



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration  
VA Northeast Ohio Healthcare System

# Press Release

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 5, 2024

### **In one of the largest-ever expansions of Veteran health care, all Veterans exposed to toxins and other hazards during military service – at home or abroad – are now eligible for VA health care**

*At the direction of President Biden, VA is expanding health care eligibility to millions of Veterans – including all Veterans who served in the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan, and any other combat zone after 9/11 – years earlier than called for by the PACT Act*

WASHINGTON — Today, VA announced that all Veterans who were exposed to toxins and other hazards while serving in the military – at home or abroad – are now eligible to enroll directly in VA health care. This means that all Veterans who served in the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Global War on Terror, or any other combat zone after 9/11 are eligible to enroll in VA health care without first applying for VA benefits. Additionally, Veterans who never deployed but were exposed to toxins or hazards while training or on active duty in the United States are eligible to enroll.

As [directed by President Biden](#), this expansion of VA health care eliminates the phased-in approach called for by the PACT Act – meaning that millions of Veterans are becoming eligible for VA health care up to eight years earlier than written into law. This is a critical step forward because Veterans who are enrolled in VA health care are proven to have better health outcomes than non-enrolled Veterans, and VA hospitals have dramatically outperformed non-VA hospitals in [overall quality ratings](#) and [patient satisfaction ratings](#). Additionally, VA health care is often [more affordable](#) than non-VA health care for Veterans.

VA encourages all eligible Veterans to visit [VA.gov/PACT](https://va.gov/PACT) or call 1-800-MYVA411 to learn more and apply for VA health care today. Since President Biden signed the PACT Act into law on August 10, 2022, more than 15,475 Ohio Veterans have enrolled in VA health care.



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“If you’re a Veteran who may have been exposed to toxins or hazards while serving our country, at home or abroad, we want you to come to us for the health care you deserve,” said **VA Secretary Denis McDonough**. “VA is proven to be the best, most affordable health care in America for Veterans – and once you’re in, you have access for life. So don’t wait, enroll today.”

“Today, we’re making millions of Veterans eligible for VA health care years earlier than called for by the PACT Act,” said VA **Under Secretary for Health Shereef Elnahal, M.D.** “With this expansion, VA can care for all Veterans who served in the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Global War on Terror, or any other combat zone after 9/11. We can also care for Veterans who never deployed but were exposed to toxins or hazards while training or on active duty here at home – by working with chemicals, pesticides, lead, asbestos, certain paints, nuclear weapons, x-rays, and more. We want to bring all of these Veterans to VA for the care they’ve earned and deserve.”

“We know there are thousands of Veterans living in northeast Ohio who may have been told in the past they were not eligible, for many possible reasons,” said **Jill Dietrich Mellon, Executive Director/CEO, VA Northeast Ohio Healthcare System**. “Today, most of the reasons for ineligibility are gone and the landscape for Veterans in need of care has changed in the most sweeping update to Veterans health care in the modern era. VA health care is the best and most affordable health care for Veterans, and Veterans enrolled in VA health care are proven to have better outcomes than Veterans seeking care elsewhere based both on quality ratings and patient satisfaction ratings. We urge those who have tried to enroll in the past to reach out again, and to get the world-class care you’ve earned.”

In addition to expanding access to VA care, this decision makes it quicker and easier for millions of Veterans to enroll. Many Veterans believe they must apply to receive [VA disability compensation](#) benefits to become eligible for VA health care, *but this is not correct*. With this expansion and other authorities, millions of eligible Veterans can enroll directly in VA care – without any need to first apply for VA benefits.



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This expansion of care covers Vietnam Veterans, Gulf War Veterans, Iraq War Veterans, Afghanistan War Veterans, Veterans who deployed in support of contingency operations for the Global War on Terror (Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Freedom's Sentinel, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn, Operation Inherent Resolve, and Resolute Support Mission), and [more](#).

This expansion also covers many Veterans who never deployed as a part of a conflict but were exposed to toxins or hazards while serving in the U.S. Specifically, under this expansion of care, any Veteran who participated in a toxic exposure risk activity (TERA) – at home or abroad – is eligible for VA health care. VA has determined that Veterans who were exposed to one or more of the following hazards or conditions during active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training participated in a TERA: air pollutants (burn pits, sand, dust, particulates, oil well fires, sulfur fires); chemicals (pesticides, herbicides, depleted uranium with embedded shrapnel, contaminated water); occupational hazards (asbestos, industrial solvents, lead, paints including chemical agent resistant coating, firefighting foams); radiation (nuclear weapons handling, maintenance and detonation, radioactive material, calibration and measurement sources, X-rays, radiation from military occupational exposure); warfare agents (nerve agents, chemical and biological weapons); and more. VA will use all available information to determine if Veterans participated in a TERA, including military records and service connection.

VA is executing a nationwide campaign to ensure that as many Veterans as possible enroll. To date, VA's PACT Act outreach campaign has included more than 2,500 events nationwide, \$13 million in [paid advertising](#), 88,000 earned media clips, more than 400 million emails and letters to Veterans, VA's first-ever text messaging campaign, the creation of a [one-stop-shop PACT Act website](#), and more. This is the largest outreach campaign in VA history, which has one goal in mind: ensure that all Veterans – and their survivors – get the health care and benefits they deserve under the PACT Act.

For more information about how the PACT Act is helping Veterans and their survivors, visit VA's [PACT Act Dashboard](#). To apply for care or benefits today, visit [VA.gov/PACT](http://VA.gov/PACT) or call 1-800-MYVA411. More information on eligibility can be found at [VA.gov/PACT](http://VA.gov/PACT).



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## **About VA Northeast Ohio Healthcare System**

Focusing on treating the whole Veteran through health promotion and disease prevention, VA Northeast Ohio Healthcare System provides comprehensive, seamless health care and social services for more than 110,900 Veterans across Northeast Ohio. With 18 locations of care, including 13 outpatient clinics, two community resource and referral centers, a psychosocial rehabilitation and recovery center, a chronic dialysis center, and an outpatient surgery center, VA Northeast Ohio Healthcare System's quality services are easily accessible to Veterans in 21 counties. VA Northeast Ohio Healthcare System also contributes to the future of medicine through education, training, and research programs.