

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL



October 2009

The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete.

EMERGENCY CHECKS TO STUDENTS AWAITING EDUCATION BENEFITS

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has authorized checks for up to \$3,000 to be given to veteran-students who have applied for VA educational benefits and who have not yet received their payment.

Starting Friday, October 2, 2009, veterans currently enrolled in school under a VA education program (Chapter 33 - Post-9/11 GI Bill; Chapter 30 - Montgomery GI Bill; Chapter 1606 - Montgomery GI Bill Selected Reserve; and Chapter 1607 - Reserve Education Assistance Program) can go to the Regional Office with a government issued photo ID (Driver's License, Military ID, etc.) and proof of enrollment in school (class schedule, admission letter, enrollment verification letter, etc.) to request advance payment of their education benefits. Recipients will be required to sign for the payment upon receipt. VA officials suggest students check their mail boxes and banking accounts before leaving home, since some veterans will find their checks have already arrived.

Veterans can also apply online at www.va.gov, starting October 2. The online application will guide veterans through the process to supply needed information. On-line applicants will receive their emergency payments through the mail after processing.

These payments are only authorized for veterans who did not receive a payment on October 1, 2009. These payments are not available to dependents of veterans enrolled under Chapter 35 - Dependents Education Assistance.

Veterans may choose to receive a payment of less than \$3000, however, only one advance payment is authorized regardless of the amount. VA officials emphasize that \$3,000 is the maximum payment, with many veterans receiving smaller payments based upon their likely monthly education benefits. After the advance payment has been recouped, education payments will be made on the normal schedule - the beginning of each month for the preceding month.

The funds VA will give to veterans are advance payments of the earned benefits for education. The payment will be recouped from future VA payments. However, if school attendance is stopped during the semester, recoupment by VA will not be possible and repayment of the advance payment will be required.

As information is updated it will be available from the VA Education National Call Center at 1-888-442-4551 or the education website at www.gibll.va.gov.

VA WARNS VETERANS OF TELEPHONE PRESCRIPTION SCAM

(VA News Release) WASHINGTON - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is warning veterans not to give credit card numbers over the phone to callers claiming to update VA prescription information. Veteran Service Organizations have brought to VA's attention that callers are misrepresenting the VA to gain personal information over the phone. They say VA recently changed procedures for dispensing prescriptions and ask for the veteran's credit card number.

VA has not changed its processes for dispensing prescription medicines, nor has VA changed its long-standing commitment to protect the personal information of this nation's veterans.

Veterans with questions about VA health services should contact the nearest VA medical center or call, toll-free, 1-877-222-8387.

VA'S SUICIDE PREVENTION PROGRAM ADDS CHAT SERVICE

(VA News Release) WASHINGTON - The Suicide Prevention campaign of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is expanding its outreach to all veterans by piloting an online, one-to-one "chat service" for veterans who prefer reaching out for assistance using the Internet. Called "Veterans Chat," the new service enables veterans, their families and friends to go online where they can anonymously chat with a trained VA counselor.

If a "chatter" is determined to be in a crisis, the counselor can take immediate steps to transfer the person to the VA

Suicide Prevention Hotline, where further counseling and referral services are provided and crisis intervention steps can be taken.

This online feature is intended to reach out to all veterans who may or may not be enrolled in the VA health care system and provide them with online access to the Suicide Prevention Lifeline. It is meant to provide veterans with an anonymous way to access VA's suicide prevention services.

Veterans, family members or friends can access Veterans Chat through the suicide prevention Web site (www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org). There is a "Veterans" tab on the left-hand side of the website that will take them directly to Veteran Resource Information. On this page, they can see the Hotline number (1-800-273-TALK), and click on the "Veterans Chat" tab on the right side of the Web page to enter.

Veterans retain anonymity by entering whatever names they choose once they enter the one-on-one chat. They are then joined by a counselor who is trained to provide information and respond to the requests and concerns of the caller. If the counselor decides the caller is in a crisis, the counselor will encourage the veteran to call the Suicide Prevention Hotline, where a trained suicide prevention counselor will determine whether crisis intervention techniques are required.

The chat line is not intended to be a crisis response line. VA's trained counselors staff the chat line 24 hours a day, seven days a week. VA's suicide prevention hotline is also staffed continuously. Chat responders are trained in an intervention method specifically developed for the chat line to assist people with emotional distress and concerns. There are procedures they can use to transfer chatters in crisis to the hotline for more immediate assistance.

The pilot program, which has been in operation since July 3, 2009, has already had positive results. In one instance, the online counselor determined that a veteran in the chat required immediate assistance. The counselor convinced the veteran to provide the counselor with a home telephone number and then remained in the chat room with the veteran while the hotline staff called the number and talked to the veteran's mother. The hotline counselor worked with the veteran's mother to convince the veteran to be admitted to a medical facility for further treatment.

Both Veterans Chat and the VA's Suicide Prevention Hotline have been established under the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, which was established through collaboration between VA and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) of the Department of Health and Human Services.

Since becoming operational in July 2007, VA's Suicide Prevention Hotline has received more than 150,000 calls, resulting in 4,000 rescues.

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

SUICIDE PREVENTION 1-800-273-8255

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 1-800-827-1000

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022 1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)

Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications 1-877-823-2378

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) 1-877-838-2778

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline (medical care) - 1-877-222-8387

VA Health Revenue Service (information on amounts owed to VA Medical Centers) 1-866-793-4591

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 1-800-669-8477

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -

CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023

CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024

Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 1-800-733-8387

National Cemeteries

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL 727-398-9426
6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 33513 352-793-7740
6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 33467 561-649-6489
4083 Lannie Rd, Jacksonville FL 32218 904-358-3510
Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL 850-453-4108/4846
9810 State Hwy 72, Sarasota FL 877-861-9840

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 5109 Russell Rd Quantico VA 22134-3903 1-800-697-6947

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120 1-888-244-6711

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit - Chicago VA Regional Office 1-800-829-4833

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: www.va.gov

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) www.warms.vba.va.gov

St. Petersburg VA Regional Office:

www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete

Property Management (sale of VA-repossessed homes):

www.ocwen.com

Federal employment: www.usajobs.opm.gov

Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs: www.floridavets.org

"Florida Vets First:" www.FloridaVetsFirst.com

Library of Congress (information on pending legislation) thomas.loc.gov