

# NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

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



August 2013

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/>.

## **POST-9/11 GI BILL CELEBRATES FOURTH**

**ANNIVERSARY** (VA News Release) Thursday, August 1, marked the fourth anniversary of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. VA has issued approximately \$30 billion in Post 9/11 GI-Bill benefit payments since its inception in August 2009 and helped nearly 1 million Service members, Veterans, and their families pursue their education.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill is the most extensive educational assistance program since the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, more commonly known as the GI Bill, was signed into law.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill provides comprehensive educational support through tuition, books and housing allowance to people with at least 90 days of total service after September 10, 2001, or people discharged with a service-connected disability after 30 days.

Approved training under the Post-9/11 GI Bill includes graduate and undergraduate degrees, vocational and technical training, on-the-job training, flight training, correspondence training, licensing and national testing programs, entrepreneurship training, and tutorial assistance.

VA is now processing benefit payments for currently enrolled students in an average of seven days, largely as a result of VA's ongoing transformation to electronic claims processing. The delivery of Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits has been automated and processing time cut in half through implementation of VA's Long Term Solution, an end-to-end claims processing system that uses rules-based, industry-standard technologies.

VA is working with schools, community organizations and other partners to ensure beneficiaries have all the information they need to use their education benefits, including education plans for all military and Veteran education beneficiaries; a designated point of contact for academic and financial advice at each school; and an end to fraudulent and aggressive recruiting techniques and misrepresentation.

In April 2012 Executive Order 13607 established the Principles of Excellence, offering guidelines that promote student success under the program and ensure accurate information about institutions and their courses. Over 6,000 educational and training institutions have agreed to comply with these principles.

VA is working with schools, community organizations and other partners to ensure beneficiaries have all the information they need to use their education benefits, including education plans for all military and Veteran education beneficiaries; a designated point of contact for academic and financial advice at each school; and an end to fraudulent and aggressive recruiting techniques and misrepresentation.

This summer, VA is launching new tools to help beneficiaries learn more about their vocational aptitudes and select an education institution. The 'Factors to Consider When Choosing a School' guide offers future students steps to take when researching, choosing, and attending a school. CareerScope® is a free, new tool featured on <http://www.gibill.va.gov> that measures a student's aptitude and interests through a self-administered online test, identifying potential career paths. The new GI Bill® Comparison Tool allows students to research and compare schools, including key indicators like average student loan debt and graduation rates.

For more information on the Post-9/11 GI Bill and other Veteran education programs, visit <http://www.gibill.va.gov>.

**165 MILLION PAGES HAVE BEEN SCANNED AND UPLOADED TO HELP TRANSFORM PAPER-BASED CLAIMS PROCESS TO DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT** (VA News Release) - WASHINGTON—The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has reached another milestone in its disability claims transformation process – over 30 percent of the current disability claims inventory is now digital and accessible to claim raters in VA's electronic claims processing system, which has now been fielded ahead of schedule at all 56 Regional Offices across the country.

This effort is a key part of transforming outdated paper processing into an electronic system that is delivering disability claims decisions for Veterans more quickly. In addition, all incoming paper claims are transformed into digital records for electronic processing using VA's new claims processing software and electronic repository.

VA established the Veterans Claims Intake Program (VCIP) to maximize the use of electronic intake for all claims, creating digital, searchable files. The document conversion service, part of VCIP, has now been implemented at all 56 VA regional claims processing offices across the country. VCIP is a capability that enables high-speed document scanning to help VA end its reliance on paper-based claims. With VCIP, a new paper claim that is received at a regional office is recorded in VA's electronic claims processing system—called the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS)—and shipped to one of three document conversion locations to be scanned and converted into digital images. The document images, which are made keyword searchable in the conversion, are placed into a VBMS electronic folder for use by the VA employees who work the Veteran's claim.

Digital conversion improves processing timeliness by eliminating paper folder transport, reducing manual data entry, streamlining the review of medical records, and standardizing correspondence with Veterans and beneficiaries. To date, VA has converted more than 165 million pages of claims documents to digital images, and continues to add over 1 million images into VBMS every day.

At the same time, VA is working closely with the Department of Defense (DoD) and Veterans Service Organizations to urge Veterans and separating service members to file their disability claims electronically and, when possible, to file a Fully Developed Claim through the joint DoD/VA online portal, eBenefits ([www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits](http://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits)). Registered eBenefits users with a Premium account can file a claim online, track the status, and access information on a variety of other benefits. Additionally, eBenefits users can take advantage of 50 self-service features that both VA and DoD have made available.

VA continues to prioritize disability claims for homeless Veterans, those experiencing extreme financial hardship, the terminally ill, former Prisoners of War, Medal of Honor recipients, and Veterans filing Fully Developed Claims. (<http://www.benefits.va.gov/fdc/>). Claims for Wounded Warriors separating from the military for medical reasons will continue to be handled separately and on a priority basis with DoD through the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES).

Veterans can learn more about disability benefits, and register and/or upgrade to a free Premium account on the joint Department of Defense/VA web portal eBenefits at [www.ebenefits.va.gov](http://www.ebenefits.va.gov).

## **VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:**

### **SUICIDE PREVENTION 1-800-273-8255**

**National Call Center for Homeless Veterans**  
1-877-4AID-VET (1-877-424-3838)

**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) 1-800-733-8387 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

### **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)** - 711

### **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)

**VA Workload and Performance Reports;**  
<http://www.vba.va.gov/reports/>

**St. Petersburg VA Regional Office:**  
<http://www.benefits.va.gov/stpetersburg/>

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

**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)