

1ST DISTRICT SERVICE OFFICER VA & R REPORT FOR FEBRUARY 2022



By Richard Strehlow 262-641-0977

Notes of Interest;

Many veterans are unaware of the latest VA changes that are sure to impact their benefits, compensation or pensions. VA changes are occurring almost daily. While some of the changes are minor in nature, some are monumental and change how a veteran is to receive VA benefits. It is in the best interest of veterans and veteran supporters to keep themselves abreast of these changes as they are sure to make significant changes in the way a veteran is to function.

Did you know serving in the Armed Forces comes with benefits, but many veterans, especially those from the Vietnam era, either don't know about them or do not go after them? Only 44% of Vietnam veterans are aware of their benefits. Only 25% of Vietnam veterans receive their VA benefits they're entitled to.

The Department of Veterans Affairs reported nearly 23,000 active cases of the coronavirus Wednesday -- more than at any other point during the pandemic. The active case count reached 22,911 recently, surpassing a high set in January. The record-breaking number of cases among VA patients reflects trends nationwide. The United States hit an all-time high this week of more than 265,000 new coronavirus cases per day on average, according to data from Johns Hopkins University. Experts blame the rapid spread on the newest coronavirus variant, Omicron, which scientists say is the most contagious strain yet. Dr. Anthony Fauci, the chief medical adviser to the president, warned Tuesday that the surge is expected to continue well into January.

Did you know the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is encouraging veterans who may have been exposed to environmental hazards during their service to register for an environmental health registry evaluation? The evaluation is free, voluntary and is beneficial to both the veteran and VA.

Disability benefits claims for veterans dealing with sleep apnea are some of the most common that the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) receives. In some years, the VA may approve as many as 280,000 sleep apnea claims, but it's important to note that the VA will deny many more for the disorder. If you think you might qualify for VA disability compensation based on your sleep apnea, take a look at all you need to know about sleep apnea's most common symptoms and how they factor into a VA disability claim.

Did you know you can use the camera on your phone, computer, or tablet, and connect to the VA Video Connect App? Using VA Video Connect App will give you direct, real-time access to your health care team. If you're a veteran who receives VA health care, has an internet connection, and an email account, you may be able to use this app for your next appointment.

How does VA Video Connect work?

When your VA care team schedules an appointment using VA Video Connect, you will receive an email with a link to join a virtual medical room. The email will include resources to help you get ready to use VA Video Connect. At the time of your appointment, click on the link, enter your name, and begin the session with your doctor or other providers. You can include family members or other caregivers, who can join the VA Video Connect session from anywhere.

Did you know as with most disabilities, the VA rating for sleep apnea depends on your particular situation? The military provides an extremely physically demanding environment that can lead to many

conditions associated with sleep apnea, ranging from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to various injuries that limit mobility, plus exposure to a wide variety of dust and fumes. Some indications are that one in five U.S. veterans has sleep apnea, and in one study, veterans of combat in Iraq were more than 45% more likely than non-combatants to develop sleep apnea.

Veterans often experience mental illness resulting from extreme physical injury or an incident they witnessed or were involved in during military service. As a veteran, you may be eligible for service-connected disability benefits for certain mental illnesses. To receive disability benefits for a mental health disorder, you must meet certain criteria set by the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA). It is essential to provide viable evidence of your condition and prove a military service connection.

How Does the VA Evaluate Mental Illness?

The U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) evaluates mental illness using the VA Schedule of Rating Disabilities, which follows the guidelines outlined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-V). Eligible compensation categories for mental illness include:

- **Psychotic disorders**
- **Cognitive disorders** including amnesia and other mental disorders that affect brain function
- **Anxiety disorders** including PTSD, panic disorders, agoraphobia, and other phobias
- **Dissociative disorders** such as multiple personality disorders causing you to lose time or forget what you did or where you were
- **Somatoform disorders** (symptoms of a physical condition without a formal diagnosis)
- **Mood disorders**
- **Adjustment disorders** that include being extremely stressed about life adjustments that lead to self-destruction
- **Eating disorders** such as anorexia and bulimia

If you're experiencing one or more of these mental disorders with similar symptoms, the VA will issue one disability rating for you.

Did you know there are many avenues available for veterans needing assistance to file a disability claim? The VA has staff at its Regional Offices that can help you. The VA also provides a list of accredited attorneys, claims agents and Veterans Service Organizations (VSO) Representatives in your area. The Disabled American Veterans group is just one example of a private organization that offers free help to file your claim.

While traumatic brain injuries and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have been called the "signature wounds" of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, affecting nearly half a million troops, thousands of veterans also have been diagnosed with diseases possibly connected to environmental hazards and toxic waste. Hundreds of veterans are fighting or have succumbed to glioblastoma, the most common form of brain cancer, striking roughly 12,000 Americans each year. The few studies done on military personnel and veterans to determine whether they have been getting glioblastoma at higher rates than the general population have been inconclusive. But glioblastoma is the third most common cause of cancer-related death in the active duty population, behind colon cancer and leukemia. And among post-9/11 veterans who deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, glioblastoma occurs at a rate 26% higher than that found in the general population, according to calculations based on Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and National Institutes of Health data.

Department of Veterans Affairs officials are hoping a new automated system that helps render decisions on disability claims will accelerate the process and decrease the backlog of claims applications. The automated system being considered by the VA has proven to shorten the disability claims review process from 100 days to two under certain circumstances and conditions, according to the agency. pilot run of the VA Automated

Benefits Delivery System, launched in December, looked at claims filed by veterans seeking upgrades to their disability ratings for hypertension and cut 98 days from the process for those with complete files.

Did you know within the next two years the VA will begin paying the costs to transport a deceased veteran's remains to state and tribal veterans cemeteries?

Currently, the VA will pay only to transport a deceased veteran's remains to a national veterans cemetery.



Please Remember..... That all gave some, *but many gave all!*