

Disabled American Veterans

Department of North Dakota

Tri-Annual News Bulletin

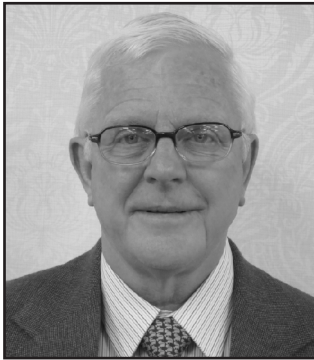


DEPARTMENT HEADQUARTERS

2009 4th STREET NE - JAMESTOWN, ND 58401

APRIL 2015

DEPARTMENT COMMANDER REPORT



Rod Olin

Department Commander DAV

Greetings again to all of my DAV Sisters and Brothers!! It is hard to believe that my year as your Commander is quickly coming to an end in a few weeks. I never expected it to go this quickly and be as much fun as it was. In all I represented the Department at 21 different functions throughout the year and was blessed to have had good weather for traveling. I was able to complete my last 2 Chapter visits to Minot and Devils Lake over the past two months. Adjutant Skip is doing a wonderful job in Minot to keep everything rolling and I want to say a special "Thank You" to Devils Lake for the awesome job they are doing volunteering at the CBOC.

Good news on Membership!! The Department overall has met their membership goals and we still have a couple of months to go. However, there are a couple of Chapters just 1 away from their goal. Please do everything possible to get those Partial Life Members fully paid up. Don't forget we still have the \$50 incentive if they pay their balance in full. Also, be on the lookout for new potential members.

Our Department Convention is rapidly approaching

and by now the Chapters should have gotten their reports in and selected members to serve on the various committees. The Convention will be at the Biltmore On Main in Fargo-April 24-26. (Formerly Kelly Inn). Address is 3800 Main Avenue and phone number is 701-281-9700. Don't wait until the last minute to make your reservation. I am looking forward to seeing many of you again as we gather and share ideas about how to make the DAV even better.

National Convention: Will be in Denver August 8-11 at the Sheraton Denver Downtown Hotel (888-627-8405). I guarantee you that it will be a first class Convention.

Legislation: The Veteran's Coordinating Council for the first time sponsored a ND Legislative Representatives Reception on January 13, 2015 in Bismarck. It was a way to develop relationships with many of our Senators and Representatives and educate them on issues important to Veterans. The Coordinating Council also stays on top of the bills related to the interest of Veterans.

Lastly, I want to again say what a pleasure it has been serving and representing you all as your Department Commander. I put on just about 5,000 miles on my little Ford Ranger and ate a lot of sunflower seeds in the process. Thank you for your countless hours of dedicated volunteerism and I wish your Chapters and the leadership the best and look forward to seeing you at our Department Convention April 24-26 in Fargo.

DAVA DEPARTMENT COMMANDER REPORT



Marissa Jackson

Department Commander DAVA

I would like to thank all those whom I have visited with and have kept the DAVA moving forward during my term as your Department Commander.

It has been a great year serving you and supporting the DAV throughout the state. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the Department Officers, Chapter Officers, and all others who have continued to bring our services to the disabled veterans and their families in communities throughout the state.

I wanted to let you know about something you may want to share with other members: the 2015 Camp Corral program is coming to this area. From June 7 through June 12, Camp Corral will have a session at YMCA Camp Cormorant near Lake Park, MN. This is approximately 50 miles from Fargo. Here is some more information about Camp Corral

DAV is once again joining with Camp Corral to provide a unique and fun camp experience to help our kids. This summer, more than 2,600 children of fallen and injured veterans will be attending a free week of Camp Corral throughout the nation. Last year, more than 200 of the camp participants were sponsored through DAV's "Just B Kids" scholarship program. Children between the ages of 8 and 15 are invited to come experience Camp Corral and enjoy a week of nonstop fun and excitement.

In addition, there is another article in this newsletter with information about this program.

If you are looking for additional information, check out www.justbkids.org.

I hope to see you at camp!

Marissa



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

DAV DEPARTMENT CONVENTION

April 24-26, 2015

Biltmore on Main
Fargo, ND

DAV PICNIC AT ND VETS HOME

June 18, 2015

Lisbon, ND

DAV NATIONAL CONVENTION

August 8-11, 2015

Sheraton Hotel
Denver, CO

DAV & DAVA DEPARTMENT FALL CONFERENCE

October 9-10, 2015



Membership Can Hold Congress, Local Leaders Accountable

By Steve Wilson - March 9, 2015

Active and growing membership in a 1.2 million member organization like DAV can be a powerful weapon in holding elected officials accountable for their actions.

"More than a million voices is powerful armament," said National Membership Director Tony Baskerville. "That's one of many reasons we have to keep bringing in new members."

Baskerville said the evidence of presenting a strong, unified front with many members speaking with the same voice helped successfully pass advanced appropriations measures through Congress last year, and is now beginning to breach the door on legislative changes for caregivers and female veterans.

"Our members are more powerful than they may realize," Baskerville said. "When the veteran community speaks out as a whole, people listen."

In a 2014 interview with DAV concerning grassroots legislative efforts, Indiana State Senator Jim Banks said members of VSOs being vocally critical on veterans issues is a sure way to get his attention.

"People would be surprised at how little we hear from constituents," Banks said in the interview. "If I get five phone calls, emails or both on an issue then I know it's on people's minds."

Baskerville said members should feel empowered to be more vocal, send more emails and use DAV's Commander's Action Network to access their elected representatives at the state and federal level and be heard.

"There are many reasons for someone to join DAV and many ways to contribute to our cause. By joining the DAV or Auxiliary, you add your name to our roles. By becoming a vocal or digital proponent of DAV's legislative efforts you double down on the impact you have in the lives of our nation's heroes," said Barry Jesinoski, National Headquarters Executive Director.

DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS DEPARTMENT OF NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OFFICERS 2014-2015

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2 Year - Jim Groven

1 Year - Roy Fillion

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Darlene Famias

Dept. Web Site:
www.davmembersportal.org/nd/default.aspx

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Adjutant: Warren Tobin
Member at Large: Tom Saddler

ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ron Otto
Jim Haukedahl
Marlys Morgenstern

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Pat Resler

1st JR. VICE COMMANDER

Joyce Stuber

2nd JR. VICE COMMANDER

Bernie Burke

DEPARTMENT CHAPLAIN

Laurel Evans

DEPARTMENT ADJUTANT

Judy Steinhouse

ASSISTANT ADJUTANT

Sandy Dobmeier

TREASURER

Faye Litzinger

JUDGE ADVOCATE/INSP. GENERAL

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Kempler Takes Auxiliary Reins

By Steven Wilson - March 3, 2015

As DAV Auxiliary Adjutant Judy Hezlep retired in early January, Auxiliary Assistant Adjutant Pat Kemper was appointed by Auxiliary National Commander LeeAnn Karg to step up to the helm of the organization.

"DAV has lost a treasure in Judy Hezlep," Karg said, "but we've gained another great leader in Pat. I'm confident of her vision as we continue to make the Auxiliary stronger and move toward our objectives of being the voice unique to the needs of veterans' families, caregivers and survivors."

Hezlep said retiring was one of the hardest decisions she ever made but knows the Auxiliary is in good hands.

"Once I decided to retire, and I knew Pat would lead the Auxiliary, it made the decision easier," Hezlep said. "Pat has been a dedicated employee for more than 30 years, and she has an unwavering commitment to leading the Auxiliary to new heights and furthering our mission."

The newly appointed Auxiliary Adjutant said she has big shoes to fill.

"We wish Judy the best in a well-earned retirement," said Kemper. "But we're also aware of how important our fight is today as caregivers' legislation needs to be expanded. We will be reaching out to a new generation of family members who deserve the very best in terms of advocacy and support."

Kemper said she appreciatively and humbly steps into the role of Auxiliary National Adjutant and already has goals for the organization in mind.

"The need for our organization is as great now as it was in 1922, if not greater," she said. "We must evolve with the changing times and serve the needs of those who need our help."

"Most of us are aware of the effects of service to country, the life-altering sacrifices and the family units that are forever changed. We need to be the voice for families—those who provide round-the-clock care to their injured heroes, the families dealing with personality changes due to PTSD, the children who instinctively know their lives are different from their friends'," Kemper said.

She added that in order to meet the goals of making a positive difference in families' and caregivers' lives, the organization must build membership.

"There are people out there who don't feel they can make a difference, but we need to remind them they can," Kemper said. "Ordinary people can and do achieve extraordinary results. DAV and DAV Auxiliary can and should be a family effort."

According to DAV National Adjutant Marc Burgess, his Auxiliary counterpart is poised to build upon the Auxiliary's recent progress and long-standing foundation.

"There are many exciting things happening in the Auxiliary, and Pat has been involved in many of the encouraging changes we've seen that have expanded membership eligibility," said Burgess. "In her new Capacity, and with the surge of energy we're seeing from our partners in the Auxiliary, I'm looking forward to all we'll accomplish together moving forward."

National Commander Ron Hope said Kemper will make the national organization, as a whole, stronger.

"Pat brings years of experience and continuity that will benefit the parent organization and the Auxiliary," Hope said. "I know through her guidance, veterans' families and loved ones will be well represented on a national scale through the voices of our members." Kemper is eligible for membership through her husband, Ernie, a Vietnam veteran, and her late father, James Connelly, a service-connected disabled World War II Navy veteran. Her brother also served, her late father-in-law was a service-connected disabled World War II veteran and seven of her uncles wore the uniform, including William Egan, who made the ultimate sacrifice in service to his country.

Kemper has served in several leadership roles in the Auxiliary and joined the national DAV Auxiliary staff in 1982. In May 2008, after 26 years of service to the organization, she was appointed National Assistant Adjutant.



Pat Kempler, 2013 Auxiliary Fall Conference

Mile High City to Host DAV National Convention

August 8-11, 2015 | Sheraton Hotel Denver

The Mile High City offers visitors the perfect blend of outdoor adventure and urban sophistication. Denver's snowcapped peaks make for the perfect backdrop of this year's convention.

Beyond meeting your fellow veterans and influencing DAV's future, the city itself offers a multitude of unique adventures for convention attendees. Denver is known as the Arts Capital of the West, and it is teeming with unique museums and galleries.

A beautiful, family-oriented city, Denver has dozens of different escapes for outdoor enthusiasts, sports fans, culture vultures and curious travelers.

From boutiques, spas and shops to amusement parks and recreation, pioneering attendees will have every chance to advocate for injured and ill veterans and enjoy everything the Mile High City has to offer.

Our special room rate is \$128 per single or double. Additional hotel reservation information is available at www.starwoodmeeting.com/Book/DAV2015, or by calling 303-893-3333. Be sure to tell them you are reserving under the "Disabled American Veterans" room block if making reservations by phone.

Travel Assistance—The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) can facilitate the screening of injured or wounded veterans. After making flight reservations, veterans (or their care coordinators) should contact a TSA Cares representative by calling tollfree 855-787-2227 weekdays from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. and weekends and holidays from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. (Eastern time). A representative will either provide screening information relevant to the veteran's disability, or the veteran may be referred to experts at TSA to help them through the screening process.

DAV Department Convention in Fargo

Members of DAV (Disabled American Veterans) from throughout the State of North Dakota will hold their annual Department Convention in Fargo from April 24th through April 26th at Biltmore on Main.

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 Rod Olin, 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 Denver, Colorado, August 8-13, 2015.

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 25th at 6:00 p.m. at which featured speakers will be Brigitte Marker, DAV National 4th Junior Vice Commander and Frances Costa, DAV Auxiliary National 1st Junior Vice Commander.

Election of new DAV state-level officers for the coming year will be held on Sunday the 26th.

The address for the Biltmore on Main is: 3801 Main Ave. The phone number is: 701-281-9700. The dates are April 24, 25, and 26, 2015. The room rates will be \$ 74.99 plus 10 % tax. The block of rooms will be released on April 1.

Please call (701) 281-9700 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 95th 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

Care and Benefits for Veterans Strengthened by \$169 Billion VA Budget

WASHINGTON – The President has proposed a \$168.8 billion budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in fiscal year 2016. The proposed budget will support VA goals to expand access to timely, high quality health care and benefits,



continue the transformation of VA into a Veteran-centric department

and end homelessness among Veterans.

“VA has before it one of the greatest opportunities in its history to enhance care for Veterans and build a more efficient and effective system. This budget will allow us to continue important progress to better serve Veterans, their families and their survivors,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald. “We are listening to what Veterans, Congress, employees, Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs), and other stakeholders are telling us. We aspire to make VA a model agency that is held up as an example for other government agencies to follow with respect to customer experience, efficient and effective operations, and taxpayer stewardship.”

The budget includes \$73.5 billion in discretionary funding, largely for healthcare, and \$95.3 billion for mandatory benefit programs such as disability compensation and pensions. The \$73.5 billion total in discretionary spending, including over \$3.2 billion in medical care collections from health insurers and Veteran copayments, is \$5.2 billion and 7.5 percent above the 2015 enacted level. The budget also requests \$66.6 billion, including collections, for the 2017 advance appropriations for medical care, an increase of \$3.4 billion and 5.4 percent above the 2016 medical care budget request. As a first-time request for advance appropriations for 2017 for Compensation and Pensions, Readjustment Benefits, and Veterans Insurance and Indemnities, within our mandatory benefits programs in the Veteran's Benefits Administration, \$104 billion is requested for 2017.

“We remain committed to providing Veterans the opportunity to pursue their education, find meaningful employment and access high-quality health care and earned benefits,” Secretary McDonald 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, every Veteran deserves to have a seamless, integrated, and responsive VA customer service experience every time.”

However, more resources will be required to ensure that VA can provide timely, high-quality health care into the future. VA is hearing directly from Veterans and their representatives that they would prefer to get their care in VA facilities from the medical professionals they know and with whom they have relationships. In the coming months, the Administration will submit legislation to allow the Department to reallocate a portion of unused funding from the Veterans Choice Program to support essential investments in VA system priorities in a fiscally responsible, budget-neutral manner. This flexibility will allow the Department to serve Veterans the way they want and deserve to be served.

VA operates one of the largest integrated health care systems in the country with approximately 9.4 million enrollees; the tenth largest life insurance program; monthly disability compensation, pensions and survivors benefits to more than 5.2 million beneficiaries; educational 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 2016 budget request for VA.

Health Care

With a medical care budget of \$63.2 billion, including collections, VA is positioned to serve approximately 9.4 million Veteran patients enrolled to receive care in the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1. The enrollee total includes over 1.4 million Veterans who served in Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn

Major spending categories within the health care budget are:

- \$7.5 billion for mental health;
- \$2.8 billion for prosthetics;
- \$556 million for spinal cord injuries;
- \$232 million for traumatic brain injuries;
- \$243 million for readjustment counseling; and
- \$7.5 billion for long-term care.

Expanding Access

The President's 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:

- \$1.2 billion in telehealth funding, which helps patients monitor chronic health care conditions and increases access to care, especially in rural and remote locations;
- \$446 million for health care services specifically designed for women, an increase of 8.3 percent over the present level;
- \$598 million for the activation of new and enhanced health care facilities;
- \$1.1 billion for major construction projects;
- \$86.6 million for improved customer service applications for online self-service portals and call center agent-assisted inquiries; and
- \$5.9 million to bring into full operation two new national cemeteries opening in 2015, and to activate one new national cemetery and one rural National Veterans Burial Ground in 2016.

Improving the Efficiency of Claims Processing

The President's Budget provides for full implementation of the Veterans Benefits Administration's (VBA) robust Transformation Plan -- a series of people, process, and technology initiatives -- in 2016. This plan will continue to systematically improve the quality and efficiency of claims processing and assist the Department in processing all disability compensation claims within 125 days.

(VA Budget Continued on Page 6)



ND Veterans Home Foundation Golf Tournament

Friday, June 19, 2015

Maple River Golf Club - Mapleton, ND

4 Man Scramble Tournament

Registration: 11:00 am

Golf: 12:00 Noon Shotgun Start

Fee: \$75/Person - \$300/Team

Fee Includes:

18 Hole Green Fees, Golf Cart, Prizes, Steak Dinner
Following Tournament

Hole Sponsor: \$150 - Sponsor Signage Displayed on the Course

TOURNAMENT LIMITED TO 26 TEAMS
SIGN UP DEADLINE JUNE 1, 2015

Pre-Registration: Send check payable to NDVHF with names of players
To: Roy Fillion, 419 N 7th St, Grand Forks, ND 58201

Tournament sponsored by the ND Veterans Home Foundation Board Members
from the American Legion, AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Veterans of
Foreign Wars, and the Vietnam Veterans of America
All of which are North Dakota Veterans Organizations

**ALL PROCEEDS WILL GO TO THE ND VETERANS HOME FOUNDATION
FOR PROJECTS AT THE LISBON VETERANS HOME**

For additional Information Contact
Richard Belling 701-541-7222 or
Bob Krause 701-680-0567
Additional Registration Information Email
Roy Fillion - roy linda@gra.midco.net



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DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS



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Meetings Held 3rd Thursday
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DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS



**FRANCIS J. BEATON
Chapter No. 1**

Fargo, North Dakota

Meetings Held 2nd Thursday
of each month

(VA Budget Continued from Page 4)

Major claims transformation initiatives in the budget invest \$431 million to bring leading-edge technology to claims processing, including:

- \$290 million (\$253 million in Information Technology and \$37 million in VBA) to support the electronic claims processing system – the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS); and
- \$141 million for Veterans Claims Intake Program (VCIP) to continue conversion of paper records, such as medical records, into electronic images and data in VBMS.

In addition, the President's Budget supports rightsizing VBA's workforce to address staffing needs so it can continue to improve the delivery of benefits to Veterans. As VBA continues to receive and complete more disability compensation rating claims, the volume of appeals, non-rating claims, and fiduciary field examinations correspondingly increases. The request for \$85 million for 770 additional full-time equivalent employees (FTE) will allow VBA to provide more timely actions on appeals and non-rating claims, and will ensure strong fiduciary oversight.

Eliminating Veterans Homelessness

The Administration has made the elimination of Veteran homelessness a national priority. The budget request targets \$1.4 billion for programs to prevent or reduce homelessness, including:

- \$300 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
- \$201 million in grant and per diem payments that support temporary housing provided by community-based organizations.

MyVA

In 2014, Secretary McDonald introduced the MyVA initiative, an effort to reorient the Department around the needs of Veterans and make VA a more customer-centric organization. This will ultimately be the largest department-wide transformation in VA's

history and will measure success based on Veteran outcomes and satisfaction. The 2016 budget supports MyVA implementation, which will create a VA that is organized for success from the perspective of Veterans – combining functions, simplifying operations, and proving Veterans the care and services they have earned and deserve.

Veterans Choice Act

The Veterans Choice Act provided \$5 billion in mandatory funding to increase Veterans' access to health care by hiring more physicians and staff and improving the VA's physical infrastructure. It also provided \$10 billion in mandatory funding through 2017 to establish a temporary program (the Veterans Choice Program) improving Veterans' access to health care by allowing eligible Veterans who meet certain wait-time or distance standards to use eligible health care providers outside of the VA system. The Veterans Choice Program may provide a measure of short-term relief from the pressure of escalating health care needs as current patients in the VA system elect to receive their care through the program. These investments, together with the 2016 Budget, will provide the authorities, funding, and other tools to enhance services to Veterans in the short-term while strengthening the underlying VA system to better serve Veterans in the future. However more resources in certain areas will be required to ensure that the VA system can provide timely, high-quality health care into the future. In the coming months, the Administration will submit legislation to allow the VA Secretary to best meet Veteran needs. This will allow the Secretary to make essential investments in VA system priorities in a fiscally-responsible, budget-neutral manner.

Other Key Services for Veterans

- \$266 million to administer the VA-run system of 133 national cemeteries;
- \$4.1 billion for information technology (IT), including investments to modernize Veterans' electronic health records, improve Veterans' access to benefits, and IT infrastructure; and
- \$1.7 billion in construction, cemetery grants, and extended care grants to include nine VHA major construction projects and four gravesite expansion projects.

DAV Disaster Relief Program

DAV's Disaster Relief Program supports veterans, service members, surviving spouses and their families during times of great need in the aftermath of disasters.



We have recently updated the program and have attached for your information, an overview. As many of you have experienced first-hand, providing disaster relief to veterans and their families in times of great need is a top priority to our organization. Veterans, service members and

their families are often faced with overwhelming loss and it is vital

we remain steadfast in fulfilling our promises to the men and women who served.

Some of the recent changes made to the program include:

- Increasing maximum draft amounts from \$500.00 for food, clothing and lodging to \$500.00 for food and clothing only and \$1,000.00 for food, clothing and lodging
- Depending on the time of year and location of the disaster area, relief may include blankets, hygiene kits and book bags.
- Authorizing travel expenses for DSOs/CSOs who aid in providing disaster relief alongside NSOs.
- Lessening the criteria for an applicant and their family to receive a DAV disaster relief grant.

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Proposed Rules Changes to VA Needs Based Program

The Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) has announced proposed regulations that will affect needs-based programs such as Pension and Aid and Attendance for older veterans and their surviving spouses. The VA claims that the proposed changes are the result of a 2012 Government Accountability Offices (GAO) report. This report recommended changes in the VA needs based programs to "to maintain the integrity of VA's needs-based benefit programs." The VA itself says another reason for the new rules is to "reduce opportunities for attorneys and financial advisors to take advantage of pension claimants." The programs targeted by these new rules are low income pension, homebound pension, and Aid and Attendance.

These benefits may be available to a veteran, or a surviving spouse of a veteran who served at least one day during wartime (as set by Congress) for at least 90 days, and received something other than a dishonorable discharge. The benefit, particularly the Aid and Attendance benefit, replaces some income that the veteran or surviving spouse is spending on unreimbursed medical expenses. Furthermore, there is a limit on assets or net worth since the VA assumes that if the veteran or his surviving spouse has sufficient assets to take care for himself or herself, then the VA should not be providing money to the veteran or spouse. These proposed changes to the rules would presumably not apply to compensation, which are the benefits for those with a current injury/illness that is service connected.

The proposed rules would impose a 36 month "look back" period on transferred assets, even between spouses to the extent that assets exceed the new net worth limit which would be the maximum community spouse resource allowance permitted by Medicaid prevailing at the time the final rule is published, indexed for inflation. In

2015, the maximum allowance is \$119,220. For those who dispose of excess assets in order to qualify for VA benefits, there will be a penalty period of up to 10 years based upon the total assets transferred during the "look back" period that exceed the net worth calculation. The penalty period would begin on the first day of the month that follows the last asset transfer, and the divisor would be the applicable maximum annual pension rate in effect as of the date of the pension claim. If the VA mirrors Medicaid rules, this would mean that no pension monies would be paid during the penalty period. The net worth is determined by adding the claimant's annual income to his or her assets. The primary residence would not be included as an asset unless it is sold and another residence is not purchased within one calendar year. Deductible medical expenses would be further clarified as well.

These new regulations seem to attempting to mirror Medicaid rules for a benefit that is not nearly as valuable as Medicaid. Moreover, it would seem that veterans earned the right to some assistance when they are older and ill by virtue of simply being veterans and having served our country. These rules are so restrictive, it would seem that few veterans or surviving spouses would qualify for what is a fairly low benefit (in 2015, the maximum surviving spouse benefit is \$1,149 per month and a veteran with one dependent/spouse is \$2,120 per month). Most claimants are trying to obtain assistance to pay for personal care/assisted living facilities, or for care in a State Veterans facility. If you are concerned about this consider contacting your U.S. Congressman or U.S. Senator to express your feeling on the proposed regulations. If accepted the new regulations could go into effect as early as early as July, 2015.

Online Prescription Tracker Gives Veterans 24/7 Online Access to Status

Recommendation Made by VA Employee, 2013 SAVE Award Winner

Veterans can now track the status of most of their prescriptions online, thanks to an innovative idea by a Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) employee. The new 24/7 service allows online tracking for most prescriptions mailed from the VA Mail Order Pharmacy.

The Prescription Tracker was recommended by VA employee Kenneth Siehr, a winner of the President's 2013 Securing Americans Value and Efficiency (SAVE) Award. Siehr's idea focused on the use of technology as a way to save money and improve the services VA provides to its patients.

"Our nation's Veterans deserve a first-class pharmacy and quality customer service as a part of the exceptional health care available from VA," said Siehr, the National Director for Consolidated Mail Outpatient Pharmacies. "It is an honor to be part of serving Veterans and to have been recognized for an idea that enhances our services to them."



More than 57,000 Veterans are currently using the service through My HealthVet, an online feature that allows Veterans to partner with their health care team. The number is expected to grow as VA starts to educate Veterans about the new feature. Later this month, the tracking feature will include images of the medication that dispensed. Over the next year, a secure messaging alert will be added so that Veterans know when a medication was placed in the mail.

"VA prescription refill online is an excellent example of how one employee looked at the process of VA prescription tracking through the eyes of our Veterans and came up with an idea that better serves Veterans," said Interim Under Secretary for Health, Carolyn M. Clancy. "This idea is both innovative and transformative, and it is certainly one, when put into action, improves customer service for America's Veterans."



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JUNE 6th Trolling for the Troops, Camp Ripley MN

Annual event hosted by the Camp Ripley staff, Teams are divided up between the Mississippi River and Mill Lacs Lake in this competitive tournament. **2 spots available**

JUNE 12/13 Kraus Anderson Walleye Classic, Bemidji MN

First come first served for this competitive tournament fishing with tournament guides! Show up Friday leave Saturday after the tournament! **4 spots available**

JUNE 20th Take A Vet Fishing Event, Leech Lake, Walker MN

All veteran competitive tournament! **6 Spots Available!**

JULY 2015 Prairie Dog Hunt SD

We will set up shop on the prairie right in the middle of a prairie dog town and practice our long distance shooting skill. **2 spots available.**

SEPTEMBER 2015, Goose Hunt Middle River MN

Multiple Veterans Service Organizations are teaming up to make this one of our biggest hunts yet! With five guide teams we have **25 applications available!**

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2015 Pheasants, Doves and Sporting Clays, Grand Forks ND

Exclusive pheasant hunting at Dakota Hunting Kennels and Hunting Club! Numbers may be down but not here, join us for a good time and great memories! **4 Spots Available**

NOVEMBER 2015 Pheasant Hunt SD

Guided Trip to the Pheasant capital of the US, Near Aberdeen SD. **3 spots available**

SEPTEMBER 2015 Deer Hunt Red River

Permanent stand near food source right on the deer! **1 spot available**

DECEMBER 2015 Ice Fishing with Perch Patrol Guide Service

Devils Lake Gold! Dates to be determined. **4 spots available!**

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VA Encourages Eligible Veterans to Apply for 2015 Veterans Summer Sports Clinic

Rehabilitation sports and recreation program supports Veterans with disabilities

Washington – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is accepting applications from Veterans interested in participating in the 2015 National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic. The 2015 National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic will be held Sept.13-18 at the VA San Diego Healthcare System in San Diego, California.

The annual event is expected to attract Veterans from all over the country who have sustained a variety of injuries ranging from traumatic brain injury and polytrauma, to spinal cord injury or loss of limb. "I encourage every Veteran who may be eligible to take advantage of this opportunity," said VA Secretary Robert McDonald. "There is rehabilitative power in leading an active lifestyle and learning new skills and activities."

The National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic represents VA's continued commitment to offer adaptive sports and recreation therapy as an integral part of a successful rehabilitation program.

The deadline to apply for the 2015 National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic is May 1.

For more information or for an application, visit www.summersportsclinic.va.gov.

The 2015 National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic is sponsored by VA, the Veterans Canteen Service and other community organizations.

Applications Accepted for 2015 National Veterans Golden Age Games

Event Takes Place in Omaha, Nebraska, Aug. 8-12

Washington – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is currently accepting applications from Veterans interested in competing in the 2015 National Veterans Golden Age Games. Applications can be completed online at www.veteransgoldenagegames.va.gov, and will be accepted through May 15. Veterans ages 55 and older who are enrolled for VA care are eligible to participate.

The 2015 National Veterans Golden Age Games takes place in Omaha, Nebraska, Aug. 8-12. Nearly 800 athletes are expected to compete in the national multi-event sports and recreational competition for senior Veterans. The event encourages participants to make physical activity a central part of their lives, and supports VA's comprehensive recreation and rehabilitation therapy programs. Competitive events include air rifle, badminton, bowling, cycling, dominoes, field, golf, horseshoes, nine ball, shuffleboard, swimming, table tennis and track.

VA research and clinical experience verify that physical activity is important to maintaining good health, speeding recovery and improving overall quality of life. The games also serve as a way for participants to continue in local senior events in their home communities.

VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System will host this year's games. The health care system provides care for more than 55,000 Veterans from 101 counties in Nebraska, western Iowa and portions of Missouri and Kansas.

For more information visit www.veteransgoldenagegames.va.gov and follow VA Adaptive Sports on Twitter at @VAAdaptiveSport or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/vaadaptivesports.



Employees of McNeilus Steel Inc. (Nick, Brent, Ashley and little Callie) are pictured with Vince Dicks, Commander of Francis J. Beaton, Chapter 1 presenting a check for \$1500 during the March meeting to support the chapter. employees and Management collected the funds and selected a benefactor and luckily it was DAV. Nick and Brent are both veterans and Ashley's father served in Vietnam.



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Department Legislative Committee members Warren Tobin and Joe Litzinger meet with Senator Heidi Heitkamp in her office. This meeting occurred during the DAV Mid-Winter Legislative conference held in February.

VA Announces Single Regional Framework Under MyVA Initiative

Internal Organizations to Realign Their Existing Structures

Washington – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced that it is taking the first steps under the MyVA initiative to realign its many organizational maps into one map with five regions to better serve Veterans.

The new regions under the MyVA alignment will allow VA to begin the process of integrating disparate organizational boundaries into a single regional framework to enhance internal coordination.

“We want every Veteran to have a seamless, integrated, and responsive VA customer service experience every time. This regional alignment is the first step in empowering Veterans to interact with one VA – MyVA,” said Secretary Robert McDonald. “Ultimately, this reform will improve the Veteran experience by enabling Veterans to more easily navigate VA and access their earned care and benefits.”

VA's new regional design utilizes state boundaries to divide the country into five regions. Each organization within VA will begin work to ensure their structures are aligned within this framework by the end of June 2015.

Veterans are already seeing the impacts of changes made through the MyVA initiative. For example, at the suggestion of VA employees, the Department has made improvements to VA call center operations, to allow call center agents to suspend or resume certain benefit payments at the request of the Veteran, which eliminates additional steps typically required of Veterans. Also at the suggestion of employees, VA is working towards piloting improved signage

in certain facilities, to make sure Veterans know where they are going and that directions are easy to follow.

Additional VA efforts are currently underway to define the next steps to transform the Department into one that is more centered on the Veteran.



Background on MyVA

Launched on September 2, 2014, MyVA is an initiative which will reorient VA around Veteran needs and empower employees to assist them in delivering excellent customer service to improve the Veteran experience. It is the largest department-wide transformation in VA's history and will be a product of ideas and insights shared by Veterans, employees, members of Congress, VSOs, and other stakeholders.

The first phase of MyVA has included creating the task force and building the team to support the

mission and an organizational change of this breadth. MyVA is focused on five areas of improvement:

- 1) Improving the Veteran experience
- 2) Improving the employee experience so they can better serve Veterans
- 3) Improving internal support services
- 4) Establishing a culture of continuous improvement, and
- 5) Enhancing strategic partnerships.

The Regional Map can be seen at: <http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/docs/myva-5-regions-map.pdf>



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VA Accelerates Deployment of Nationwide Opioid Therapy Tool

Allows VA Providers to Review Pain Treatment Data in One Place to Help Protect Patients

Washington – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is accelerating the deployment of a state-of-the-art tool to help protect Veteran patients using high doses of opioids or with medical risk factors that put them at an increased risk of complications from opioid medications.

The tool, referred to as the **Opioid Therapy Risk Report**, is being made available now to all staff in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). Over the past week, VA's Interim Under Secretary for Health, Dr. Carolyn Clancy, has reached out to over 2,000 primary care providers in VHA clinics throughout the country to promote the use of this novel tool. It includes information about the dosages of narcotics and other sedative medications, significant medical problems that could contribute to an adverse reaction and monitoring data to aid in the review and management of complex patients.



“All of American medicine is aiming to better understand how to treat severe pain, and Veterans receiving care in the VA health care system typically suffer from higher rates of chronic pain than the general public,” said Dr. Clancy. “While opioid medications may be appropriate in

some cases of chronic pain, we are dedicated to using them safely and providing effective pain care to our Veterans. It is critical that we ensure system-wide implementation of the Opioid Therapy Risk Report in the weeks ahead.”

The Opioid Therapy Risk Report allows VA providers to review all pertinent clinical data related to pain treatment in one place, providing a comprehensive Veteran-centered and more efficient level of management not previously available to primary care providers. VHA is actively deploying training aids to providers and facilities now and over the next several weeks to familiarize them with how to utilize this tool in their daily practice.

Overuse and abuse of prescription opioids is a significant public health issue, particularly since patients in pain are at risk for potential negative outcomes including unintended overdose, adverse medical reactions, and mental health complications. VA established the Opioid Safety Initiative (OSI) in 2012 to enhance safe and effective pain care for Veterans. As a result, there are currently:

- 91,614 fewer patients receiving opioids;
- 29,281 fewer patients receiving opioids and benzodiazepines together;
- 71,255 more patients on opioids that have had a urine drug screen to help guide treatment decisions;
- 67,466 fewer patients on long-term opioid therapy



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Just B Kids Scholarship Program

I, National Adjutant J. Marc Burgess, would like to extend my sincere gratitude to all of the DAV Chapters and Departments who have supported Camp Corral through DAV's Just B Kids Scholarship. As you are aware, a few years ago DAV developed this scholarship program to incentivize and support the efforts of DAV Chapters and Departments who wish to raise funds to support Camp Corral.

The Just B Kids Scholarship Program, provides an opportunity for you to support a very worthy cause and make a positive difference in the lives' of children of disabled veterans while ensuring our Chapter and Department representatives remain within the guidelines of DAV's Constitution and Bylaws, which requires that all funds raised through DAV activities be approved and benefit DAV programs.

Please do not provide any funds raised in support of Camp Corral directly to the Golden Corral restaurants or their managers. Doing so would not only violate DAV's internal governing regulations, it would also violate governing federal regulations for charities and could raise concerns with charity watchdogs.

To support the fundraising efforts of DAV Chapters and Departments, national headquarters will once again match the first \$50,000 in donations raised for the Just B Kids Scholarship Program this year. This means the money you raise will be doubled and twice as many participants will benefit from your generosity. Moneys collected through approved activities should be accounted for, and submitted to DAV using the attached form. All donations must be deposited and accounted for as Just B Kids funds prior to being distributed to Camp Corral in order for your funds to be matched. If you are raising funds in support of a particular Golden Corral restaurant, there is space on the attached form to include this information so you can be assured they will get the appropriate credit.

DAV is grateful for its longstanding relationship with Golden Corral. DAV members are reminded that DAV Chapters and Departments have received millions of dollars through Golden Corral's Military Appreciation Monday event to support grassroots service initiatives nationwide. We are grateful for their friendship and support for more than a decade now.

If you are interested in sending a child to a Camp Corral event, additional information and eligibility requirements can be found at www.justbkids.org. We are grateful for your interest in supporting Camp Corral through the Just B Kids Scholarship Program and for your active membership in DAV.

Thank you for your participation and for all you do to fulfill our promises to the men and women who served.



VA Releases Key Findings of Clinical Review of Opioid Practices in Tomah Clinical and Administrative Reviews Still Ongoing

Washington – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today released key findings and recommendations of its initial clinical review into opioid prescription practices at the Tomah VA Medical Center (VAMC).

Based on these preliminary findings, the team recommended that VA consider a more in-depth evaluation of the clinical and administrative practices at the Tomah VAMC. An administrative review team from VA's Office of Accountability Review (OAR) is continuing to look at allegations of retaliation against employees and other accountability issues related to Tomah VAMC leadership. Investigators from the independent VA Office of Inspector General and the Department of Justice's Drug Enforcement Administration have also been on site.

Yesterday, VA announced the accelerated deployment of a nationwide opioid therapy tool for use at all Veterans Health Administration (VHA) facilities.

In January, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald directed Interim Under Secretary for Health Dr. Carolyn Clancy to lead a comprehensive review of medication prescription practices at the Tomah VA Medical Center. Dr. Clancy charged the Clinical Review Team to assess the practice patterns, controlled substance prescribing habits, and administrative interactions with subordinates and clinical leadership as related to prescribing practices.

The release of the key findings comes as VA's Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson met today with employees and stakeholders in Tomah.

Go to this highlighted link, for a summary of Phase One Clinical Review Findings.



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Formalizing the Process

By Joseph R. Chenelly – March 9, 2015

New law mandates all claims, appeals begin on standard forms

The days of being able to informally start disability claims with the Department of Veterans Affairs by writing a simple statement on a sheet of paper are over. That will no longer secure an effective date for the evaluation of an award. New laws going into effect March 24 will require claimants to use specific forms for claims and appeals.

The new laws require that all claims to the VA be filed on standard forms, regardless of the type. The VA states that abolishing the longtime practice of informally initiating veterans' disability claims will be one way of improving the quality and timeliness of processing.

"These new processes will leave no doubt as to the effective dates of claims," said National Service Director Jim Marszalek. "Of course, our 3,815 National, Department and Chapter Service Officers, including County Veteran Service Officers accredited by DAV, are ready to help everyone get through and understand these new requirements."

The new law eliminates the practice of using reports of hospitalizations, examinations and other medical records to serve as the start of informal claims for increase or to reopen while retaining the retroactive effective dates.

The change also affects appeals. Under the new laws, the VA will accept an expression of dissatisfaction or disagreement with its decision as a Notice of Disagreement (NOD) only if it is submitted on a standardized form.

There are three major components to these changes.

First, the traditional informal claims process is being standardized with a new standard form, VA Form 21-0966, Intent to File a Claim for Compensation and/ or Pension, Survivors Pension, or Other Benefits. The form is designed to capture information necessary to identify and support compensation, pension and other benefit claims.

An individual or their representative can submit this form in order to establish a potential effective date for benefits and then take up to a year to gather the evidence necessary to support the claim.

The form may be submitted electronically, on paper or over the phone. The form is electronically available through eBenefits. The form can be submitted there or in hard copy by mailing it to a DAV National Service Office. The form can also be completed by a VA call center representative over the phone or

by a DAV National Service Officer (NSO).

Submitting an Intent to File claim protects an effective date of benefits for up to one year, meaning individuals seeking compensation or pension benefits will have a full year to gather and submit evidence necessary to support their claim. The new rule does not require that evidence necessary to support a claim be submitted in order for the claim to be recognized as complete and for the VA to take action.

The new regulations allow the VA to award increased benefits retroactive to the date of medical treatment, as long as the form is filed within one year of the treatment and the required claim form is filed within a year after that.

Second, if veterans wants to file for compensation, they can do so online. If that is not possible or desirable, use of the EZ forms becomes mandatory under the new regulations. VA Form 21-526EZ, Application for Disability Compensation and Related Compensation Benefits, is needed for paper submissions. Pension claims must be filed on VA Form 21-527EZ, Application for Pension. Survivors' claims for dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC), survivors' pension and accrued benefits must be filed on VA Form 21-534EZ, Application for DIC, Death Pension, and/or Accrued Benefits.

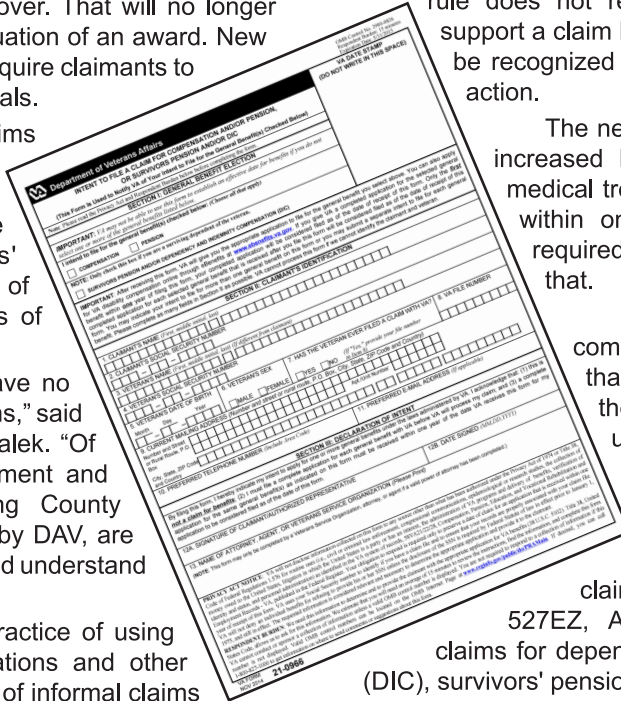
The EZ forms were previously available on an optional basis. Under the new regulations, the VA will mandate their use. Veterans and survivors do not have to file fully developed claims (FDCs) when using these mandatory forms, but the VA encourages FDC participation because it can expedite delivery of benefits through the FDC program.

Third, the changes mandate use of a standardized notice of disagreement form when a claimant wishes to initiate an appeal of a VA decision. Claimants will initiate the appeal of a decision with which they disagree by explaining their disagreement on VA Form 21-0958, Notice of Disagreement.

NSOs are being trained in these new laws and forms, and this will be a key topic in this year's Department and Chapter Service Officer Certification Training Program.

Learn More Online

Veterans, family members and survivors should always feel free to contact their local DAV National Service Office with any questions about claims, appeals and compensation. Contact information for those offices can be found online at DAV.org/veterans/find-your-local-office/.



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Property Tax Credits: Do You Qualify?

In addition to the 12% state paid credit that all North Dakotans receive, there are a couple of property tax credits for which you may be eligible. The Homestead Tax Credit is for senior citizens and disabled individuals, and the Disabled Veterans Tax Credit is for disabled veterans of the United States armed forces.

Homestead Tax Credit

The Homestead Tax Credit was enacted by the North Dakota State Legislature in 1969. It is available to individuals who are 65 years old or older, or are permanently and totally disabled.

Homeowners

If you meet either of these criteria, you may apply if you

reside on and have an interest in the property for which the credit is claimed. For a husband and wife who live together, only one may apply for this credit. Disabled individuals do not need to meet the age requirement, but do need to provide proof of disability.

In order to qualify for the credit, your income, plus the income of your spouse and any dependents, may not exceed \$42,000 for the calendar year preceding the assessment date, and your assets may not exceed \$500,000, including the value of your home.

The Homestead Tax Credit is a reduction to the homeowner's taxable value according to the following schedule:

If Your Income Is	Taxable Value is Reduced by	Maximum Reduction to Taxable Value	Equal to Maximum Reduction to True and Full Value
\$0 - \$22,000	100%	\$4,500	\$100,000
\$22,001 - \$26,000	80%	\$3,600	\$80,000
\$26,001 - \$30,000	60%	\$2,700	\$60,000
\$30,001 - \$34,000	40%	\$1,800	\$40,000
\$34,001 - \$38,000	20%	\$900	\$20,000
\$38,001 - \$42,000	10%	\$450	\$10,000

Contract your local assessment officials for an application and more information on the Homestead Tax Credit for homeowners. Application deadline for homeowners is February 1st in the year in which your property is assessed and for which the credit is requested.

Renters

If you rent and meet the above listed criteria for age or disability, you may be eligible for a partial refund of your rent through the Homestead Tax Credit. The maximum amount of refund is \$400. Applicants must submit information on rent paid, income from all sources and medical expenses paid for by the applicant that were not covered by insurance.

Here is how the formula works to calculate the refund: When 20% of your net annual rent exceeds 4% of your net income, you receive a refund for the overpayment of rent.

Example: Rent is \$450 per month = \$5,400 per year; Renters income is \$18,000 per year
 20% of \$5,400 = \$1,080; 4% of \$18,000 = \$720
 \$1,080 - \$720 = **\$360 refund**

Contact the Office of State Tax Commissioner for an application and information on the rent refund. Application

deadline for renters is June 1st following the year for which the refund is claimed.

Mobile Homeowners

If you own a mobile home and pay rent toward the lot on which the mobile home is located, you may qualify for both the homestead credit and the renters refund. Contact your local assessment officials for an application and more information. The application deadlines apply for both programs.

Disabled Veterans Tax Credit

The Disabled Veterans Tax Credit was enacted in 2009 by the North Dakota State Legislature. This property tax credit is available to veterans of the United States armed forces with a disability of 50% or greater. To qualify, individuals must also have been discharged under honorable conditions or be retired from the armed forces of the United States, and must reside on and have an interest in the property for which the credit is claimed.

Proper documentation regarding your service-connected disability and military honorable discharge (when claiming for the first time) must be included with your application.

The Disabled Veterans Credit is a reduction to the taxable value of your property as follows:

Disability Percentage	Maximum Reduction to Taxable Value	Equal to Maximum Reduction to True and Full Value
100%	\$6,750	\$150,000
90%	\$6,075	\$135,000
80%	\$5,400	\$120,000
70%	\$4,725	\$105,000
60%	\$4,050	\$90,000
50%	\$3,375	\$75,000

Contact your local assessor or county director of tax equalization for an application or more information on the Disabled

Veterans Tax Credit.

VA Eliminates Net Worth as Health Care Eligibility Factor

Elimination of Net Worth Makes More Veterans Eligible for Health Care

Washington – The Department of Veterans Affairs is updating the way it determines eligibility for VA health care, a change that will result in more Veterans having access to the health care benefits they've earned and deserve.

Effective 2015, VA eliminated the use of net worth as a determining factor for both health care programs and copayment responsibilities. This change makes VA health care benefits more accessible to lower-income Veterans and brings VA policies in line with Secretary Robert A. McDonald's MyVA initiative which reorients VA around Veterans' needs.

"Everything that we do and every decision we make has to be focused on the Veterans we serve," said VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald. "We are working every day to earn their trust. Changing the way we determine eligibility to make the process easier for Veterans is part of our promise to our Veterans."

Instead of combining the sum of Veterans' income with their assets to determine eligibility for medical care and copayment obligations, VA will now only consider a Veteran's gross household

income and deductible expenses from the previous year. Elimination of the consideration of net worth for VA health care enrollment means that certain lower-income, non-service-connected Veterans will have less out-of-pocket costs. Over a 5-year period, it is estimated that 190,000 Veterans will become eligible for reduced costs of their health care services.

In March 2014, VA eliminated the annual requirement for updated financial information. VA now uses information from the Internal Revenue Service and Social Security Administration to automatically match individual Veterans' income information which reduces the burden on Veterans to keep their healthcare eligibility up to date. That change better aligned VA's health care financial assessment program with other federal health care organizations.

Veterans may submit updated income information at www.1010ez.med.va.gov/, or by visiting their nearby VA health care facility. For more information, visit www.va.gov/healthbenefits or call VA toll-free at 1-877-222-VETS (8387).

VA Vet Choice Program

Only 27,000 veterans have made appointments for private medical care since the Department of Veteran's Affairs Choice Card program rolled out at the start of November, Secretary Robert "Bob" McDonald said in Mid March. It's such a tiny number compared with the 9 million people who use VA health care that McDonald has asked for "flexibility" to reallocate billions of dollars for other pressing matters, from hiring more claims officers to help wade through a vast veterans' benefits backlog to managing other patient medical needs. The VA's release of the choice card numbers is at the heart of a controversy over President Obama's 2016 budget, which asks for authority to reallocate funds from the temporary \$10 billion program that Congress established last year to help former troops struggling to obtain care at vastly overstrapped VA clinics.

House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL) has roundly rejected the plan, calling it a "complete non-starter, which I will not support." He is instead pushing to expand the program to give veterans more care in private clinics. "If there's going to be any reallocation, it's going to be to further improve and strengthen the

program itself and not address other unspecified needs," Miller told McDonald.

The program, was created after the VA's patient wait list scandal, which kept veterans on lists for months as they waited for care for everything from suicide prevention to cancer-related surgeries. A series of government reports earlier this year documented a widespread coverup of the issue through falsification of appointment data and extensive treatment delays. The card gives veterans who have been waiting more than 30 days for appointments or who live more than 40 miles from a VA facility the chance to see a private doctor.

The VA has been hiring tens of thousands of doctors and nurses to curb to fill shortages that they said contributed to the delays. They now say wait times are down. Nationally, VA completed more than 37 million appointments between May 1, 2014 and December 31, 2014. That's an increase of 1.8 million more appointments than were completed during the same time period in 2013, a fact sheet by the agency said.



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