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Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act claims now being determined

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will begin deciding claims for the [Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019](#) at 12:01 a.m., Philippine Standard Time, Jan. 1, 2020, as the Philippines is the farthest east VA regional benefits office.

The Act extends the presumption of herbicide exposure, that include toxins such as Agent Orange, to Veterans who served in the offshore waters of the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam War.

Signed into law Jun. 25, the law specifically affects Blue Water Navy (BWN) Veterans who served no more than 12 nautical miles offshore of the Republic of Vietnam between Jan. 6, 1962 and May 7, 1975, as well as Veterans who served in the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between Jan. 1, 1967 and Aug. 31, 1971. These Veterans can now apply for disability compensation and other benefits if they have since developed one of [14 conditions](#) that are presumed to be related to exposure to herbicides. Veterans do not need to prove that they were exposed to herbicides. The specific conditions can be found by searching the term “Agent Orange” on www.va.gov.

“For six months, VA worked diligently to gather and digitize records from the National Archives and Records Administration to support faster claims decisions,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “These efforts will positively impact the claims process for Veterans filing for these benefits.”

To be eligible a Veteran must have served in the identified locations during the specified time period and currently have a [condition\(s\) associated](#) with herbicide exposures, such as Agent Orange. Blue Water Navy claims are being processed under current prioritization criteria; however, special priority is being given to Veterans who are over the age of 85 or have a terminal condition. Qualifying recipients include affected Veterans who are still living and certain survivors of deceased BWN and Korean DMZ Veterans.

Survivors can file claims for benefits based on the Veteran’s service if the Veteran died from at least one of the 14 presumptive conditions associated with herbicides such as Agent Orange. The law also provides benefits for children born with [spina bifida](#) if their parent is or was a Veteran with certain verified service in Thailand during a specific period.

The Act includes provisions impacting the VA Home Loan Program. Veterans have more access to obtain no-down payment home loans, regardless of loan amount, and the home loan funding fee is reduced for eligible Reservists and National Guard borrowers who use their home loan benefits for the first time. VA’s website describes the eligibility of certain Purple Heart recipients who do not have to pay a funding fee as well as [other benefits](#).

Veterans who want to file an initial claim for an herbicide-related disability can use VA [Form 21-526EZ, Application for Disability Compensation and Related Compensation Benefits](#) or work with a VA-recognized [Veterans Service Organization](#) to assist with the application process. Veterans may also contact their [state Veterans Affairs Office](#).

BWN Veterans who previously filed a claim seeking service connection for one of the 14 presumptive conditions that was denied by VA may provide or identify any new and relevant information regarding their claim when reapplying. To re-apply, Veterans may use [VA Form 20-0995, Decision Review Request: Supplemental Claim](#). As a result of the new law, VA will automatically review claims that are currently in the VA review process or under appeal. Visit [Blue Water Navy Veterans benefits](#) for more information or call 1-800-749-8387 for special issues.

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