

# NVTAC Monthly Newsletter: July 2024

## Monthly Newsletter

July 2024



## JULY SPOTLIGHT



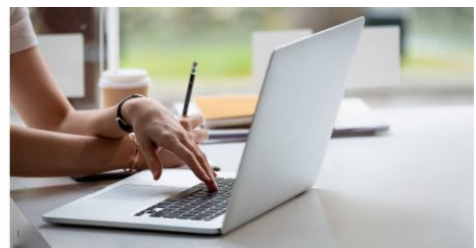
### **Biden Pardons Thousands of LGBTQ Veterans, Addressing Decades of Discrimination**

In a historic move, President Joe Biden will [pardon thousands of LGBTQ veterans](#) who were criminally charged and discharged due to their sexual orientation. The White House estimates that veterans convicted between 1951 and 2013 could qualify for pardons, enabling access to U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits, though applications are required. This decision comes amid advocacy from veterans' groups and LGBTQ organizations for the Biden administration to address discriminatory military practices and upgrade discharges for those affected. While the clemency won't automatically revise "bad paper" discharges, it represents significant progress in addressing historical injustices against LGBTQ service members.

## RESOURCES



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



## National Minority Mental Health Awareness Month: Supporting Veterans and Veteran Service Providers

National Minority Mental Health Awareness Month, observed in July, focuses attention on mental health challenges in minority communities. The National Veterans' Training Institute (NVTI) offers several resources to support the mental health and well-being of veterans as well as those serving veterans.

[Empowering Veteran Service Providers: A Guide to Understanding Post-Traumatic Stress \(PTS\) and Opioid Use](#) presents information about PTS and opioid use among veterans, promoting effective and empathetic support.

NVTI's Useful Resources page offers specific categories focused on providing support and resources for mental health including:

- [Suicide Prevention, Mental Health, and Burnout Resources](#): Provides practical tools to mitigate suicide risks and burnout. Explore the resources.
- [Serving Veterans with Substance Use Disorders](#): Focuses on the unique challenges of serving veterans with substance use disorders, ensuring those veterans can receive the necessary support.

The NVTI podcast, [Episode 15: Addressing Burnout and Secondary Trauma for Veteran Service Providers](#), discusses strategies for addressing burnout and secondary trauma among veteran service providers promoting better mental health for those who serve our veterans.



## Things Every Veteran Must Do to Properly Work a Conference or Job Fair

[Military.com](#) released a list of [10 things every veteran should do when planning to attend a conference, networking event, or job fair](#). Preparation is key. Veterans should start by planning their attire and transportation and setting clear goals. Veterans should research attendees and speakers to facilitate meaningful conversations and ensure they arrive early. Bringing business cards or a virtual alternative, sitting in a visible location, and preparing questions to engage actively are essential. Following up on discussions during breaks, keeping detailed notes, and performing a self-assessment post-event to identify successes and areas for improvement are recommended. Lastly, following up with new contacts is crucial to maintaining connections and capitalizing on the event's opportunities.

## NEWS UPDATES



### **Veterans Face Uphill Battle for Dental Care Despite Service-Connected Injuries**

Marine Corps veteran Jeremy Williams, injured in a 2006 roadside bomb attack in Iraq, has faced prolonged struggles to receive adequate dental care from the VA. Despite his service-connected injuries, Williams has had to spend tens of thousands of dollars out-of-pocket for dental treatments. His frustration is compounded by the VA's slow response and inadequate dental coverage for veterans, a common issue highlighted by advocates. While the VA has increased dental staff and plans to expand services, many veterans, like Williams, continue to experience significant barriers to accessing necessary dental care. Legislative efforts are underway to improve VA dental coverage, but substantial challenges remain.

[Read Williams' Story Here](#)



### **Private Firms Illegally Profit from Veterans' Benefits Expansion**

In the two years since the Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act expanded veterans' benefits, over a million disability claims have been approved. However, numerous private firms are illegally profiting by charging veterans for assistance in filing these claims. Despite federal laws prohibiting such practices, loopholes, and lack of penalties have allowed these companies to operate, often misleading veterans into paying for services that are otherwise free through organizations like the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW). The PACT Act, which aims to provide extensive benefits for veterans exposed to toxic substances, has inadvertently amplified these exploitative practices. Veterans are advised to seek free assistance from accredited sources to avoid falling prey to these profiteering firms.

[Read about the Firms Illegally Profiting on Veterans' Benefits](#)



## **VA Medical Center in Aurora Halts Heart Surgeries Amid Leadership-Induced 'Culture of Fear'**

The VA medical center in Aurora, Colorado, paused heart surgeries for over a year due to leadership changes that created a "culture of fear," according to the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG). Reports revealed that cardiac surgeries were halted from June to July 2022 and again from September 2022 to October 2023 without informing higher authorities of the longer suspension.

The toxic work environment and staff resignations compromised patient safety, leading to a significant delay in procedures until a contract with the University of Colorado brought in new surgical teams. Investigations found that leadership's public belittlement and disregard for staff concerns resulted in resignations and an unsafe work atmosphere. The hospital's director and chief of staff were reassigned or resigned following these findings. Recommendations for improvement included a thorough review of operations, staffing, leadership, and standardization of roles to prevent similar issues in the future.

[More about the VA Medical Center in Aurora Scandal](#)



## **VA Announces \$10 Million Initiative for Veteran Suicide Prevention Strategies**

The VA announced [\\$10 million in funding for states, territories, and Tribal governments to enhance veteran suicide prevention strategies](#) through cooperative



agreements. This funding will help establish and manage suicide mortality review committees, which will analyze suicide deaths to understand local trends better and inform data-driven prevention strategies. This initiative supports the VA's National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide, the Biden-Harris administration's efforts to reduce military and veteran suicides, and President Biden's Unity Agenda. It also aligns with the Governor's Challenge, a collaboration to develop best practices for suicide prevention among service members, veterans, and their families. Awards will be made by September 30, 2024, with applications open until July 24, 2024.

## EVENTS

# CONQUER



### **Connect and Conquer: Employment Strategies for Female Veterans and Spouses Master Class**

The [Connect and Conquer: Employment Strategies for Female Veterans and Spouses Master Class](#) is a 60-minute session designed to help female veterans and spouses leverage their network to secure desirable jobs. The class will cover how to identify the best job opportunities through networking, explore employer programs tailored for them, navigate interview traps, and present their authentic selves to achieve job satisfaction.

Date: Wednesday, July 24, 2024, at 4 p.m. EDT



## **Nine-Week Mindful Self-Compassion Group at VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System (VAGLAHS)**

At the Center for Mindfulness at the VAGLAHS, veterans can participate in a [nine-week mindful self-compassion group](#) that teaches mindfulness and self-compassion techniques to address thoughts, feelings, and challenges with kindness. The program includes a three-hour silent retreat and combines ancient mindfulness practices with self-compassion training, developed by Drs. Kirsten Neff and Christopher Germer.

Dr. Susan Steinberg-Oren, a clinical psychologist, emphasizes three components: mindfulness, common humanity, and self-kindness, helping veterans validate their pain, recognize shared human experiences, and treat themselves with compassion. Navy Veteran Philip Levin credits the program with improving his self-connection and changing his negative self-talk. Interested veterans can learn more on the [Center for Mindfulness](#) page or through their provider.

## **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 at [contact@nvtac.org](mailto:contact@nvtac.org)

# OUTREACH AT NVTAC

The NVTAC Outreach Coach is available to provide information, answer questions, and guide interested organizations through the process of getting involved with HVRP. If you know of organizations that could benefit from learning more about HVRP, you can refer them to NVTAC Outreach Coach Miranda Moffat at:

[Moffat.Miranda.M@dol.gov](mailto:Moffat.Miranda.M@dol.gov)

(734) 406-7525

