

# NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

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



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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.benefits.va.gov/stpetersburg](http://www.benefits.va.gov/stpetersburg).

**CAREGIVER LEGISLATION** On May 5, President Barack Obama signed the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 into law (Public Law 111-163). The Act will allow VA to provide unprecedented benefits to caregivers who support the veterans who have sacrificed for this Nation.

Under the new law, primary caregivers of OEF/OIF veterans may be eligible to receive a stipend and access to healthcare coverage if they are not already entitled to care or services under a health plan contract, including Medicare, Medicaid or worker's compensation. Mental health counseling, including marriage and family counseling, will also be provided. Caregivers may also be eligible for travel, lodging and per diem when they accompany the veteran for care or attend training.

**What does this new law mean to me?** VA recognizes there is no blanket solution to implement the new provisions in the Act for veterans and their caregivers, many of whom may reside in different regions and living situations across the country. This will require considerable time to implement and to ensure VA has the opportunity to work with Congress and veteran stakeholders on the technical and budgetary challenges involved. Workgroups with subject matter experts are already addressing the clinical components of the new law, and VA will be submitting an implementation plan to Congress within 180 days for approval by the end of 2010.

VA has not yet determined the amount of the stipend primary caregivers will receive. However, they will be based on the amount and degree of personal care services the Veteran requires and will be comparable to the cost of local care-giving services.

**What is VA doing now?** VA has long advocated for caregivers as vital partners in providing care worthy of the sacrifices by America's veterans and service members and has designated a Caregiver Support Point of Contact at each VA Medical Center to coordinate caregiver activities and serve as a resource expert for veterans, their families and VA providers.

Additionally, several programs/resources are already in place for all veteran caregivers including:

*In-Home and Community Based Care:* This includes skilled home health care, homemaker home health aide services, community adult day health care and home based primary care.

*Respite care:* Designed to relieve the family caregiver from the burden of caring for a chronically ill or disabled veteran at home, respite services can include in-home care, a short stay in an institutional setting or adult day health care.

*Caregiver education and training programs:* VA currently provides multiple training opportunities which include pre-discharge care instruction and specialized caregiver programs in multiple severe traumas such as Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Spinal Cord Injury/Disorders, and Blind Rehabilitation. VA has a caregiver assistance healthy living center on My HealtheVet, as well as caregiver information on the VA's main Web page health site; both Websites include information on VA and community resources and caregiver health and wellness.

*Family support services:* These support groups can be face to face or on the telephone. They include family counseling, spiritual and pastoral care, family leisure and recreational activities and temporary lodging in Fisher Houses.

*Other benefits:* VA provides durable medical equipment and prosthetic and sensory aides to improve function, financial assistance with home modification to improve access and mobility, and transportation assistance for some Veterans to and from medical appointments.

## **2010 SURVEY OF VETERAN ENROLLEES' HEALTH AND RELIANCE UPON VA**

VA is conducting the 2010 update of the national Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Telephone Survey of Enrollees. The purpose of the survey is to provide information that is incorporated into annual VHA projections of enrollment, utilization, and expenditures, as well as into a variety of high level VHA budget and policy related analyses.

The survey will be fully initiated the week of May 24, 2010. Interviewing will continue for 12 weeks. Veteran enrollees selected for the survey will receive a letter that provides information about the survey and the contractor conducting the survey on behalf of the VA. Veterans' support in this survey will help ensure that VA provides the best care possible, where it is needed, when it is needed, and by whom it is needed.

**VA MAKES FILING CLAIMS EASIER AND FASTER FOR VETERANS** (VA News Release) WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is reducing the paperwork and expediting the process for veterans seeking compensation for disabilities related to their military service. VA has shortened application forms to reduce paperwork. The new forms, which are being made available on VA's Web site at [www.va.gov/vaforms](http://www.va.gov/vaforms), include:

A shortened VA Form 21-526 for veterans applying for the first-time to VA for disability compensation or pension benefits. This form has been cut in half – from 23 to 10 pages. It is immediately available via Web download, and will be available through VA's online claim-filing process later this summer at <http://vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp/main.asp>

VA Form 21-526b for veterans seeking increased benefits for conditions already determined by VA to be service-connected. This new form more clearly describes the information needed to support claims for increased benefits.

In order to make the claims process faster, VA has also introduced two new forms for veterans participating in the new fully developed claim (FDC) program, which is one of the fastest means to receive a claims decision. If VA receives all of the available evidence when the claim is submitted, the remaining steps in the claims-decision process can be expedited without compromising quality.

To participate in the FDC program, veterans should complete and submit an FDC Certification and VA Form 21-526EZ, "Fully Developed Claim (Compensation)," for a compensation claim, or a VA Form 21-527EZ, "Fully Developed Claim (Pension)," for a pension claim.

The forms were designed specifically for the FDC program. These six-page application forms include notification to applicants of all information and evidence necessary to "fully develop" and substantiate their claims. With this notification, veterans and their representatives can "fully develop" their claims before submission to VA for processing.

Along with the application and certification, veterans must also submit all relevant and pertinent evidence to "fully develop" their claims. A claim submitted as "fully developed" may still require some additional evidence to be obtained by VA, to include certain federal records and a VA medical examination.

## **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 352-793-7740

6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 561-649-6489

4083 Lannie Rd, Jacksonville FL 904-766-5222

Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL 850-453-4108/4846

9810 State Hwy 72, Sarasota FL 877-861-9840

104 Marine St, St Augustine FL 352-793-7740

**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](http://www.va.gov)

**VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS)** [www.warms.vba.va.gov](http://www.warms.vba.va.gov)

**St. Petersburg VA Regional Office:**

[www.benefits.va.gov/stpetersburg](http://www.benefits.va.gov/stpetersburg)

**Property Management (sale of VA-repossessed homes):** <http://va.reotrans.com/>

**Federal employment:** [www.usajobs.opm.gov](http://www.usajobs.opm.gov)

**Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs:** [www.floridavets.org](http://www.floridavets.org)

**"Florida Vets First:"** [www.FloridaVetsFirst.com](http://www.FloridaVetsFirst.com)

**Library of Congress (information on pending legislation)** [thomas.loc.gov](http://thomas.loc.gov)