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Service Bulletin

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DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)

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

VA Proposes Expansion of TBI Benefits

<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-12-10/pdf/2012-29709.pdf>

VA has published a proposed regulation in the Federal Register that would change its rules to add five diagnosable illnesses which are secondary to service-connected Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). VA proposes to add a new subsection to its adjudication regulation by revising 38 CFR 3.310 to state that if a veteran who has a service-connected TBI also has one of the five illnesses, then the illness will be considered service connected as secondary to the TBI. Public comments on the proposed rule will be accepted until February 8, 2013. A final regulation will be published after consideration of all comments received. Comments on the proposed rule will be accepted until February 8, 2013. A final regulation will be published after consideration of all comments received.

VA's decision is based on a report by the National Academy of Sciences, Institute of Medicine (IOM), "Gulf War and Health, Volume 7: Long-Term Consequences of TBI." The IOM found "sufficient evidence of an association" between moderate or severe levels of TBI and Parkinsonism; dementias (which VA understands to include presenile dementia of the Alzheimer type and post-traumatic dementia); depression (which also was associated with mild TBI); and diseases of hormone deficiency that may result from hypothalamo-pituitary changes.

Million Veteran Program (MVP) Enrolls 100,000th Volunteer

www.research.va.gov/MVP

The VA Million Veteran Program (MVP) recently enrolled its 100,000th volunteer research participant. Launched in 2011, MVP is a research effort aimed at better understanding how genes affect health. Up to a million veterans are expected to enroll in the VA study over the next six years. Data and genetic samples collected through the study are stored securely and made available for studies by authorized researchers, with stringent safeguards in place to protect veterans' private health information.

MVP is now at 40 VA medical centers nationwide, with additional VA sites opening for enrollment in the coming year. With more than 110,000 enrollees to date, MVP already far exceeds the enrollment numbers of any single VA study or research program in the past. MVP provides researchers with a large resource of genetic, health, lifestyle, and military-exposure data collected from questionnaires, medical records, and genetic analyses. By combining this information into a single database, MVP promises to advance knowledge about the complex links between genes and health. Authorized researchers are able to use MVP data to help answer questions on a wide range of health conditions affecting veterans, from military-related conditions such as post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injury, to common chronic illnesses such as diabetes and heart disease.

MVP-related discoveries also promise to advance the field of personalized medicine, which aims to tailor medical care based on people's individual genetic profiles. Personalized medicine is expected to yield more effective treatments and reduce costs, given its emphasis on prevention.

VA Registers “GI Bill” as Trademark

www.gibill.va.gov

GI Bill is now a registered trademark with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office and VA is the sole owner of the mark. On April 26, 2012, President Obama signed Executive Order 13607, directing the VA, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Education to undertake a number of measures to “stop deceptive and misleading” promotional efforts that target the GI Bill educational benefits of servicemembers, veterans, and eligible family members and survivors.

One of the key components of the order was for VA to register the term “GI Bill” as a trademark in order to protect individuals and ensure they are directed to the right resources to make informed decisions. In addition, VA obtained the rights to the *GIBill.com* website after the original owners agreed to give up the site. VA will issue terms of use for “GI Bill” within the next six months.

Expanded Opportunity for VGLI Coverage

www.insurance.va.gov

All servicemembers whose date of separation is 11/1/12 or later can enroll in Veterans' Group Life Insurance (VGLI) without answering health questions, if they enroll within 240 days of their date of separation. During this 240-day period, separating servicemembers will be approved for VGLI by simply showing proof of Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) coverage and paying the required premium. Health conditions will not be taken into consideration. This regulatory change extends the “no health” period from 120 to 240 days.

After 240 days, separating servicemembers have an additional eight months to apply for VGLI, but proof of good health will be required. Servicemembers separating prior to 11/1/12

still have 120 days from their date of separation to enroll in VGLI coverage without proof of good health.

The following two SGLI program features remain in effect:

- SGLI coverage continues for 120 days after the member's separation date at no charge.
- Service members have a total of 1 year and 120 days after their separation date to apply for VGLI.

VA and Indian Health Service Begin National Reimbursement Agreement

www.va.gov/tribalgovernment

American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) veterans will soon have increased access to health care services closer to home following a recent VA and Indian Health Service (IHS) joint national agreement.

VA will be able to reimburse the IHS for direct care services provided to eligible AI/AN veterans. While the national agreement applies only to VA and IHS, it will inform agreements negotiated between the VA and Tribal Health Programs (THP). VA copayments do not apply to direct care services provided by IHS to eligible American Indian and Alaska Native veterans under this agreement.

The sharing agreement sets forth four mutual goals:

- Effectively leverage the strengths of THPs to enhance the delivery of optimal clinical care.
- Promote patient-centered collaboration and facilitate communication among the VA, AI/AN veterans, and THPs.
- Ensure appropriate resources are identified and available to support programs for AI/AN veterans.
- Improve health promotion and disease prevention services to AI/AN veterans to address community-based wellness.

VA Releases New Campaign Focusing on Women Veterans

www.womenshealth.va.gov

VA has developed a new public service announcement (PSA) and campaign to let women veterans know they've come to "The Right Place" when seeking VA health care. The number of women using VA health care has doubled in the past decade and that number is expected to double again soon. Key messages in the PSA include: assuring women veterans that VA is ready to serve them; encouraging viewers to rethink assumptions that all veterans are male; and reminding Americans that women veterans are coming home, separating from service, or returning to Guard or Reserve status.

Women serve in every branch of the military, representing 15 percent of today's active duty military and nearly 18 percent of National Guard and Reserve forces. By 2020, VA estimates women veterans will constitute 10 percent of the veteran population. VA is disseminating its message through a multi-faceted campaign, which includes a toolkit for outreach to women veterans.

To access additional campaign materials, visit: www.womenshealth.va.gov/culture_change.asp.

To access the toolkit, visit: www.womenshealth.va.gov/toolkits.asp.

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR (DOL)

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

The Labor Department, in concert with the Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense, has provided online tools to guide potential employers seeking to hire disabled veterans. The "America's Heroes at Work" website provides resources to organizations looking to hire veterans with or without disabilities.

The website guides employers to understand the disabilities and potential accommodations that may be necessary, and how they can be made. DOL officials credit the website's toolkits for employers as a factor in declining veteran unemployment. In addition to giving employers toolkits and information about veteran disabilities, the website also emphasizes the advantages of hiring veterans, whether they have disabilities or not.

The site includes a focus on the employment challenges of returning service members living with Traumatic Brain Injury or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, particularly those veterans and active duty military personnel who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan. The program equips employers and workforce development systems with the tools needed to help those affected by these injuries succeed in the workplace.

DEPARTMENT OF TREASURY

<http://www.godirect.org/>

All federal benefit payments will be electronic by March 1, 2013. Applicants for federal benefit payments must choose an electronic payment option – direct deposit to a bank or credit union account or to a Direct Express Debit Card. People currently receiving paper benefit checks must switch to an electronic payment option by March 1, 2013. Those who have not chosen an electronic payment option by March 1, 2013, will receive their payment after the deadline date via the Direct Express card.

Effective March 1, 2013, all recipients of Social Security, VA, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Railroad Retirement Board, Department of Labor (Black Lung) and Office of Personnel Management benefit checks will receive electronic payments.

DAV National Service Department Program Updates

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

- **DSO/CSO Certification Program:**
 - Total number of certifications and re-certifications YTD in 2012: 1,771
 - Total number of Departments involved: 36

- **Transition Service Program (TSP):**
 - Total number of 2012 TSP participants YT: 59,403
 - Applications filed: 16,946
 - Total TSO staffing: 34

- **Mobile Service Office (MSO) Program:**
 - Total number of claims filed: 12,741
 - Total number of Powers of Attorney executed: 4,988
 - Total number of interviews: 17,194
 - Total memberships: 352
 - Total miles driven: 108,081

- **Service Seminar Program:**
 - Total number of 2012 Service Seminars: 32
 - Total number of persons attending: 3,360
 - Total number of interviews: 1,047
 - Total number of claims filed: 344
 - Total number of new members: 78



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