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WHAT EVERY VETERAN SHOULD KNOW

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VA Expands Access to Community Care for Veterans

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has announced a significant update to its Community Care Program, making it easier for veterans to receive medical treatment from non-VA providers when needed. This change is designed to reduce delays and improve access, particularly when VA facilities cannot meet certain care needs in a timely or convenient manner.

What Is the Community Care Program?

The Community Care Program was established under the MISSION Act of 2018, which allows eligible veterans to receive care from healthcare providers outside the VA system—at the VA's expense—under specific circumstances. The goal is to ensure veterans get timely, high-quality care, even if that care isn't available at their local VA facility.

Veterans may qualify for community care if:

- The needed services are not available at a VA facility.
- The veteran faces long wait times for VA appointments (more than 20 days for primary care or mental health, 28 days for specialty care).

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- The drive time to VA care is excessive (over 30 minutes for primary or mental health care, over 60 minutes for specialty care).
- The veteran lives in a state or U.S. territory without a full-service VA hospital.
- VA services do not meet quality standards.
- Receiving care in the community is in the best medical interest of the veteran.
- The veteran qualifies under grandfathered provisions from the previous Veterans Choice Program.

These decisions have traditionally been made jointly by the veteran and their VA provider, but until now, they required a secondary review by another VA physician—creating an added layer of delay.

What's New?

Effective immediately, the VA is removing that extra review step. Thanks to recent changes outlined in the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act, veterans and their referring VA providers can now make final decisions about accessing community care without waiting for a second opinion from another VA doctor.

This update is expected to improve speed and reduce administrative barriers, giving veterans quicker access to the care they need—whether it's in a VA facility or in the community.

What This Means for Veterans and VSOs

For veterans, this means more autonomy in choosing where to receive care—especially when VA options are limited or when it's more practical to see a local provider.

For Veterans Service Officers (VSOs), this change simplifies the process of helping veterans navigate their healthcare options. It also means fewer delays in accessing necessary treatments, particularly in rural or underserved areas.

The VA has committed to training staff across

the Veterans Health Administration to ensure consistent application of the new policy and to uphold the standards outlined in the Dole Act.

Need Help Getting Started?

Veterans enrolled in VA health care who believe they may qualify for community care should speak with their VA provider or contact their local VSO for guidance. You can also find help through the VA's Community Care website or by calling the VA directly.

VA Launches New Reforms to Support Survivors and Dependents

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has announced a major initiative to improve the way it serves the survivors and dependents of deceased veterans and servicemembers.

These changes aim to reduce delays, simplify the claims process, and provide more personalized assistance during what is often a very difficult time.

What's Changing?

As of May 2025, the VA is rolling out three key updates to better support survivors:

- **Restoring the Office of Survivor Assistance (OSA) to its original leadership position:** OSA is being moved back to the Office of the VA Secretary, where it can directly advise on survivor-related policy and ensure survivor voices are heard at the highest level.
- **Launching a dedicated "White-Glove" Survivor Outreach Team:** Based at the Philadelphia Regional Office, this specialized team will guide eligible survivors through every step of the Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) claims process, offering hands-on support.

- Expanding automation to streamline benefits processing: The VA already automates over 1,000 DIC payment actions per day and is now identifying additional ways to use automation to make claims faster and easier for survivors to navigate.

These reforms are intended to remove unnecessary red tape and help survivors access the benefits they've earned with less stress and more clarity, according to the VA.

About the Office of Survivor Assistance (OSA)

The Office of Survivor Assistance was created under the Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2008 to ensure that the needs of survivors and dependents are not overlooked.

OSA serves as the VA's primary advocate for surviving spouses, children, and parents of veterans who have passed away.

Its responsibilities include:

- Advising the VA Secretary on survivor-related policies, programs, and legislative priorities
- Coordinating outreach and communication to ensure survivors are aware of the benefits and services available to them
- Helping survivors navigate the system by providing accurate information and directing them to the right VA resources

How to Contact the Office of Survivor Assistance

Survivors who need assistance or have questions about their benefits can reach out to the Office of Survivor Assistance in several ways:

- Visit the VA's Ask VA portal: ask.va.gov – submit questions, upload documents, and get updates on claims

- Call the VA main information line: 1-800-698-2411
- Speak with a survivor benefits coordinator at your local VA regional office
- Visit VA.gov's survivor benefits section: va.gov/family-member-benefits

New National Center for Warrior Independence to Support Homeless Veterans

On May 9, 2025, the White House announced the establishment of a National Center for Warrior Independence at the West Los Angeles VA Campus.

This initiative is part of a broader effort to expand housing, healthcare, and supportive services for homeless veterans, particularly in the Los Angeles area—home to the highest number of unhoused veterans in the country.

What Is the National Center for Warrior Independence?

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will designate the West LA VA campus as the future National Center for Warrior Independence, with a goal of restoring its capacity to house up to 6,000 homeless veterans by January 2028.

The facility will serve as a centralized hub to help veterans achieve self-sufficiency through coordinated access to housing, mental health and substance use treatment, employment support, and community reintegration services.

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Key Actions Included in the Executive Order:

- Designation of the West LA VA campus as the National Center for Warrior Independence
- Expanded access to care and housing services for homeless veterans nationwide, not just those in Los Angeles
- Collaboration with HUD, HHS, and other federal agencies to align funding and resources in support of the center
- Voucher support for housing provided by the Department of Housing and Urban Development for eligible veterans
- Development of a full action plan within 120 days to scale up services, improve outreach, and restore the center's full housing potential

Supportive Services and Coordination

Veterans who access the National Center will be offered a range of services, including:

- Safe, stable housing on campus
- Access to healthcare, including mental health and substance use disorder treatment
- Workforce reentry programs and life skills support
- Case management and navigation services to ensure sustained recovery and community reintegration

Next Steps for Veterans and VSOs

Veterans in the Los Angeles area experiencing homelessness—or those outside the region who may wish to access services at the new center—are encouraged to speak with their local VA Homeless Program Coordinator or contact the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at 1-877-4AID-VET (1-877-424-3838).

VSOs assisting homeless or at-risk veterans can stay informed about developments through their local VA regional office or the VA's official communications channels.

Additional VA System Improvements Included in the Order:

- Plans to reduce wait times for VA healthcare appointments, including expanded hours and telehealth options
- Feasibility study for expanding services at the Manchester VA Medical Center in New Hampshire
- Cross-agency strategy development to improve healthcare delivery for veterans nationwide
- Continued efforts to ensure accountability and improve performance within VA operations

The goal is to ensure every veteran has the opportunity to recover, rebuild, and regain independence with dignity and support.

Philadelphia to Host 250th Anniversary Celebrations for the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps

This fall, Philadelphia—birthplace of both the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps—will serve as the official site for a weeklong national celebration marking the 250th anniversaries of both military branches. Dubbed Homecoming 250, the event will feature a series of ceremonies, parades, performances, and tributes from October 9–16, with an additional Marine Corps birthday commemoration on November 10.

A Return to Where It All Began

The U.S. Navy and Marine Corps were both founded in Philadelphia during the Revolutionary War.

Independence Hall and nearby landmarks will serve as key backdrops for the commemoration, honoring the legacy of those who served then—and those who serve now.

Highlights of the October events include:

- **Parade of Ships on the Delaware River (Oct. 9):** Active Navy vessels, historic ships, and Coast Guard cutters will sail into port, kicking off the week's activities.
- **Public ship tours (Oct. 9–15):** Visitors will have the opportunity to tour a range of military vessels, including the historic battleship New Jersey and submarine Becuna.
- **Live military performances and ceremonies (Oct. 9–16):** Enjoy exhibitions by the Marine Corps Silent Drill Platoon and music by Navy and Marine Corps bands across Independence National Historical Park.
- **All Veterans Reunion Picnic (Oct. 12):** An inclusive event for veterans of all branches and eras, featuring camaraderie, resources, and service organization booths on Independence Mall.
- **Victory at Sea Concert (Oct. 12):** A patriotic musical performance by the U.S. Navy Band and Marine Drum & Bugle Corps.
- **Memorial service at Christ Church (Oct. 13):** A solemn remembrance for Navy and Marine Corps service members who gave their lives.

Inspiring the Next Generation

As part of the outreach to youth, the 250th Salute to Youth Parade (Oct. 13) will honor ROTC, NROTC, JROTC cadets, and Naval Academy midshipmen—highlighting young people on the path to military service.

The aim is to raise awareness about service opportunities at a time when the armed forces

are facing nationwide recruitment challenges.

Marine Corps 250th Commemoration (Nov. 10)

The Marine Corps will mark its 250th birthday in a series of events centered on its historic roots:

- **Independence Hall Ceremony (Nov. 10):** With remarks from senior leaders in the Navy and Marine Corps.
- **Tun Tavern Site Tribute (Nov. 10):** A celebration of the Marine Corps' birthplace, including a look at reconstruction efforts of the original tavern location.
- **100th Marine Corps Birthday Ball (Nov. 10):** Held in the same hotel ballroom where the very first official Marine Corps Ball took place in 1925.

Why It Matters for Veterans and Families

These commemorations aren't just about honoring the past—they're also a reminder of the strength, resilience, and values that continue to define the U.S. military.

For veterans, this is an opportunity to reconnect with their service branch, meet fellow veterans, and share the significance of their stories with younger generations.

For VSOs, events like Homecoming 250 provide valuable chances to engage with the public, connect veterans to benefits and services, and promote awareness of military history and its ongoing importance.

Plan Your Visit

Events are open to the public, and many are free.

Some larger activities, including sporting events and formal galas, may require tickets. For the latest schedule and access details, [visit homecoming250.org](https://homecoming250.org).

Veterans with SMC, Purple Heart Recognition Urged to Watch for Targeted Scams

Veterans receiving Special Monthly Compensation (SMC), Purple Heart recipients, and those accessing income-based pensions or Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) grants are increasingly being targeted by scammers. These benefits often involve higher monthly payments or public visibility, making recipients prime targets for fraud.

What Types of Scams Are Happening?

Fraud against veterans can take many forms, including:

- Identity theft
- Phishing scams
- Bogus financial or legal services
- Pressure to pay for help with VA benefits that are offered free of charge
- Fraudulent home repair schemes targeting SAH recipients

In many cases, scammers impersonate official agencies or promise faster access to benefits in exchange for fees or personal information. Veterans and families should be especially cautious when dealing with unsolicited phone calls, emails, or door-to-door visits.

How to Protect Your VA Benefits

To help safeguard your benefits, the VA offers these recommendations:

- Never share your VA.gov login details, passwords, or security question answers—even with family or friends.
- Avoid direct deposit into accounts that don't include your name. VA benefits should go into a bank account you can access and that is legally tied to you.

- Only work with accredited representatives when filing claims. You can find one through a Veterans Service Organization (VSO), attorney, or claims agent recognized by the VA.

Understanding Pension Poaching

Pension poaching is a specific scam that targets veterans receiving VA pension or survivors' pension benefits. It typically involves someone advising a veteran to move assets or inflate expenses to qualify for benefits. If a false claim is discovered, the veteran—not the scammer—may be required to repay the money. Always seek help from a trusted, accredited VSO when applying for or adjusting benefits.

Caution for SAH Grant Recipients

Veterans approved for a Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) grant should be extremely cautious when selecting contractors. Tips for protecting yourself during home improvements include:

- Avoid uninvited or high-pressure salespeople.
- Always get multiple estimates and take your time selecting a contractor.
- Check licensing and permits with your city or state before any work begins.
- Insist on a clear, written contract—never sign a blank or vague agreement.
- Don't rush. A trustworthy contractor will let you review the contract and won't pressure you to sign on the spot.

What to Do If You Suspect Fraud

If you think your VA benefit payments are missing, misdirected, or compromised, act quickly: Call the VA at 800-827-1000 for help with benefits and payments. Report suspected fraud or identity theft at VSAFE.gov or call 833-38V-SAFE.

Top Summer 2025 Travel Discounts for Veterans

Planning a summer getaway? Veterans and their families can take advantage of exclusive travel discounts to make their vacations more affordable and enjoyable.

1. American Forces Travel (AFT)

Operated by the Department of Defense in partnership with Priceline, AFT offers up to 50% off on hotels, flights, rental cars, vacation packages, and cruises.

This summer, AFT features special deals in popular destinations like Cancun, Puerto Rico, and Punta Cana, with hotel discounts up to 55%. Additionally, veterans can save up to 20% on Avis or Budget car rentals and up to 15% on U-SAVE rentals.

Exclusive cruise discounts are also available with major lines such as Carnival and Royal Caribbean.

2. Armed Forces Vacation Club (AFVC)

AFVC provides access to resort accommodations worldwide at discounted rates.

Veterans can book 7-night stays in top destinations for as low as \$379. Special promotions are available for travel through September 28, 2025.

3. Carnival Cruise Line

Carnival honors veterans with special military rates on cruises. Every sailing includes a Military Appreciation Day, featuring events and gatherings to recognize service members.

Veterans can also participate in a monthly sweepstakes to win a free cruise.

4. Dollywood Parks & Resorts

Located in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, Dollywood offers discounted tickets and season passes to veterans and their families. Discounts apply to both the theme park and Splash Country water park, with verification through ID.me.

5. Greyhound Bus Lines

Veterans can receive a 10% discount on Greyhound fares year-round through the WeSalute+ program. Additional savings are available by booking in advance or traveling during off-peak times.

6. GOVX

GOVX offers exclusive travel discounts for military personnel, including veterans. Members can access deals on hotels, rental cars, cruises, and tours. New York

7. Military Discount Center

This platform aggregates various discounts available to military members and veterans, including travel-related deals. It's a valuable resource for finding the latest offers on accommodations, transportation, and more.

8. Military OneSource

Through the Information, Tickets, and Travel (ITT) office, Military OneSource provides veterans with access to discounted tickets for special events, area attractions, and travel services.

Before booking, always verify eligibility requirements and availability, as some discounts may have specific conditions or limited timeframes. Taking advantage of these offers can lead to significant savings and a more enjoyable travel experience.



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VA Expands Online Memorials for Veterans Buried Overseas

The VA has added more than 210,000 new memorial pages to its Veterans Legacy Memorial (VLM) website, honoring Americans buried in 26 overseas cemeteries maintained by the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC). This brings the total number of VLM profiles to over 10 million, making it the largest digital tribute platform for veterans. Each page allows family, friends, and the public to leave tributes, upload photos, and share stories about those who served.

The new additions recognize veterans from World War I, World War II, and earlier conflicts—along with 94,000 missing in action or lost at sea. Veterans approved for pre-need burial can also share their own story using the “Your Life, Your Story” feature.

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