Veteran Information Session

VA Maryland Health Care System

New VA Health Eligibility Under the PACT Act

January 28, 2026

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Agenda

Veteran Information Session:
New VA Health Care Eligibility
Under the PACT Act

- PACT Act Overview
- New VA Health Care Eligibility
- Toxic Exposure Screening
- Q&A Session

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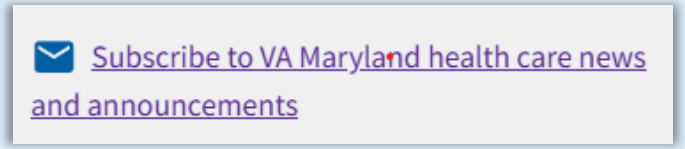

PACT Act Overview

- Expanded VA health care eligibility
- Improved VA's presumption decision making process
- Bolsters VA's toxic exposure resources
- Strengthens VA's toxic exposure research
- Increased VA benefits claims processing capacity
- Strengthens VA's workforce
- Authorized funding for VA facility leases

New VA Health Care Eligibility

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Enrollment & Eligibility
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2024 PACT Act Health Care Eligibility: What Changed?

- Under the PACT Act, all toxic exposed Veterans were supposed to become eligible for VA care – in increments – between now and 2032.
- VA eliminated the phased-in approach – meaning that three new cohorts of Veterans are now eligible to enroll in VA health care as of March 5, 2024.

Veterans must first meet the minimum active-duty service and discharge requirements to qualify for VA health care under PACT Act authorities.

Newly Eligible Veteran Cohorts

- Veterans who participated in a toxic exposure risk activity (TERA), as defined by law, while serving on active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training.

- Veterans who were assigned to a duty station in (including airspace above) certain locations during specific periods of time:
  - On or after August 2, 1990, in the following countries: Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, or the United Arab Emirates
  - On or after September 11, 2001, in the following countries: Afghanistan, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Uzbekistan, or any other country determined relevant by VA. (**Note**: VA has not determined any other country relevant at this time.)

- Veterans who were deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Freedom's Sentinel, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn, Operation Inherent Resolve, and Resolute Support Mission.

What Is Considered a TERA? (more on this further in the presentation)

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, nuclear weapon technicians and dental technicians, served on nuclear submarine and other nuclear ships or in shipyards, or were involved in nuclear weapons handling and maintenance, including clean-up after accidents).
- Warfare agents (nerve agents, chemical and biological weapons).

This is not a comprehensive list, and there's no timeline. Veterans can view additional military exposure categories on VA's Public Health website at https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/.

Vietnam Era Veteran VA Health Care Eligibility

Veterans who served in the following locations and time periods are also eligible to enroll in VA health care effective on enactment (August 10, 2022):

- Republic of Vietnam (between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975),
- Thailand at any U.S. or Royal Thai base (between January 9, 1962, and June 30, 1976)
- Laos (between December 1, 1965, and September 30, 1969)
- Certain Provinces in Cambodia (between April 16, 1969, and April 30, 1969)
- Guam or American Samoa or their territorial waters (between January 9, 1962, and July 31, 1980)
- Johnston Atoll, or a ship that called there, between January 1, 1972, and September 30, 1977

VA Health Care Eligibility FAQs

What are the minimum active-duty service requirements for VA health care?

In general, Veterans must have served 24 months of continuous active duty or the full period for which they were called or ordered to active duty.

Former members of the Reserves or National Guard are eligible for VA health care if they have qualifying service (as described above) ***and*** meet one of the health care eligibility requirements in the PACT Act. Former members of the Reserves or National Guard who only served for training purposes may not be able to establish Veteran status if they did not incur a qualifying disability during such training.

Some exceptions apply. Please visit www.va.gov/health-care/eligibility for more information.

What are the exceptions to the minimum active-duty service requirements for VA health care?

The minimum active-duty service requirement for VA health care may not apply if any of these are true:

- The Veteran was discharged or released for a qualifying reason (e.g., early discharge, hardship, medical discharge).
- The Veteran was discharged for a disability that was caused—or made worse—by active-duty service.
- The Veteran served prior to the early 1980s.

VA encourages all Veterans to apply to determine their enrollment eligibility. Please visit www.va.gov/health-care/eligibility for more information.

Apply for VA Health Care in 4 Easy Ways

1. Online: https://www.va.gov/health-care/apply/application/introduction.

2. By calling the toll-free hotline: 855-976-1093.

3. By mailing VA Form 10-10EZ to:

   Health Eligibility Center
   2957 Clairmont Rd., Suite 200
   Atlanta, GA 30329

4. In person at the nearest VA medical center

   Baltimore VA Medical Center
   Perry Point VA Medical Center

Why Choose VA?

- VA provides the best and most affordable health care for Veterans in America – and *this* is your chance to apply.
- Veterans who are enrolled in VA health care are proven to have better health outcomes than those who get their care elsewhere. And this year alone, VA has beaten non-VA hospitals in quality ratings *and* patient satisfaction ratings.
- That's because our clinicians know Veterans – they often *are* Veterans – and they know exactly how to help.
- And VA health care isn't only the best option for Veterans – it's often the most affordable – with copays as low as $0 for prescriptions, urgent care, outpatient care, and more for some Veterans at VA.
- So don't wait – get the world-class care you've earned.

If you previously applied and were not found eligible for VA health care (due to income, lack of service-connection or other factors), you may now be eligible.

But it won't happen automatically. You must reapply or call 855-976-1093 for a reassessment.

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Toxic Exposure Screening

Ashley Hanahan, CRNP
Toxic Exposure Screening Navigator
VA Maryland Health Care System

VA Toxic Exposure Screening Quick Facts

- **Who:** All Veterans enrolled in VA health care.
- **What:** A brief screening averaging 5–10 minutes to identify and document any potential exposures to toxins during military service.
- **When:** At least once every 5 years.
- **Where:** At VA medical centers/clinics, including virtual encounters.
- **Why:** To support the long-term health plan of the Veteran—ensuring they receive informed, whole-health care—and connect them with follow-up resources as requested.

⇒ **EXPOSURE-INFORMED CARE**

Expanding Presumptions of Service Connection

The PACT Act establishes presumptions of service connection for more than 20 presumptive disease categories related to toxic exposures.

For Gulf War and Post-9/11 Veterans

Asthma diagnosed after service	Interstitial lung disease (ILD)
Brain cancer	Kidney cancer
Chronic bronchitis	Lymphoma of any type
Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)	Melanoma
Chronic rhinitis	Neck cancer
Chronic sinusitis	Pancreatic cancer
Constrictive bronchiolitis or obliterative bronchiolitis	Pleuritis
Emphysema	Pulmonary fibrosis
Gastrointestinal cancer of any type	Reproductive cancer of any type
Glioblastoma	Respiratory cancer of any type
Granulomatous disease	Sarcoidosis
Head cancer of any type	

For Vietnam Veterans and other Veterans exposed to tactical herbicides

Monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance (MGUS)
High blood pressure (also called hypertension)

What Is Considered a TERA?

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- 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, nuclear weapon technicians and dental technicians, served on nuclear submarine and other nuclear ships or in shipyards, or were involved in nuclear weapons handling and maintenance, including clean-up after accidents).
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This is not a comprehensive list, and there's no timeline. Veterans can view additional military exposure categories on VA's Public Health website at https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/.

Filing and Processing Claims Associated with the PACT Act

VA will contact Veterans when a presumption of service connection is established or changed. Veterans can learn more at www.va.gov/PACT.

However, Veterans who were previously denied a toxic-exposure-related claim are encouraged to file a **supplemental claim** using VA Form 20-0995, Decision Review Request: Supplemental Claim. Most claims that were previously denied will not be automatically reviewed under the PACT Act. Survivors who were previously denied dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC), related to any of the new presumptive conditions, are likewise encouraged to re-file a claim.

Veterans who have not previously filed a claim and are diagnosed with one of the new presumptive conditions and meet eligibility requirements should **submit a new claim** on VA Form 21-526EZ, Application for Disability Compensation and Related Compensation Benefits. Survivors who have not previously filed a claim and meet eligibility requirements should **submit a new claim** on VA Form 21P-534EZ, Application for DIC, Survivors Pension, and/or Accrued Benefits.

Veterans should be prepared to submit any supportive medical and lay evidence along with their claims.

Next Steps: Websites

Learn more about the PACT Act:
www.va.gov/PACT

Apply for VA health care:
https://www.va.gov/health-care/apply-for-health-care-form-10-10ez/introduction
855-976-1093

Submit a VBA claim:
https://www.va.gov/disability/file-disability-claim-form-21-526ez/introduction

Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry:
https://veteran.mobilehealth.va.gov/AHBurnPitRegistry/#page/home

This presentation will be recorded and available for viewing on the VA Maryland Health Care System website at maryland.va.gov. page.

Next Steps: Contacts & Telephone Numbers

From Today's Presentation	
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Heather Mitchell, Chief of Social Works Services, VAMHCS	**410-605-7000, ext. 51351**
Siobhan Kirksey, Women's Health Program Manager, VAMHCS	**410-605-7275**
Philip Munley, MD Dept. of Veterans & Military Families	**410-230-4444, ext. 16457**
Cardell Bass, Maryland Dept. of Veterans & Military Families	**410-230-4444, ext. 16455**
Aaron Filsinger, Executive Director (Acting), Baltimore Regional Office, Veterans Benefits Administration	**410-230-4530**

Additional Telephone Numbers	
Appointment Center	**410-605-7333**
Eligibility & Enrollment Center	**877-222-8387**
Patient Advocates	**410-605-7099**
Prescription Refills	**410-605-7395, press 2**
Telephone Care Line	**800-865-2441**
VA Benefits	**800-827-1000**
Veterans Crisis Line	**988, press 1**

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