



National Service & Legislative Headquarters  
807 Maine Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20024-2410  
Phone (202) 554-3501  
Fax (202) 554-3581  
[www.dav.org](http://www.dav.org)

# Service Bulletin

**October 2012**

## **DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)**

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

### **VA and DoD to Fund \$100 Million PTSD and TBI Study**

<http://www.grants.gov/> <http://cdmrp.army.mil/>

The Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense (DoD) are investing more than \$100 million in research to improve diagnosis and treatment of mild Traumatic Brain Injury (mTBI) and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The two groups, The Consortium to Alleviate PTSD (CAP) and the Chronic Effects of Neurotrauma Consortium (CENC) will be jointly managed by VA, and by the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP), on behalf of the DoD.

More than 15 percent of servicemembers and veterans suffer impaired functioning as a result of PTSD. CAP will study potential indicators of the trauma, as well as prevention strategies, possible interventions, and improved treatments. Biomarker-based research will be a key factor for CAP's studies. A primary goal of CENC is to establish an understanding of the aftereffects of an mTBI. Potential comorbidities also will be studied; that is, conditions associated with and worsen because of a neurotrauma.

On Aug. 31, the President signed an executive order to improve access to mental health services for veterans, servicemembers and military families. As part of that executive order, the President directed the Department of Defense, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education to develop a National Research Action Plan that will include strategies to improve early diagnosis and treatment effectiveness for TBI and PTSD. He further directed the Department of Defense and Department of Health and Human Services to conduct a comprehensive mental health study with an emphasis on PTSD, TBI, and related injuries to develop better prevention, diagnosis, and treatment options.

Specific information on the consortia, including the full description of each award, eligibility, and submission deadlines, and General Application Instructions, are posted on the Grants.gov and CDMRP websites at the links above.

## **VA Fills First Phase of Veterans Retraining Program to Enhance Job Skills**

[www.benefits.va.gov/VOW](http://www.benefits.va.gov/VOW)

VA has approved applications for all 45,000 slots available in fiscal year 2012 under the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP) and is in the process of approving applications for a total of 54,000 slots available in FY 2013. VRAP is a new training and education program for unemployed veterans who want to upgrade their skills for high-demand jobs. The goal of VRAP is to train a total of 99,000 veterans over the next two years in more than 200 job skills that the Department of Labor (DOL) has determined are the most sought-after by employers.

The joint VA/DOL program is a provision of the Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) to Hire Heroes Act of 2011, which Congress passed and President Obama signed into law in November 2011. The program allows qualifying veterans to receive up to 12 months of education assistance equal to the current full-time Montgomery GI Bill – Active Duty rate of \$1,473 per month. Starting October 1, 2012 the rate will increase to \$1546 per month.

To be eligible for VRAP, a veteran must:

- Be 35-60 years old, unemployed on the day of application, and not dishonorably discharged;
- Not be eligible for any other VA education benefit program such as the Post-9/11 GI Bill, Montgomery GI Bill, or Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment;
- Not be enrolled in a federal or state job-training program within the last 180 days; and,
- Not receive VA compensation at the 100 percent rate due to individual unemployability (IU).

Veterans approved for VRAP are encouraged to enroll as soon as possible and begin training full-time in a VA-approved program of study at their local community college or technical school. The program of study must lead to an associate degree, a non-college degree, or a certificate for a high-demand occupation as defined by DOL. Some of the high-demand job training programs veterans pursued in FY 2012 include computer support specialist, general and operations manager, business operations specialist, and heating, air conditioning and refrigeration mechanic and installer.

Potential applicants can learn more about VRAP and apply online at [www.benefits.va.gov/VOW](http://www.benefits.va.gov/VOW), or call VA toll-free at 1-800-827-1000. Information about the Department of Labor's programs for Veterans is available at [www.dol.gov/vets](http://www.dol.gov/vets). Veterans can also visit the nearly 3,000 One-Stop Career Centers across the nation, listed at [www.servicelocator.org](http://www.servicelocator.org), for in-person employment assistance.

## **Online Toolkit Aims to Support Mental Health Providers**

[www.mentalhealth.va.gov/communityproviders](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/communityproviders)

VA has developed a new online Community Provider Toolkit aimed at delivering support, therapeutic tools, and resources to community providers treating veterans for mental health concerns. The goal of the Toolkit is to enhance the delivery of mental health services to veterans through increased communication and coordination of care between community providers and VA. It provides information about accessing, communicating with, and, if needed, making referrals to VA, and provides tools to assist veterans who are dealing with a variety of mental health challenges. The Toolkit also includes sections intended to increase providers' knowledge about military culture.

Those interested in further information can go to [www.mentalhealth.va.gov](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov) or [www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov) to find educational materials including courses for providers and best practices in mental health treatment. They can also learn more about the VA/DoD PTSD Coach Mobile App, which provides education, resources, and symptom monitoring and management strategies.

## **Law Provides Initial Review of Evidence by Board of Veterans' Appeals**

<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-112hr1627enr/pdf/BILLS-112hr1627enr.pdf>

Public Law 112-154, the Honoring America's Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act of 2012, was passed by Congress on August 6, 2012. Section 501 of this law amends 38 U.S.C. § 7105 by adding a new subsection (e), which provides for initial review of evidence by the Board of Veterans' Appeals unless specifically requested in writing that initial review be conducted by the agency of original jurisdiction.

(e)(1) If, either at the time or after the agency of original jurisdiction receives a substantive appeal, the claimant or the claimant's representative, if any, submits evidence to either the agency of original jurisdiction or the Board of Veterans' Appeals for consideration in connection with the issue or issues with which disagreement has been expressed, such evidence shall be subject to initial review by the Board unless the claimant or the claimant's representative, as the case may be, requests in writing that the agency of original jurisdiction initially review such evidence.

(2) A request for review of evidence under paragraph (1) shall accompany the submittal of the evidence.

The new subsection (e) will take effect 180 days after the August 6, 2012 date of the enactment of the Lejeune Act, and applies to claims for which a substantive appeal is filed on or after the 180<sup>th</sup> day after the enactment date.

## **VA Expanding Burial Options in Rural Areas**

[www.cem.va.gov](http://www.cem.va.gov)

VA has implemented a plan to provide burial services for veterans in rural areas where there are no available VA national cemeteries, state veterans cemeteries or tribal veterans cemeteries. Under the Rural Initiative plan, VA will build small National Veterans Burial Grounds within existing public or private cemeteries in rural areas where the unserved veteran population is 25,000 or less within a 75-mile radius.

VA plans to open eight National Veterans Burial Grounds that will serve veterans in the areas of Fargo, N.D.; Rhinelander, Wis.; Cheyenne, Wyo.; Laurel, Mont.; Idaho Falls, Idaho; Cedar City, Utah; Calais, Maine; and Elko, Nev. This new initiative will make VA burial options available to more than 136,000 Veterans and their eligible dependents.

A National Veterans Burial Ground will be a small, VA-managed section of three to five acres within an existing public or private cemetery. VA will provide a full range of burial options and control the operation and maintenance of these lots. These sections will be held to the same “national shrine” standards as VA-run national cemeteries.

## **VA Exceeds 2012 Goal to Improve eBenefits Access to Benefits Information**

[www.ebenefits.va.gov](http://www.ebenefits.va.gov)

VA has announced that 1.67 million veterans and servicemembers have registered for the joint VA-Department of Defense (DoD), self-service web portal, eBenefits, which provides online information and access to a wide variety of military and Veteran benefits resources. The pace of registrations for the site since its launch in October 2009 has allowed VA to exceed its fiscal year 2012 agency priority goal of 1.65 million users, and puts it on track to meet the 2013 goal of 2.5 million users.

Veterans and servicemembers new to the website [www.ebenefits.va.gov](http://www.ebenefits.va.gov) are guided through the registration process to get a full-access account, called a premier account, which allows maximum ability to update personal information and learn about benefits without having to visit a VA facility. With the premier account, one password—called a single sign-on—allows veterans to access multiple applications on the secure portion of the website.

A premier account also allows veterans to check the status of compensation and pension claims that they have filed with VA. This feature, the most popular within the eBenefits application, had over 700,000 visits in June alone. Another key function added is a single sign-on capability for veterans to transition securely between benefits information on eBenefits and health information on VA’s myHealtheVet website without an additional log-on step. Overall, visits to the site have increased 60 percent over the previous year, approaching 2 million per month.

With the most recent release, there are now 46 self-service features enabling servicemembers and veterans the ability to download copies of their official VA and military correspondence, including veterans civil service preference, service verification, benefits verification letters,

military records and VA home loan certificates of eligibility. Servicemembers and veterans can also access records that directly impact their family members, like the Post-9/11 GI Bill enrollment status, VA payment history, and DoD TRICARE health insurance status.

## **DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE (DoD)**

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

### **New DoD Safe Helpline Mobile App Available**

<http://www.sapr.mil/>

DoD has announced the availability of the Safe Helpline Mobile Application. With this new app, servicemembers transitioning to civilian life will have access resources that assist in managing the short and long-term effects of sexual assault. The app contains the option for users to record their current emotional state and create tailored self-care plans to address sadness, hopelessness and disconnection. These self-care plans include suggested resources and exercises, and can be stored for future reference. This includes a list of breathing, stretching and visualization techniques that can reduce anxiety, depression and symptoms of post-traumatic stress.

Users can connect with live sexual assault response professionals via phone or anonymous online chat from their mobile devices for support. Users can also navigate resources (e.g., disability assistance, medical benefits, housing help and employment assistance), or search for resources near their base or installation. The Safe Helpline mobile app is for short-term self-care and is not to be used as a substitute for professional medical advice or a mental health treatment plan.

The Safe Helpline Mobile App is free and available for download from the Apple and Android app stores. DoD administers Safe Helpline via a contract with the non-profit Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN), the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization.

## **DAV National Service Department Program Updates**

- **DSO/CSO Certification Program:**
  - Total number of certifications and re-certifications YTD in 2012: 1,387
  - Total number of Departments involved: 31
- **Transition Service Program (TSP):**
  - Total number of 2012 TSP participants YTD: 41,758
  - Applications filed: 12,166
  - Total TSO staffing: 31
- **Mobile Service Office (MSO) Program:**
  - Total number of claims filed: 7,530
  - Total number of Powers of Attorney executed: 3,131
  - Total number of interviews: 10,342
  - Total memberships: 236
  - Total miles driven: 67,117

- **Service Seminar Program:**
  - Total number of 2012 Service Seminars: 18
  - Total number of persons attending: 2,143
  - Total number of interviews: 472
  - Total number of claims filed: 173
  - Total number of new members: 51



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GARRY J. AUGUSTINE  
National Service Director