHE



## U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration  
VA Puget Sound Health Care System

### Official news from:

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Seattle, WA 98108  
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American Lake  
9600 Veterans Dr.  
Lakewood, WA 98493  
253-582-8440



### Main Campuses



Seattle  
1660 S. Columbian Way  
Seattle, WA 98108  
206-762-1010



Edmonds  
21616 76th Ave. West,  
Suites 107 and 112  
Edmonds, WA 98026  
206-716-5858

### Outpatient Clinics



Everett  
220 Olympic Boulevard  
Everett, WA 98203  
Doors open Oct. 3, 2022

Port Angeles/North Olympic  
1114 Georgiana St.  
Port Angeles, WA 98362  
360-565-7420



Puyallup  
Sunrise Medical Center  
11216 Sunrise Blvd. East  
Bldg. 3, Suite 209  
Puyallup, WA 98374  
253-583-3821



Silverdale  
9177 Ridgetop Blvd. NW  
Silverdale, WA 98383  
360-307-6920



Olympia  
Memorial Medical Plaza  
500 Lilly Rd. NE, Suite 201,  
Olympia, WA 98506  
253-583-2621

### Community Resource & Referral Centers

Community Resource  
& Referral Center  
305 S. Lucile St.  
Seattle, WA 98108  
206-764-5149



Community Resource  
& Referral Center  
419 South 2nd Street  
Suite 2  
Renton, WA 98057  
425-203-7201

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### Have story ideas?

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