

Disabled American Veterans

Department of North Dakota

Tri-Annual News Bulletin



DEPARTMENT HEADQUARTERS

2009 4th STREET NE - JAMESTOWN, ND 58401

MARCH 2014

DEPARTMENT COMMANDER REPORT



Thomas Saddler, Jr.
Department Commander DAV

Our Department Convention, which will be held in Jamestown, is rapidly approaching and I would like to encourage your attendance and request you make your reservations early. See Page 5 for all the pertinent information. We will have as our National Representative, National 4th Jr. Vice Commander Dennis Krulder from the Department of New York. He is a decorated Vietnam veteran and last year's winner of the George H. Seal Memorial

Trophy for extraordinary volunteerism. The Convention is an excellent time to meet new members and reminisce with friends from across the state, be updated on the DAV and important veterans' issues, honor those who have dedicated much time and effort to veterans, and, to elect Department Officers for 2014-15.

Since our January Bulletin, Commander Jackie and I visited Chapter 31 and Unit, Chapter 3 and Unit, and our home Chapter 2 and Unit, which completes our scheduled visitations. Our hosts were very gracious and we enjoyed meeting and talking with so many dedicated individuals. The Bismarck/Mandan visit coincided with their Volunteer Drivers' Recognition Banquet and I had the privilege of helping present awards to the volunteer drivers who had accumulated approximately 50,000 miles during the year!

Last month Jackie and I were able to attend the Midwinter

Conference in Washington, D.C. The opportunity to learn more about the DAV's great programs and their legislative goals for the year, and to meet with our Congressional staffers, was really a wonderful experience.

I would like to congratulate all Chapters on meeting their membership goals. As of March 7, 2014, the Department is 75 over goal and in a tight race with Montana and South Dakota. Continue to concentrate on membership, especially the Iraqi and Afghanistan veterans—make them feel welcome, offer them support and get them involved in your activities. They will be our future! Our annual North Dakota Veterans Home Picnic will be held on June Visiting with the residents and helping with the picnic and/or the bingo makes for a fun day.

My term as Department Commander is soon coming to an end. I would again like to thank you for the opportunity to serve in this position; it has indeed been an honor and a privilege to do so. It was made even more special by having my Commander-in-Chief and the Department Auxiliary Commander on the journey with me.

As I close, I want to thank our veterans for their service, the Executive Committee, especially the Adjutant, for their support, the Auxiliary for all they do for the DAV for we would be lost without them, the Chapter Officers for their leadership, the members who faithfully attend meetings and support activities, and last but not least, the volunteers who transport veterans to and from their medical appointments or who work in the Fargo VA Health Care System. It is everyone working together, with whatever their talents, that has enabled us to make significant contributions to our communities and to the lives of our veterans! Our single purpose is "Empowering veterans to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity."

DAVA DEPARTMENT COMMANDER REPORT



Jackie Saddler
Department Commander DAVA

The 2013 - 2014 year is quickly coming to a close. The DAV/A State Convention in Jamestown will be the end of my term as your ND Department Commander and, this is my last report. I truly cannot believe how fast this year has gone by.

I was able to visit all units

across our great state. It was fun getting to know you all better. We work for the same goal, helping our Veterans, but, every unit has their own distinct way of doing that. Thank you for your help, your kindness and your generous hospitality this past year. Our DAV Veterans are truly in great hands. SUPER JOB!

With that said, see you in Jamestown at the Quality Inn April 25th to 27th (Yes, there is a SPRING!)

I look forward to seeing everyone.

Thanks For A Great Year



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

DAV and DAVA DEPARTMENT CONVENTION

April 24-27, 2014
Jamestown, ND

DAV ANNUAL CONVENTION August 9-12, 2014

Ballys
Las Vegas, NV

DAV MIDWINTER CONFERENCE

February 22-24, 2015
Crystal Gateway Marriot
Arlington, VA

2015 Independent Budget Has Been Published

The fiscal year 2015 Independent Budget has been published to the website, and can be accessed at www.independentbudget.org.

DAV and our Independent Budget (IB) co-authors (AMVETS, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States) are calling for \$61.1 billion in VA Medical Care funding. For Medical and Prosthetic Research, the IB recommends a funding level of \$611 million. The IB recommends approximately \$2.9 billion for VA's General Operating Expenses. For total capital infrastructure programs and grants, the IB recommends \$3.9 billion, \$2.8 billion for major medical facility construction projects, \$831 million for minor construction projects, and \$298 million for VA grants to state

veterans homes and state veterans cemeteries. DAV and its IB co-authors recommend a total discretionary funding level of \$72.9 billion in FY 2015.

More detail on our recommendations for both policy and budget matters can be found at www.independentbudget.org. We hope to testify soon before Committees on Veterans' Affairs about these issues.



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New VA ID Cards

This week the VA announced the phased rollout of a more secure Veteran Health Identification Card (VHIC).

The cards, first introduced in 2004, are getting improved security features and will be personalized to display the emblem of the veteran's service branch. They will include VA phone numbers, emergency care instructions and the "VA" in Braille to help visually impaired veterans.



The rollout begins this month, starting with newly enrolled veterans and those without the current VIC cards. In early April, the VA will begin a

three-month effort to get replacements to current VIC cardholders, who will be asked to cut up or shred their old cards to safeguard their personal information.

"VA is committed to providing high-quality health care while ensuring the personal security of Veterans," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki. "These new identification cards are an important step forward in protecting our nation's heroes from identity theft and other personal crimes."

The new cards will function like a typical health insurance card. They will include the veteran's member ID, a new unique identifier, as well as a plan ID, reflecting the veteran's enrollment in VA health care, the statement said. The cards are not required to receive VA health care but are recommended.

For more information, enrolled veterans can visit their VA medical facility enrollment coordinator, call 1-877-222-VETS (8387) or visit this website.

New Online GI Bill Comparison Tool

VA has launched an online GI Bill® Comparison Tool to make it easier for veterans, servicemembers and dependents to calculate their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits and learn more about VA's approved colleges, universities and other education and training programs across the country.

The GI Bill Comparison Tool provides key information about college afford ability and brings together information from more than 17 different online sources and three federal agencies, including the number of students receiving VA education benefits at each school.

The GI Bill Comparison Tool was launched in response to President Obama's Executive Order 13607, which directs agencies to implement and promote "Principles of Excellence" for education institutions that interact with veterans, servicemembers and their families, and to ensure beneficiaries have the information they need to make educated choices about VA education benefits and approved programs.

Recently, VA also instituted a GI Bill online complaint system, designed to collect feedback from those who are experiencing problems with educational institutions receiving funding from federal military and veterans educational benefits programs, including benefits programs provided by the Post-9/11 GI Bill and the DoD Military Tuition Assistance Program.

The centralized online reporting system is designed for veterans, service members and eligible dependents to report negative experiences with educational institutions, and gives the federal government the information needed to identify and address unfair, deceptive, and misleading practices and ensure high quality academic and student support services are available.

Students can submit a complaint if they believe their school is failing to follow the Principles of Excellence, (i.e. unfair recruiting practices, credit transfer or change in degree requirements) through the centralized online reporting system accessed via the Department of Defense and GI Bill websites. When feedback is received, agencies will contact the school on behalf of the student and work toward a resolution. Complaints and their resolution will be forwarded to the Federal Trade Commission Consumer Sentinel Network, accessible by over 650 federal, state and local law enforcement agencies for use in enhancing and coordinating law enforcement investigations.

VA Education Claims Benefit From Automation Processing

The time it takes to process requests for GI Bill and other education benefits for returning students has been reduced by nearly 50 percent compared to fiscal year 2012. VA attributes the faster process in large part to improved claims automation that uses rules-based technology to deliver benefits. The automation technology, part of VA's Post-9/11 GI Bill processing system called "Long Term Solution" (LTS), was implemented in September 2012. This technology has more than 1,700 calculations and rules that support benefits. Up to six distinct payments per beneficiary can be calculated automatically per term, including: housing, books and supplies stipend, tuition and fees and Yellow Ribbon payments.

In addition, a variety of different types of education and training programs are supported by the automated technology, including: graduate, undergraduate, non-college degree, correspondence, licensing and certification, apprenticeship and on-the-job training. The improvement in timeliness was achieved despite a 27 percent increase in incoming education claims – 3.4 million in fiscal year 2013 compared to 2.7 million the prior year. Currently, VA is processing initial claims for new students in an average of less than 20 days, and supplemental claims for returning students in less than 8 days, down from 33 days and 16 days respectively since LTS was first fielded.



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**THANK A
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TODAY!**

Care and Benefits for Veterans Strengthened By \$164 Billion VA Budget

WASHINGTON – Continuing the transformation of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) into a 21st century organization, the President has proposed a \$163.9 billion budget, a 6.5 percent increase over Fiscal Year 2014, that will support VA's goals to expand access to health care and other benefits, eliminate the disability claims backlog, and end homelessness among Veterans. The budget includes \$68.4 billion in discretionary spending, largely for healthcare, and \$95.6 billion for mandatory programs – mostly disability compensation and pensions for Veterans.

"This budget will allow us to continue the progress we have made in helping Veterans secure their place in the middle class," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "It is a tangible demonstration of the President's commitment to ensuring Veterans and their families have the care and benefits they've earned and deserve."

The \$68.4 billion total in discretionary spending includes approximately \$3.1 billion in medical care collections from health insurers and Veteran copayments.

"We remain committed to providing Veterans the opportunity to pursue their education, find meaningful employment and access high-quality health care," Shinseki added. "From the men and women of 'the greatest generation' to the Veterans who have returned from our most recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, no one deserves it more."

VA operates one of the largest integrated health care systems in the country with nearly 9 million enrollees; the ninth largest life insurance program; monthly disability pay, pensions and survivors payments to more than 5.1 million beneficiaries of monthly pay, pensions and survivor benefits; education assistance or vocational rehabilitation benefits and services to 1.2 million students; mortgage guaranties to over 2 million homeowners; and the largest cemetery system in the nation.

Here are highlights from the President's 2015 budget request for VA.

Health Care

With a medical care budget of \$59.1 billion, including collections, VA is positioned to provide care to 6.7 million patients in the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1. The patient total includes over 757,000 people whose military service began after Sept. 11, 2001.

Major spending categories within the health care budget are:

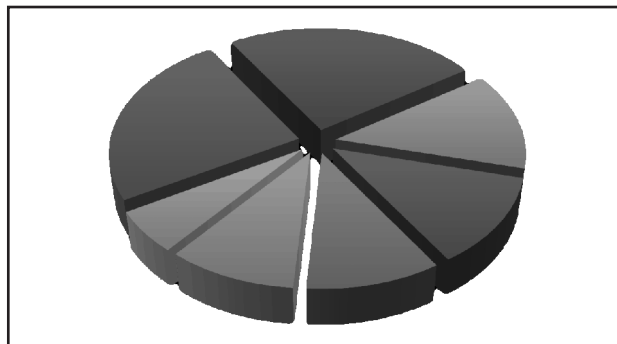
- \$7.2 billion for mental health;
- \$2.6 billion for prosthetics;
- \$561 million for spinal cord injuries;
- \$229 million for traumatic brain injuries;
- \$238 million for readjustment counseling; and
- \$7.0 billion for long-term care.

Expanding Access

The President's proposed budget would ensure that care and other benefits are available to Veterans when and where they need them. Among the programs that will expand access under the proposed budget are:

- \$567 million in telehealth funding, which helps patients monitor chronic health care conditions and increases access to care, especially in rural and remote locations;

- \$403 million for health care services specifically-designed for women, an increase of 8.7 percent over the present level;
- \$534 million for the activation of new and enhanced health care facilities;
- \$562 million to continue on-going major construction projects;
- \$86.6 million for improved customer service applications for online self-service portals and call center agent-assisted inquiries; and
- \$3.6 million to open two new national cemeteries in Florida and prepare for the opening of two new rural national Veterans burial grounds.



Eliminating Claims Backlog

The President's proposed budget provides for full implementation of the Veterans Benefits Administration's (VBA) robust Transformation Plan -- a series of people, process and technology initiatives -- in FY 2015. This plan will continue to systematically reduce the backlog and enable the Department to reach its 2015 goal - to eliminate the disability claims backlog and process all claims within 125 days with 98 percent accuracy.

Major transformation initiatives in the budget proposal invest \$312 million to bring leading-edge technology to the claims backlog, including:

- \$173 million (\$137 million in Information Technology and \$36 million in VBA) for the next generation of the electronic claims processing system Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS); and
- \$139 million for Veterans Claims Intake Program (VCIP) to continue conversion of paper records into electronic images and data in VBMS.

Eliminating Veterans Homelessness

A major strategic goal for the Department is to end homelessness among Veterans in 2015. The budget request targets \$1.6 billion for programs to prevent or reduce homelessness, including:

- \$500 million for Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) to promote housing stability;
- \$374 million for the HUD-VASH program wherein VA provides case management services for at-risk Veterans and their families and HUD provides permanent housing through its Housing Choice Voucher program; and
- \$253 million in grant and per diem payments that support temporary housing provided by community-based organizations.

Other Services for Veterans

Other features of the administration's FY 2015 budget request for the department are:

- \$257 million to administer the VA-run system of national cemeteries;
- \$3.9 billion for information technology; and
- \$1.2 billion in construction, cemetery grants and extended care grants.

DAV & DAVA Department Convention to be Held April 25-27 in Jamestown

Members of DAV (Disabled American Veterans) from throughout the State of North Dakota will hold their annual Department Convention in Jamestown from April 25th through April 27th at Quality Inn.

More than 70 DAV members--including many ill and injured veterans of World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Persian Gulf War, Iraq and Afghanistan are expected to attend.



According to Tom Saddler, DAV Department of North Dakota Commander, convention business sessions will include adoption of resolutions to be submitted to DAV's National Convention to be held in Las Vegas, Nevada, August 9-12, 2014.

Several of these mandates are expected to concentrate on improvements in the rights and benefits earned by more than 3 million veterans disabled in wartime service to their country. DAV leaders are deeply concerned about this issue because many federal cost-

cutting proposals would harm our injured heroes. They are particularly concerned, among several issues, with two important initiatives currently waiting for action. One would help our nation's wounded women veterans get the best care. The other supports the families of wounded veterans to allow them to provide better care for their loved ones.

The convention's highlight will be a banquet held Saturday, the 26th at 6:00 p.m. at which featured speakers will be Dennis Krulder, DAV National 4th Junior Vice Commander_ and Ellen Timmerman, DAV Auxiliary National 4th Junior Vice Commander.

Election of new DAV state-level officers for the coming year will be held on Sunday the 27th.

The address for the Quality Inn is: 507 25th St SW. The phone number is: 701-252-3611. The dates are April 25, 26, and 27, 2013. The room rates will be \$ 79.99 plus 10 % tax. The block of rooms will be released on April 1.

Please call (701) 252-3611 for reservations. Please note that if you call in on a Quality Inn toll free number, the special convention rate will not be available.

Now in its 94th year, DAV empowers veterans to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity. It is dedicated to a single purpose: fulfilling our promises to the men and women who served. DAV does this by ensuring that veterans and their families can access the full range of benefits available to them; fighting for the interests of America's injured heroes on Capitol Hill; and educating the public about the great sacrifices and needs of veterans transitioning back to civilian life. DAV, a non-profit organization with 1.2 million members, was founded in 1920 and chartered by the U. S. Congress in 1932. Learn more at www.dav.org



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DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS



FRANCIS J. BEATON Chapter No. 1

Fargo, North Dakota

Meetings Held 2nd Thursday of each month

No Veteran Dies Alone

“No one should die alone...Each human should die with the sight of a loving face.” ~ Mother Teresa.

The Fargo VA is now recruiting volunteers for the No Veteran Dies Alone program.

No Veteran Dies Alone (NVDA) is a volunteer program that provides the reassuring presence of a volunteer companion to patients with end stage diseases. With the support of nursing staff, No Veteran Dies Alone volunteers are able to help provide patients with the valuable human gifts of their presence.

No Veteran Dies Alone volunteers may provide their presence to seriously ill patients who have neither family nor close friends near or they may provide respite to the family members of seriously ill Veterans by sitting with the Veteran while their loved ones go to an appointment or simply take a break.

All employees, volunteers and the community are

invited to be considered for the No Veteran Dies Alone program. As a NVDA volunteer, you choose the time, day, and number of hours you are available to volunteer.

Nursing skills are not necessary to participate in the program. Companions should be willing to hold the hand of a Veteran, play music, read to the Veteran, etc.

All volunteers must become a registered volunteer with the Fargo VA Health Care System and be available to attend a training session where they will learn the simple art of being compassionately present at the bedside of a seriously ill Veteran. The first training date is scheduled for **Friday, April 4,**

from 8:30am to 12pm in the third floor auditorium.

To register, please contact **Voluntary Service at ext. 3395.** Tell them you would like to be a part of the No Veteran Dies Alone team.



DAV's Message Goes Skyward

February 6, 2014 - By Steve Wilson

The DAV Air Show Team wrapped up the 2013 season Oct. 26 and 27 with “Wings Over Houston.” This year, the DAV-sponsored vintage B-25 Mitchell Bombers Panchito and Special Delivery performed for more than 1.3 million people at venues nationwide, bringing DAV's message of service to veterans and their families.



Through the program, DAV was featured in a flyover at the 138th

Preakness Stakes horse race in Baltimore and took center stage at the Experimental Aircraft Association's Air Venture, held in Oshkosh, Wisc. As the largest air show in the country, it boasted a record 500,000 attendees this year. DAV sponsored a concert featuring Gary Sinise and the Lt. Dan Band, and past National Commander Larry Polzin led the veterans' parade.

Budget cuts caused many events to be cancelled on military installations, so DAV's outreach initiative was more in demand than ever before.

“Through this program, DAV becomes an experience at patriotic events,” said Barry Jesinoski, National Headquarters Executive Director. “Airshow patrons are able to connect with DAV and become aware of our free professional services and volunteer opportunities.”



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DARPA Project Advance “Touch” Sensations for Prosthetic Limbs

Researchers have made significant advances in recent years in developing and building better prosthetics from legs that enable an amputee to walk to arms and hands controlled by the brain. But a Chicago researcher working on a project funded by the Defense Advance Research



Projects Agency says it's not enough for the brain to send a signal to a limb. It's important for the brain to get a signal back to restore a sense of touch. "To restore sensory motor function of an arm, you not only have to replace the motor signals that the brain sends to the arm to move it around, but you also have to replace the sensory signals that the arm sends back to the

brain," Sliman Bensmaia, an assistant professor in the university's Department of Organismal Biology and Anatomy, said in October, when the research was published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

"We think the key is to invoke what we know about how the brain of the intact organism processes sensory information, and then try to reproduce these patterns of neural activity through stimulation of the brain," he said. Bensmaia's work with DARPA, if successful, is a big step in developing a prosthetic that a fully functional artificial limb, since the wearer would not only have the ability to pick up objects with the ease of thought—say a hammer or an egg—but would feel the difference.

In the lab, the researchers have already had some success using monkeys, and have been cleared for human trials. The work requires electrodes be implanted in the brain. What they have done is linked artificial fingertips to the brains of rhesus monkeys trained to signal when they feel contact or pressure to their own real fingertips. Once parts of the brain responsible for receiving and interpreting signals for a range of sensations, including heat, cold, weight, etc., are identified, they would be linked to a prosthetic that incorporates sensors that in real time instantly transmits this data to the brain. Once perfected, the wearer would feel the object in the same way he would with a human hand.

In July, DefenseTech reported on work at the University of Tokyo that could lead to an artificial skin that would provide a sense of touch or feeling to wearers of prostheses. In that project, engineer Martin Kaltenbrunner is developing an ultra-thin, featherweight electronic sensor foil that can be shaped or molded to any surface.

VA Initiative Shows Early Promise in Reducing Use of Opioids for Chronic Pain

WASHINGTON -- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has initiated a multi-faceted approach to reduce the use of opioids among America's Veterans using VA health care. The Opioid Safety Initiative (OSI) is a comprehensive effort to improve the quality of life for the hundreds of thousands of Veterans suffering from chronic pain.

Launched in October 2013 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, OSI is already demonstrating success in lowering dependency on this class of drugs. At eight sites of care in Minnesota, OSI practices have decreased high-dose opioid use by more than 50 percent. OSI incorporates the team approach with the goal of reducing opioid use by alleviating a Veterans' pain using non-prescription methods. There is an emphasis on patient education, close patient monitoring with frequent feedback and Complementary and Alternative Medicine practices like acupuncture.

"We have developed and implemented joint pain management guidelines which encourage the use of other medications and therapies in lieu of habit forming opiates," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "Early results give us hope that we can reduce the use of opioids for Veterans suffering with chronic pain and share these best practices across our healthcare networks."

The Opioid Safety Initiative faces the challenge of opioid dependency with an innovative and comprehensive plan that closely monitors VA's dispensing practices system-wide and coordinates pain management to include patient and provider education, testing and tapering programs, and alternative therapies like acupuncture and behavior therapy.

Veterans enrolled in the VA health care system suffer from high rates of chronic pain. Each VA facility employs personnel including Interdisciplinary Pain Medicine Specialty Teams and Consult Services, Facility Pain Committees, Pharmacy staff and Primary Care/PACT, and other professionals to accomplish the goals and objectives of the OSI.

VA has developed patient management initiatives including Pain Coach, which is a pain management app available for download by patients receiving pain management treatments, a Veterans' Health Library, including a Patient/Family Management Toolkit, and resources for Pain Management on My HealtheVet. All of these applications allow Veterans to better manage their pain without the use of opioids. VA's measurement-based pain care includes the "Pain Scale," which reduces uncertainty and helps Veterans by discussing the potential benefits of a medication and possible side-effects.

"The Opioid Safety Initiative is an example of VHA's personalized, proactive and patient-centered approach to health care. We are also using a full-range of support treatments for Veterans, including Complementary and Alternative Medicine," said Dr. Robert Petzel, VA's Under Secretary for Health. "We are delivering health care with the patient's long-term personal health goals at the forefront."

For further information, Veterans should contact their primary care health team. To learn more about VA health care, visit www.va.gov.



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VA Home Improvement & Structural Alterations Grants Eligible uses

The Home Improvements and Structural Alterations program is available to veterans who have received a medical determination indicating that improvements and structural alterations are necessary or appropriate for the effective and economical treatment of his/her disability. A veteran may receive both a HISA grant and either a Special Home Adaptation grant or a Specially Adapted Housing grant at the same time. The HISA program is available for both service-connected veterans and non-service connected veterans. The Department of Veteran Affairs has increased the amounts available under the HISA grant: For service-connected condition, a veteran has up to \$6,800 for Home Improvement benefits. For non-service-connected condition, veterans with a 50 percent service connected or more have up to \$2,000 for home improvement benefits. In order to receive a HISA grant, the veteran must first have a prescription from a VA or fee-basis physician. This must include: Specific items required, the diagnosis with medical justification, the veteran's

name, address, SSN and phone number(s).

The veteran must complete VA Form 10-0103 and submit to the Prosthetic Department for process. Examples of what HISA will pay for include: allowing entrance or exit from veteran's home, improving access for use of essential lavatory and sanitary facilities, improving access to kitchen and bathroom counters, Handrails, Lowered electrical outlets and switches, Improving paths or driveways, and improving plumbing/electrical work for dialysis patients.



HISA will not pay for: walkways to exterior buildings, widening of driveways (in excess of a 7-by-6-foot area), spa, hot tub or Jacuzzi, and Exterior decking (in excess of 8-by-8 feet). For more information about Home Improvement and Structural Alteration go to <http://www.prosthetics.va.gov/HISA2.asp>

or call or visit your local County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO).



With Respect and Honor We Thank You

VETERANS!



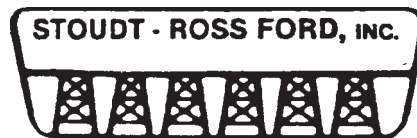
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VA Mail Order Pharmacy Receives Highest Score in Mail Order Segment of J.D. Power Study

VA Mail-Order Pharmacy Receives Highest Score in Mail Order Segment of J.D. Power Study VA Employee wins award for idea to allow Veterans to track prescriptions online WASHINGTON -- For the fourth consecutive year, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Consolidated Mail Outpatient Pharmacy receives the highest customer satisfaction score among the nation's public and private mail-order pharmacies, according to a respected, independent study. "Our Nation's Veterans deserve a first-class pharmacy as a part of the exceptional health care available," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "It is an honor to hear from Veterans that we are delivering on that commitment." The 2013 independent study was conducted by J.D. Power. Veterans were asked to rate VA on cost competitiveness, delivery, ordering process and customer service experience. Out of 1,000 possible points, VA scored 871. This was the highest score among participating mail-order pharmacies. The score matched the same industry-high score received by the Department in 2012.



VA also led the industry nationwide in 2010 and 2011. "The fact that we are rated higher than our private sector counterparts is due in part to our unique partnership with our patients and medical centers," said Dr. Robert A. Petzel, VA's Under Secretary for Health.

"In addition to the convenience of mail-order service, Veterans also have a pharmacist available to meet with them face to face." VA participates in this annual survey as a way to compare itself against industry leaders and to ensure VA health care meets the highest standards. On February 13, an employee who works in the VA Consolidated Mail Outpatient Pharmacy received the 2013 Securing Americans Value Efficiency (SAVE) Award from President Obama. Kenneth Siehr from Milwaukee, Wisconsin met with the President to discuss his proposal. Siehr's winning idea allows Veterans to track the status of their mail-order prescriptions via the Veterans Health Administration's MyHealthVet web portal. With over 8 million Veterans enrolled, VA operates the largest integrated health care delivery system in the United States, with a mission to honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being. VA provides a broad range of primary care, specialized care, and related medical and social support services. More information is available at <http://www.va.gov/health/>. Veterans who wish to learn about the mail-order pharmacy and other health benefits can find information at www.va.gov/healthbenefits/.



Automation Speeds Benefits Processing for Post 9/11 GI Bill Students

Students See Improvement in Turn Around Time for Education Claims

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) decreased the time it takes to process requests for GI Bill and other education benefits for returning students by nearly 50 percent compared to fiscal year 2012. VA attributes the faster process in large part to improved claims automation that uses rule-based, industry-standard technologies to deliver Veterans' benefits.

POST 9/11
GI BILL

"We are happy to report that our students are seeing a reduction in the amount of time it takes to process their education claims thanks to an automated, digital process making it easier for Veterans, Servicemembers and their families to attend post-secondary education and enroll for continuing semesters," said Under Secretary for Benefits Allison A. Hickey. "This automation has not only improved education benefits processing, it has allowed us to shift resources to other priorities, like improving timeliness of disability compensation decisions. It's a great example of how technology is helping us to transform the way we do business and better serve Veterans."

The Post-9/11 GI Bill builds on the great legacy of the original GI Bill, giving Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans and their families the opportunity to reach their educational goals, find a good job and improve their lives. The automation technology, part of VA's Post-9/11 GI Bill processing system called "Long Term Solution" (LTS), was implemented in September 2012. This technology has more than 1,700 calculations and rules that support benefits delivery for eligible Veterans, Servicemembers, and dependents. Up to six distinct payments per beneficiary can be calculated automatically per term, including: housing, books and supplies stipend, tuition and fees and Yellow Ribbon payments.

In addition, a variety of different types of education and training programs are supported by the automated technology, including: graduate, undergraduate, non-college degree, correspondence, licensing and certification, apprenticeship and on-the-job training. The improvement in timeliness was achieved despite a 27 percent increase in incoming education claims – 3.4 million in fiscal year 2013 compared to 2.7 million the prior year.

Currently, VA is processing initial claims for new students in an average of less than 20 days, and supplemental claims for returning students in less than 8 days, down from 33 days and 16 days respectively since LTS was first fielded.

VA has provided more than \$35.6 billion in Post-9/11 GI Bill benefit payments to over 1.1 million Veterans, Servicemembers, and their families, and to the universities, colleges, and trade schools they attend. In 2014, VA will continue to improve education benefits delivery, through additional automation, tracking of beneficiary graduation rates, and the release of new tools to help beneficiaries best utilize VA education benefits, including the Choosing a School Guide, and CareerScope.

For more information about VA education benefits, visit www.benefits.va.gov/gibill.

Pictures from the Mid-Winter Conference Held in Arlington, Virginia



Above Left: National Commander Joseph Johnston (OH) addressing the Mid-Winter Conference

Above: Our delegation (L-R) – Mike Dobmeier National Judge Advocate, Jackie Saddler Department DAVA Commander, Warren Tobin Legislative Chair, Rep. Kevin Cramer, Tom Saddler Department DAV Commander and Joe Litzinger Committee Member



Below Left: VA Secretary Shinseki addressing the Mid-Winter Conference

Below: Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL) chairing the committee meeting



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Federal Agencies Partner to Protect Vets, Service Members & Families Using GI Bill Education Benefits, Launch New Online Complaint System

The Departments of Veterans Affairs, Defense, Education and Justice, along with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and the Federal Trade Commission announced today the launch of a new online complaint system designed to collect feedback from veterans, service members and their families who are experiencing problems with educational institutions receiving funding from federal military and veterans educational benefits programs, including benefits programs provided by the Post-9/11 GI Bill and the DOD Military Tuition Assistance Program.

The centralized online reporting system is designed for veterans, service members and eligible dependents to report negative experiences with educational institutions; and gives the federal government the information needed to identify and address unfair, deceptive, and misleading practices and ensure high quality academic and student support services are available for veterans, service members, and their families.

"The online complaint system empowers veterans and their dependents and provides them a direct line to VA and our partner agencies," said Allison A. Hickey, Under Secretary for Benefits, Department of Veterans Affairs. "The feedback we receive from veterans, service members and their families will help us strengthen enforcement of the 'Principles of Excellence' for institutions of higher learning serving veterans and their families to ensure students are receiving the education benefits they have earned and deserve."

"Our service members and their families now have an easier and efficient way to provide feedback on their civilian educational experiences, which will ensure we have the right

information to identify and address any negative practices," said Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Jessica Wright.

Students can submit a complaint if they believe their school is failing to follow the Principles of Excellence, (i.e. unfair recruiting practices, credit transfer or change in degree requirements) through the centralized online reporting system accessed via the Department of Defense and GI Bill websites. When feedback is received, agencies will contact the school on behalf of the student and work toward a resolution. Complaints and their resolution will be forwarded to the Federal Trade Commission Consumer Sentinel Network, accessible by over 650 federal, state and local law enforcement agencies for use in enhancing and coordinating law enforcement investigations.

Executive Order 13607, signed April 27, 2012, addresses reports of unfair, deceptive or misleading behavior toward veterans, service members and their families pursuing higher education and directs agencies to establish, implement and promote compliance with "Principles of Excellence" for educational institutions receiving funding from federal military and veterans educational benefits programs for America's veterans, service members and eligible dependents, including preventing abusive and deceptive recruiting practices. The new online complaint system is one of a range of tools being implemented by the federal government to ensure that service members, veterans and eligible dependents have access to meaningful information about the cost and quality of educational institutions.

REMEMBER – NEVER FORGET MEMORIAL DAY 2014

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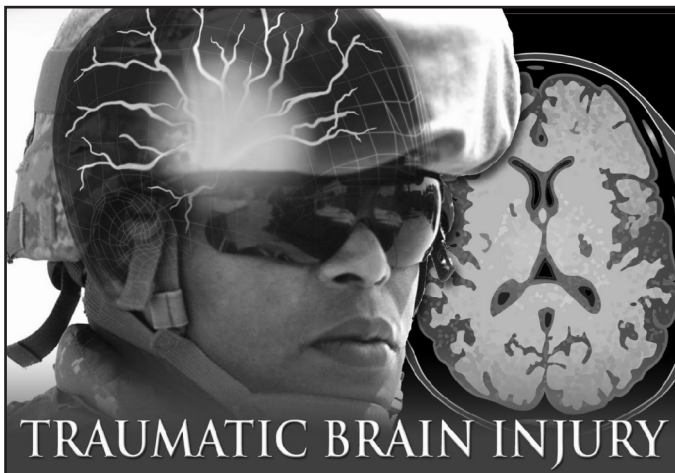
Phone 1-845-2764

New Clinical Recommendations Released for TBI Injuries

The Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center has released new clinical recommendations to help service members who have sustained a mild traumatic brain injury, otherwise known as concussion, to progressively return to their normal activities following their injury. These clinical recommendations are available for military and civilian health care professionals. The recommendations can be downloaded from DVBiC's website.

The guidelines were developed with input from academic experts, sports concussion clinicians and military TBI experts and will assist health care providers as they monitor patients recovering from concussion. Since 2000, more than 287,000 U.S. service members have sustained a traumatic brain injury. These injuries have occurred both in training and combat. Eighty-three percent of TBIs are mild TBIs, making it the most common form of brain injury for U.S. Armed Forces personnel.

The Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center is part of the U.S. Military Health System. It is the TBI operational component of the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury.



Military Reservists Eligible to Apply for SBA Working Capital Loans

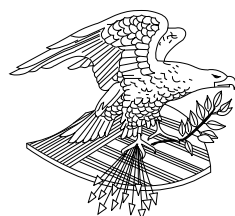
Small businesses that suffered economic losses when the owner or a key employee was called up to active duty are eligible to apply for a low interest loan of up to \$2 million from the SBA.

Small businesses can apply for a Military Reservist Economic Injury Disaster Loan (MREIDL) any time from the date of notice of expected call-up and ending one year after the date of discharge or release.



The program was created to enable eligible small businesses to pay operating expenses it could have covered if the owner or key employee hadn't been called to active duty. The MREIDL is a direct working capital loan, managed by SBA's Office of Disaster Assistance. The interest rate on these working capital loans is 4 percent, with terms up to a maximum of 30 years. In general, no collateral is required to secure an MREIDL of \$50,000 or less. The loan cannot be used to replace lost income or profits, refinance long-term debt or to expand the business.

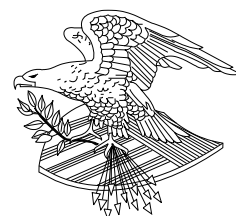
Businesses can apply online at <http://go.usa.gov/BcuA>. To get an application by mail, or for other questions about the loan program, contact SBA's Disaster Assistance Customer Service Center at 800-659-2955 or by email at disastercustomerservice@sba.gov



REMEMBER OUR VETERANS

Yesterday's Military Heroes • Today's Veterans

Today's Military • Tomorrow's Veterans



DoD Electronic Health Records Help VA Disability Claims

The Defense Department is making service members' health records electronically available to the VA to speed up the adjudication of disability claims for service members who have separated or discharged from the military since Jan. 1, 2014. The Health Artifact and Image Management Solution, or HAIMS, electronic system 2 makes certified military service treatment records automatically available to VA to determine disability benefits when a claim is filed.



The records are provided via an interface from DOD to VA through HAIMS. DOD's HAIMS already exists for military medical clinicians and has been sharing electronic data with Veterans Health Administration providers before it was tied to the VA's Veterans Benefits Administration.

The electronic records shared between DOD and VA also allow VA hospitals to access the records. Complete medical records are kept on patients while under DOD care and include information on services provided by the commercial sector.

TRICARE Ends Walk-In Admin Services at 189 Facilities

According to Pentagon officials, TRICARE military health plan service centers will end administrative walk-in services in the United States on April 1, 2014. While the 189 facilities will stop taking walk-ins, beneficiaries can accomplish administrative tasks online or by phone. TRICARE service centers overseas are not affected.

Fifty percent of the visits to the centers are for in- and out-processing and requests to change primary care providers, and the rest involve billing-related questions.



The Defense Department spends roughly \$50 million a year on these services, and it is felt that this type of customer service can be handled more efficiently by phone. TRICARE gets about 38,000 hits per day on its website. Officials have run tests to ensure the website and call center can handle the expected increase in volume.

Beneficiaries can get more information and sign up for updates at <http://www.tricare.mil/tsc>.



AMERICAN VETERANS HEROES EVERYDAY

Chapter 14 Presents VAVS Check to Chapter 2



DAV Chapter 14, Commander Marvin Mattson, Crookston, MN presented Chapter 2 DAV Grand Forks a check for \$300 to be used to support the Coffee and Cookies that is served at the Grand Forks Community Based Outreach Clinic to patients that come in for their appointments.



Pictured: Jim Groven, Chapter 2 Adjutant/Treasurer, Chapter 14 Commander Marvin Mattson, and Chapter 2 Commander Tom Saddler.



VA's National Cemeteries Continue Leading Nation in Satisfaction Survey

Ranking Tops Federal Agencies, Private Firms

February 10, 2014

WASHINGTON – For the fifth consecutive time, the Department of Veterans Affairs' National Cemetery Administration (NCA) has bested the nation's top corporations and other federal agencies in a prestigious, independent survey of customer satisfaction. "Once again, this survey shows that employees at VA's 131 national cemeteries are committed to providing world-class customer service for our Nation's Veterans and their families," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "It is an honor to care for our Nation's heroes in perpetuity, and we use the highest of standards of compassion and professionalism to ensure we commemorate their service to our nation."

The American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) is the only national, cross-industry measure of satisfaction with the quality of goods and services available in the United States. Beginning in 1999, the federal government selected ACSI to measure citizen satisfaction. Information on ACSI can be found at <http://www.theacsi.org/the-american-customer-satisfaction-index#homelogo>. Citing the NCA's record-setting ACSI results, the independent Federal Consulting Group noted the satisfaction scores as the "highest to date for any organization in the public or private sector." The driving factors for continued customer satisfaction include cemetery service and customer service. More than 100 federal agencies have used the ACSI to gauge consumer satisfaction with more than 200 services and programs. The Index was founded at the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business and the survey is produced by ACSI, LLC.

For 2013, NCA achieved a customer satisfaction index of 96, the highest ACSI score in either the private or public sector in the history of the ACSI. The score is nearly 28 points above the 68 point average for federal government agencies. NCA participates in the ACSI every three years, previously in 2001, 2004, 2007 and 2010. This is the fifth time NCA participated and the fifth consecutive time NCA received the top rating of

participating organizations.

The ACSI survey polled the next-of-kin or other people who had arranged for the interment of a loved one in a VA national cemetery six months to one year prior to the survey commencement. Surveys were sent to 2,500 people, 494 responded, a high response rate for a mail survey.

Using methodologies developed at the National Quality Research Center of the University of Michigan Business School, NCA received ratings in the categories of "customer service" and "user trust" of 96 out of a possible 100 points, indicating respondents are exceptionally pleased with their experience at national cemeteries and willing to recommend their services to others.

Veterans with a discharge issued under conditions other than dishonorable, their spouses and eligible dependent children can be buried in a VA national cemetery. Also eligible are military personnel who die on active duty, their spouses and eligible dependents.

Other burial benefits available for all eligible Veterans, regardless of whether they are buried in a national cemetery or a private cemetery, include a burial flag, a Presidential Memorial Certificate and a government headstone or marker. Families of eligible Veterans may also order a memorial headstone or marker when remains are not available for interment.

In the midst of the largest expansion since the Civil War, VA operates 131 national cemeteries in 39 states and Puerto Rico and 33 soldiers' lots and monument sites. More than 4 million Americans, including Veterans of every war and conflict, are buried in VA's cemeteries on more than 20,000 acres of land.

Information on VA burial benefits can be obtained from national cemetery offices, from the Internet at www.cem.va.gov or by calling VA regional offices toll-free at 800-827-1000. To make burial arrangements at the time of need at any VA national cemetery, call the National Cemetery Scheduling Office at 800-535-1117.



2014 National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic is Scheduled for March 30th - April 4th

February 27, 2014 – By Steve Wilson

For more than 25 years, DAV and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have co-hosted the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, a physical rehabilitation program, held in the mountains of Snowmass, Colorado.

This program has transformed the lives of 7,744 of America's most severely injured and ill veterans since its inception. This unique program, often referred to as "Miracles on a Mountainside," helps severely injured veterans to rebuild confidence and regain balance in their lives.

In 2013, 343 veterans from across the nation with multiple amputations, traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries, severe neurological issues, and even total blindness participated in the clinic to develop winter sports skills, enjoy the camaraderie of fellow veterans and take part in a variety of workshops and educational sessions.

The event promotes rehabilitation and restoration by coaching and encouraging veterans with severe injuries to conquer adaptive skiing, rock climbing, scuba diving, kayaking, and other sports, and shows them by example they are not barred from recreational activities.

"This event is truly spectacular," said Director of Voluntary Services Ron Minter. "It's amazing to see these veterans' lives dramatically change for the better in real-time as we conduct this clinic. It's nothing short of awe inspiring."

National Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski said the clinic is a dramatic tool to positively affect veterans and their families.

"I've personally seen veterans, some with severe injuries, start the process of taking their lives back at this clinic," he said. "It's a very empowering experience for our nation's veterans and I'm grateful DAV, our partners at VA and our generous corporate sponsors make it possible."

Veterans from all eras attend the clinic, including many who were injured in the Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns. Often, this seminal event offers veterans their very first experience in winter sports and gives them motivation to overcome any perceived limitations which enhances their quality of life and



rehabilitative journey.

More information on the clinic can be found at <http://miracles.dav.org/Page1.html>.

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