

NVTAC Monthly Newsletter: May 2024

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MAY SPOTLIGHT



Expansion of Benefits Options for Veterans with Other Than Honorable Status

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has issued a final rule amending its regulations on character of discharge determinations, aiming to broaden access to VA care and benefits for former service members discharged under other-than-honorable conditions or by special court-martial. Under the new regulation, certain barriers to benefits, such as the bar for "homosexual acts involving aggravating circumstances," have been eliminated, demonstrating VA's commitment to reducing disparity in the adjudication process. Additionally, a "compelling circumstances exception" has been established, enabling consideration of various factors such as mental health struggles or combat-related hardships to determine eligibility for care and services. Former service members previously denied benefits are encouraged to reapply.

[Learn More About the Ruling](#)

RESOURCES



**National Veterans'
Training Institute**
a DOL VETS Program



Enhancing Professional Practice with National Veterans' Training Institute (NVTI): Resources for Veteran Service Providers

In addition to NVTI's wide array of [classes](#) and [on-demand learning](#), NVTI curated a library of existing resources for veteran service providers. NVTI's [Useful Resources](#) provides extensive resources to enhance professional growth and deepen understanding of special veteran populations. Some of the topics include:

- [Suicide Prevention, Mental Health, and Burnout](#)
- [Serving Veterans with Substance Use Disorders \(SUD\)](#)
- Serving Special Populations including
 - [Serving Veterans Experiencing Homelessness](#)
 - [Serving LGBTQ+ Veterans](#)
 - [Serving Veterans with Disability and Accessibility Needs](#)



Free Legal Services for Oakland County, Michigan Veterans

The Southfield Human Services Department, in collaboration with the Legal Aid and Defender Association, is offering [free legal services for veterans](#) from 9 a.m. – noon every second Monday of the month until September, as well as on December 9, 2024, at the Southfield Human Services Department, 26000 Evergreen Road.



Unmet Needs Grant to Help Active-Duty Service Members

The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)'s [Unmet Needs program](#) aims to alleviate financial hardships active-duty service members face, including activated Guard/Reserve members, and their families due to deployment or military-related activities. Offering grants of up to \$2,500 for daily necessities. By paying creditors directly, Unmet Needs ensures that the needs of military families are met during challenging times. To qualify for the grant, review the [eligibility criteria](#).



Center for Minority Veterans (CMV)

The [CMV](#), as part of the VA, stands as a model for collaboration across agencies, aiming to provide equitable services to all veterans irrespective of race, origin, religion, or gender. With a focus on process improvement and customer satisfaction, the center ensures that VA executes its mission in the most fair, efficient, and compassionate manner possible. Their goal is to deliver dignity and a satisfactory quality of life to every

veteran, honoring their service to the nation with gratitude and dedication to their mission.

NEWS UPDATES



Veteran Advocates Urge Supreme Court to Reject Laws Criminalizing Homelessness

Veteran advocates are deeply concerned about the [potential ramifications](#) of arguments presented to the Supreme Court in the case of Johnson v. City of Grants Pass, which focuses on laws criminalizing homelessness in an Oregon town. The regulations in question impose fines and even jail time for sleeping outside in public areas, a measure aimed at managing homeless encampments. However, courts have historically ruled against such laws, emphasizing that individuals cannot be punished simply for being homeless, especially without adequate support services.

This legal battle comes amid a nationwide increase in homelessness among veterans, prompting 44 veterans advocacy groups to file an amicus brief with the Supreme Court opposing the penalties. Advocates argue that penalizing homelessness only exacerbates the challenges faced by vulnerable populations, hindering access to crucial support services and benefits. Demonstrators gathered outside the court in protest, advocating for a focus on housing solutions rather than punitive measures.



Expansion of Cancer Diagnosis and Treatment Program for Veterans

The VA has announced an [expansion of its "Close to Me" cancer care program](#) as part of the Biden Cancer Moonshot initiative. By the end of October 2025, this

expansion will provide new cancer diagnosis, treatment, and surveillance services to an additional 9,000 veterans across 30 locations. Under the program, VA clinicians travel to nearby community-based outpatient clinics, particularly in rural areas, to offer comprehensive cancer care, reducing the need for veterans to travel long distances for treatment. With 0 reported medical emergencies during treatment, high patient satisfaction, and a 99 percent treatment adherence rate, the program has already benefited nearly 500 veterans since its inception in 2021, saving over \$1.9 million in medication costs.



Reports of Mediocre Disability Exams by VA Contractors

Senator Elizabeth Warren has urged the VA to review the quality of its privatized disability benefits exams [following reports of inadequate treatment of veterans](#). In a letter to VA Secretary Denis McDonough, Warren highlighted complaints from constituents regarding contractor examiners' failures to review veterans' service treatment records and the unconventional locations of exams, such as co-working offices and hotel rooms. Warren demanded answers to questions about contractor eligibility requirements, quality measurement, wait times for exams, and how appeals after contracted exams compare to appeals after exams by VA doctors. She emphasized the financial and emotional hardships endured by veterans due to inadequate exams and slow appeals processes, urging improvements to ensure veterans receive the benefits they deserve.



Veterans Who Are Younger, Female, and LGBTQ Report More Mental Health Issues

A recent report reveals that female, LGBTQ, and post-9/11 veterans are more likely to experience serious psychological distress compared to other veteran groups. Despite

this, younger veterans from the post-9/11 era are also more inclined to seek mental health services and treatment for drug or alcohol abuse. The shifting demographics of the veteran population, including increased racial and ethnic diversity and a growing number of women and LGBTQ individuals, highlight the need for tailored healthcare services. Drawing from data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Department of Health and Human Services, the report underscores the importance of understanding the diverse needs of veterans to inform policy decisions. As the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Defense Department strive to expand healthcare options for specific populations, such as LGBTQ veterans, the report emphasizes the importance of embracing generational shifts in mental health awareness to better support veterans' needs.

[More About the Study](#)



Veterans Defrauded Out of GI Bill Benefits Could Get Them Restored Under House-Passed Bill

The House passed the [Student Veteran Benefit Restoration Act](#), which aims to restore GI Bill benefits for veterans defrauded by educational institutions. Under the bill, the VA would have the authority to reinstate benefits for veterans impacted by fraudulent behavior, addressing a longstanding injustice facing these veterans. While the bill still awaits approval by the Senate, advocates view its passage as a crucial step toward rectifying the situation. Advocates emphasize that the current law lacks provisions for restoring benefits solely due to fraud, leaving defrauded veterans with limited recourse.

Although estimates on the number of veterans affected vary, proponents argue that restoring GI Bill benefits is essential to fulfilling the promise of quality education for veterans. While the bill represents a bipartisan compromise and includes additional protections for accused schools, advocates pledge to continue advocating for broader reforms to ensure that all defrauded veterans receive the benefits they deserve.



280,000 New Veterans Sign Up For Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act Benefits While Some Are Still Left Out

The VA has enrolled [over 280,000 new veterans](#) and resolved about 900,000 new toxic exposure claims under the PACT Act expansion, an initiative accelerated by the Biden administration. The act, effective as of March 5, extends VA health coverage to veterans exposed to various toxic substances during their military service, including those who didn't deploy. These exposures encompass a wide range of hazards, from burn pits and sand to depleted uranium and chemical weapons. The move seeks to address the health needs of veterans spanning different conflicts, eliminating cost-sharing for a host of illnesses linked to toxic exposures. However, challenges persist for veterans who served at Karshi Khanabad Air Base (K2), where severe contamination poses health risks not fully covered by existing legislation. Despite progress, efforts continue to ensure comprehensive care, recognition, and compensation for all veterans affected by toxic exposures.

SUCCESS STORY



Do you have a success story you would like to share? If you are a grantee who helped a veteran who is struggling with housing or employment, we would love to hear from you.

[Submit Your Success Stories](#)

