

# 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 <http://www.benefits.va.gov/stpetersburg/>.

## **VA ANNOUNCES CHANGES TO EMERGENCY CARE PAYMENT POLICY** (VA News Release)

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs announced today a change in regulations regarding payments for emergency care provided to eligible veterans in non-VA facilities. The new regulation extends VA's authority to pay for emergency care provided to eligible veterans at non-VA facilities until the veterans can be safely transferred to a VA medical facility. More than 100,000 Veterans are estimated to be affected by the new rules, at a cost of about \$44 million annually.

VA operates 121 emergency departments across the country that provide resuscitative therapy and stabilization in life-threatening situations. They operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week. VA also has 46 urgent care units, which provide care for patients without scheduled appointments who need immediate medical or psychiatric attention.

## **NEW LAW CHANGE INCREASES INSURANCE COVERAGE FOR VETERANS** (VA News Release)

WASHINGTON – Some veterans covered under the Veterans Group Life Insurance program (VGLI) now have the opportunity to increase their coverage to the current maximum coverage under the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) program. Under the Veterans' Benefits Act of 2010, enacted on October 13, 2010, veterans can increase their coverage by \$25,000 at each five-year anniversary date of their policy to the current legislated maximum SGLI coverage, presently, \$400,000. To date, approximately 21 percent of eligible veterans have taken advantage of this opportunity, resulting in nearly \$113 million of new coverage being issued.

The VGLI program allows newly discharged veterans to convert their SGLI coverage they had while in the service to a civilian program. Before enactment of this law, veterans could not have more VGLI than the amount of SGLI they had at the time of separation from service. For example, those who got out of the service prior to Sept. 1, 2005, when the maximum SGLI coverage was \$250,000, were limited to \$250,000 in VGLI coverage.

Now on their first five-year anniversary, these veterans can elect to increase their coverage to \$275,000. On their next five-year anniversary, they can increase the coverage to \$300,000, and so forth.

The additional coverage can be issued regardless of the veteran's health. To be eligible to purchase this additional coverage, the veteran must have active VGLI coverage; have less than the current legislated maximum coverage of \$400,000; request the additional coverage during the 120-day period prior to each five-year anniversary date; and be less than 60 years of age on the five-year anniversary date of his or her coverage. Eligible veterans are notified of this opportunity a week before the start of the 120-day period prior to their anniversary date, and twice more before the actual anniversary date.

For more information about VA's Insurance Program or other VA benefits, go to [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) or call 1-800-827-1000. Veterans are also encouraged to visit VA's web portal eBenefits - Insurance.

## **VETERANS AND BENEFICIARIES RECEIVE 2012 COST OF LIVING ADJUSTMENT** (VA News Release)

WASHINGTON – Veterans, their families, and survivors receiving benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs saw a 3.6 percent increase in their compensation and pension benefits beginning January 1. The new compensation rates will range from \$127 monthly for a disability rated at 10 percent to \$2,769 monthly for 100 percent.

The cost of living adjustments (COLAs) also apply to disability and death pension recipients, survivors receiving Dependency and Indemnity Compensation, disabled veterans receiving automobile and clothing allowances, and other benefits. The full rates are available on the Internet at [www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Rates/#BM01](http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Rates/#BM01).

Under federal law, COLAs for VA's compensation and pension rates are the same percentage as for Social Security benefits. The last COLA for VA benefits was in 2008 when the last Social Security increase occurred.

Veterans receiving VA disability and pension payments can now check their new 2012 COLA increase online. Veterans, their dependents and survivors are encouraged to sign up for eBenefits, VA's popular website that recently crossed the one million mark in registrations. In close collaboration, the Department of Defense (DoD) and VA jointly developed the eBenefits portal (<https://www.ebenefits.va.gov>) as a single secure point of access for online benefit information and tools to perform multiple self-service functions, such as checking monthly benefit rates, filing a claim, or checking its status.

Veterans may enroll in eBenefits and obtain a Premium account by verifying their identity in-person at the nearest regional office or online depending on their status, or calling VA's toll free number at 1-800-827-1000. Service members may also enroll in eBenefits using their Common Access Card at any time during their military service, or before they leave during their Transition Assistance Program briefings.

VA is enhancing its online eBenefits services with newer features such as online selection of veterans organizations or other advocates to represent applicants for benefits where representation is desired. Another new feature automates messages sent to veterans and service members to notify them of benefits that they may be eligible to receive based on recent life events, such as military separation or marriage. The site also continues to consolidate access to other VA and DoD systems through the portal, recently incorporating a gateway to vocational rehabilitation benefits under VA's VetSuccess program.

Web access to information and benefits management tools for service members, veterans and their families is part of VA and DoD's lifetime engagement strategy from an individual's entry into the military through the twilight years in civilian life as a veteran.

For more information about VA benefits or new payment rates, visit [www.vba.va.gov](http://www.vba.va.gov) or call 1-800-827-1000.

#### **VA PUBLISHES REGULATION ON NEWBORN CARE**

(VA News Release) WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs has published a regulation officially amending VA's medical benefits package to include up to seven days of medical care for newborns delivered by women veterans who are receiving VA maternity care benefits. Newborn care includes routine post-delivery care and all other medically necessary services that are in accord with generally accepted standards of medical practice. The effective date of the rule is December 19, 2011, but the regulation applies retroactively to newborn care provided to eligible women veterans on or after May 5, 2011.

VA has women Veterans program managers at every VA medical center to help women Veterans learn more about the health care benefits they have earned with their service. For more information about VA healthcare for women Veterans, visit <http://www.womenshealth.va.gov>.

#### **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:**

<http://www.benefits.va.gov/stpetersburg/>

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

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

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

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