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Service Bulletin

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DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)

<http://www.va.gov/>

September is Suicide Prevention Month

VeteransCrisisLine.net/ItMatters

In recognition of September as Suicide Prevention Month, VA is mobilizing people and organizations nationwide to support veterans in crisis and spread the word about VA mental health services. Throughout the month, VA suicide prevention coordinators at all 151 VA medical centers will organize community events, host health fairs, lead training sessions and work with VA Voluntary Service. VA is also launching a new Suicide Prevention Month public service announcement, "[Talking About It Matters](#)" nationwide.

This year's theme, "It Matters," emphasizes the people, relationships and experiences that matter to veterans and their loved ones, reinforcing their personal connections and giving their lives hope and meaning. To spark conversation about the difficult topics of suicide risk and prevention, VA will unveil a photo-sharing campaign, "[Show Us What Matters](#)," and will invite veterans and their loved ones to upload photos of the special people in their lives to VeteransCrisisLine.net/ItMatters.

VA is calling on supporters to educate their networks to recognize suicide warning signs and encourage veterans in crisis to call the Veterans Crisis Line (1-800-273-8255 and Press 1), chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat or text to 838255 – even if they are not registered with VA or enrolled in VA health care. All Veterans Crisis Line resources are optimized for mobile devices.

VA has implemented comprehensive, wide-ranging suicide prevention initiatives, including the toll-free Veterans Crisis Line, placement of Suicide Prevention Coordinators at all VA medical centers and large outpatient facilities, and improvements in case management and reporting. The Veterans Crisis Line, online chat and text-messaging services offer free, confidential support, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, to veterans, their families and friends.

VA Has Converted Over 30 Percent of Disability Claims into Digital Files

Over 30 percent of the current VA disability claims inventory is now digital and accessible to claim raters in VA's electronic claims processing system, which is now operational at all 56 Regional Offices across the country. In addition, all incoming paper claims are transformed into digital records for electronic processing using VA's new claims processing software and electronic repository.

Last year, VA established the Veterans Claims Intake Program (VCIP) to maximize the use of electronic intake for all claims, creating digital, searchable files. The document conversion service, part of VCIP, has now been implemented at all 56 VA regional claims processing offices across the country. VCIP is a capability that enables high-speed document scanning to help VA end its reliance on paper-based claims. With VCIP, a new paper claim that is received at a regional office is recorded in VA's electronic claims processing system—called the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS)—and shipped to one of three document conversion locations to be scanned and converted into digital images. The document images, which are made keyword searchable in the conversion, are placed into a VBMS electronic folder for use by the VA employees who work the Veteran's claim.

Digital conversion improves processing timeliness by eliminating paper folder transport, reducing manual data entry, streamlining the review of medical records, and standardizing correspondence. To date, VA has converted more than 165 million pages of claims documents to digital images, and continues to add over 1 million images into VBMS every day.

VA Grants up to One Year Retroactive Benefits for Veterans Filing Fully Developed Claims

www.benefits.va.gov/fdc/

Veterans filing an original Fully Developed Claim (FDC) for service-connected disability compensation may be entitled to up to one-year of retroactive disability benefits. The retroactive benefits, which are in effect Aug. 6, 2013, through Aug. 5, 2015, are a result of a legislative package passed by Congress and signed into law by President Obama last year.

Filing an FDC is usually the fastest way for veterans to receive a decision on their claims because Fully Developed Claims require veterans to provide all supporting evidence in their possession when they submit their claims. Often, this is evidence that VA legally must attempt to collect on the veteran's behalf, which is already in the veteran's possession, or is evidence the veteran could easily obtain, like private treatment records.

When veterans submit such evidence with their claims, it significantly reduces the amount of time VA spends gathering evidence from them or other sources -- often the longest part of the claims process. While VA will still make efforts to obtain federal

records on the veterans' behalf, the submittal of non-federal records (and any federal records the veteran may have) with the claim allows VA to issue a decision more quickly. Typically, VA processes FDCs in half the time it takes for a traditionally filed claim.

FDCs can be filed digitally through the joint, DoD-VA online portal, *eBenefits* (www.ebenefits.va.gov). DAV encourages veterans who cannot file online to work with a National Service Office which can file claims digitally on veterans' behalf. While submitting an FDC provides a faster decision for any compensation or pension claim, only veterans who are submitting their very first compensation claim as an FDC are potentially eligible for up to one-year of retroactive disability benefits under the newly implemented law.

VA assigns FDCs a higher priority than other claims which means veterans receive decisions to their claim faster than traditional claims. VA continues to prioritize other specific categories of claims, including those of seriously wounded, terminally ill, Medal of Honor recipients, former Prisoners of War, the homeless and those experiencing extreme financial hardship. In May, VA announced a partnership with Veterans Service Organizations and others known as the "Community of Practice," an effort that seeks to reduce the compensation claims backlog for veterans by increasing the number of FDCs filed by veterans and their advocates.

VA and DOD Establish Two Programs to Research PTSD and TBI

In response to President Obama's Executive Order, the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense have established two joint research consortia to research the diagnosis and treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI) over a five-year period.

The Consortium to Alleviate PTSD -- a collaboration involving the STRONG Star Consortium (www.strongstar.org) of the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio and VA's National Center for PTSD (www.ptsd.va.gov) -- will attempt to develop the most effective diagnostic, prognostic, novel treatment, and rehabilitative strategies to treat and prevent PTSD.

The Chronic Effects of Neurotrauma Consortium, a collaborative effort between Virginia Commonwealth University, the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, and the Richmond VA Medical Center will examine the factors which influence the chronic effects of mTBI and common comorbidities in order to improve diagnostic and treatment options. A key point will be to further the understanding of the relationship between mTBI and neurodegenerative disease.

Since Sept. 11, 2001, more than 2.5 million American service members have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. Military service exposes service members to a variety of stressors, including risk to life, exposure to death, injury, sustained threat of injury, and the day-to-day family stress inherent in all phases of the military life cycle.

Veterans and the Affordable Care Act Law

www.va.gov/aca

Veterans receiving health care from the Department of Veterans Affairs will see no change in their benefits or out-of-pocket costs when portions of the Affordable Care Act take effect next year. VA's health care system for veterans has no enrollment fee, no monthly premiums and no deductibles. Most veterans also have no out-of-pocket costs, though some may have small copayments for some health care or prescription drugs.

The Affordable Care Act creates new opportunities for coverage for uninsured veterans and their families. There are more than 1.3 million veterans and more than 950,000 spouses and children of veterans without health insurance. Most uninsured veterans are eligible for VA health care.

Recently VA mailed VA Form 10-10EZ to enrolled veterans as part of the Affordable Care Act. The form is to obtain an information update to ensure VA has accurate addresses, phone numbers and Social Security numbers. Having correct information will keep veterans from being penalized for not having health care insurance. Should a name not match an address, this can possibly flag as an error or a completely different person, which would then generate a penalty for not having health care insurance. Veterans enrolled in the VA health care system should complete and return the 10-10EZ form in order to verify the information requested.

For those who are not eligible for VA care – such as veterans' family members – the law created a new Health Insurance Marketplace. In 2014, the [Marketplace](#) will be a new way to shop for and purchase private health insurance. People who purchase insurance through the Marketplace may be able to lower the costs of health insurance coverage by paying lower monthly premiums. For more information, visit www.healthcare.gov.

For information about VA health care and the Affordable Care Act, veterans and family members are encouraged to visit www.va.gov/aca. The new website includes a Health Benefits Explorer, where veterans can learn about the benefits they can receive if they enroll in VA care. Veterans can apply for VA health care at any time by visiting www.va.gov/healthbenefits/enroll, or visiting their local VA health care facility. Full details on eligibility are available at www.va.gov/opa/publications/benefits_book.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE (DOD)

DOD/VA Website Teaches Stress Coping Skills

<http://www.startmovingforward.org>

The Defense Department's National Center for Telehealth and Technology and the Veterans Affairs Department's mental health informatics section have partnered to develop an interactive online educational and life-coaching program. Moving Forward is

designed to be especially helpful for veterans, service members and their families in learning skills useful for dealing with stress.

The web site teaches problem-solving skills to members of the military community and is focused on recognizing when a person is stressed, identifying stressors and developing stress management skills. To accomplish this, users navigate through a set of problem-solving exercises. In addition to testimonials from former service members, the site offers quizzes to evaluate stress levels and games to practice counseling progressions.

The techniques on the site are based on a problem-solving therapy program that has been used successfully with service members and veterans across the country. The website is designed to allow users to remain anonymous, but also to be able to pick up where they left off if they take a break from training. Some advantages of using the website include never having to wait and the ability to log on from home or another safe environment.

DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT (HUD)

<http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD>

Second Round of HUD-VASH Vouchers to Help Homeless Veterans

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the VA announced in August the second round of HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) funding to local public housing agencies across the U.S. and Puerto Rico. The \$7.8 million will provide housing and clinical services for 1,120 currently homeless veterans.

In May the two agencies announced \$60 million in HUD-VASH vouchers. The supportive housing assistance announced today is provided through the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Program which combines rental assistance from HUD with case management and clinical services provided by VA. Since 2008, a total of 58,140 vouchers have been awarded and 43,371 formerly homeless veterans are currently in homes of their own because of HUD-VASH.

HUD-VASH is a critical part of the commitment to end veteran homelessness by 2015. HUD's annual "point in time" estimate of the number of homeless persons and families for 2012 found that veteran homelessness fell by 7.2 percent (or 4,876 people) since January 2011 and by 17.2 percent since January 2009. On a single night in January 2012, 62,619 veterans were homeless.

The grants are part of \$75 million appropriated this year to support the housing needs of homeless veterans. Local public housing authorities provide rental assistance to homeless veterans while nearby VA Medical Centers (VAMC) offer supportive services and case management. This is the second round of the 2013 HUD-VASH funding. HUD expects to announce more HUD-VASH funding this year.

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR (DOL)

www.dol.gov

Final Rules to Improve Employment of Veterans and the Disabled

www.dol.gov/ofccp/VEVRAARule/

www.dol.gov/ofccp/503Rule/

The U.S. Department of Labor recently announced two final rules to improve hiring and employment of veterans and for people with disabilities. One rule updates requirements under the Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act of 1974; the other updates those under Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. For more than 40 years these laws have required federal contractors and subcontractors to affirmatively recruit, hire, train and promote qualified veterans and people with disabilities respectively.

The VEVRAA rule provides contractors with a quantifiable metric to measure their success in recruiting and employing veterans by requiring contractors to annually adopt a benchmark either based on the national percentage of veterans in the workforce (currently 8 percent), or their own benchmark based on the best available data. The rule strengthens accountability and record-keeping requirements, enabling contractors to assess the effectiveness of their recruitment efforts. It also clarifies job listing and subcontract requirements to facilitate compliance.

The Section 503 rule introduces a hiring goal for federal contractors and subcontractors that 7 percent of each job group in their workforce be qualified individuals with disabilities. The rule also details specific actions contractors must take in the areas of recruitment, training, record keeping and policy dissemination — similar to those which have long been required to promote workplace equality for women and minorities.

FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION (FTC)

www.ftc.gov

Consumer Protection for Military Members and Veterans

<http://www.military.ncpw.gov/>

The FTC, the Department of Defense, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, and Military Saves have teamed up for a year-round campaign to empower the military and veteran communities with consumer information. A new web site, Military Consumer Protection Day (MCPD), launched in July to increase military and veteran consumer information and to provide resources on avoiding scams.

The MCPD site has free materials from these organizations and other partners to help manage money and credit, deal with debt, avoid scams and face a host of other consumer challenges. Are you a servicemember who's curious about protecting your personal information? Maybe you're a military spouse who wants some tips on saving

and investing. Or you might be a veteran who wonders whether a business opportunity checks out. Two dozen other federal and state agencies, consumer advocates, and industry groups have joined the effort with resources on these and other consumer issues to help military families and veterans make informed consumer decisions and steer clear of fraud.

Commanders, personnel finance managers, military members or spouses, veterans, community leaders, and others can use the MCPD site to download resources or order copies of materials from FTC and other partners.

DAV National Service Department Program Updates

<http://www.dav.org/veterans/>

- **DSO/CSO Certification Program:**
 - Total number of certifications and re-certifications in 2013: 1,157
 - Total number of Departments involved: 20

- **Transition Service Program (TSP):**
 - Total number of 2013 TSP participants: 46,947
 - Applications filed: 16,309
 - Total TSO staffing: 34

- **Mobile Service Office (MSO) Program:**
 - Total number of claims filed: 10,423
 - Total number of Powers of Attorney executed: 4,600
 - Total number of interviews: 14,649
 - Total memberships: 330
 - Total miles driven: 73,644

- **Service Seminar Program:**
 - Total number of 2013 Service Seminars: 21
 - Total number of persons attending: 2,620
 - Total number of interviews: 776
 - Total number of claims filed: 365
 - Total number of new members: 34



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