

TDVS Benefits Bulletin
24-3

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This month's bulletin is 1,515 words and will take just over 5 minutes of your time.

1 big thing: Veterans Exposed to Toxins and Other Hazards – at home or abroad – Eligible for VA Health Care

Millions of Veterans who were exposed to toxins and other hazards while serving in the military are now eligible to enroll in VA health care.

The big picture: Beginning March 5th, VA expanded access to VA health care as a result of the authority in Section 103 of the PACT Act. This expansion eliminated the phased-in approach called for by the PACT Act and makes more Veterans eligible for VA health care years earlier than provided by law.

Why it matters: This expansion makes it quicker and easier for millions of Veterans to enroll in VA health care. Eligible Veterans can enroll directly in VA care-without any need to first apply for VA benefits. VetraSpec's VA Form 10-10EZ has already been updated to reflect the March 2024 form version released in conjunction with this expansion.

Here's more:

- [VA Press Release](#)
- [PACT Act Section 103 – Stakeholder Toolkit](#)
- [Sub-Regulatory Guidance – Processing Applications for Health Care](#)

TDVS Updates

[TDVS Town Hall in Conjunction with Orange Heart Medal Foundation](#)

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In conjunction with the
Orange Heart Medal
Foundation

TN Department of
Veterans Services

VETERANS TOWN HALL
SPRINGFIELD, TN
03/29/24 — VIETNAM VETERANS DAY EVENT
8:30 AM - 11 AM  **FREE FOOD**

Springfield Memorial Gardens, 4005 Memorial Blvd, Springfield, TN 37172

Wednesday, April 17th – “Purple Up! For Military Kids” Day

Wednesday, April 17th is the official “Purple Up! For Military Kids” day. In April, the Tennessee Military Interstate Children’s Compact Commission (TN-MIC3), along with many other organizations, non-profits, and public entities will celebrate the important role of military children. Across the nation, states, communities, and schools celebrate in various ways, including wearing the color purple.

Did you know: Tennessee has been a Military Interstate Children’s Compact Commission (MIC3) member since 2011. The Compact membership includes all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the Department of Defense Education Activity schools. The Compact addresses the key educational transition issues encountered by military-connected students.

I need more:

- [Purple Up! Toolkit](#)
- [Information on Military Interstate Children's Compact](#)

PACT Act Toolbox – Updates

TDVS has created a [PACT Act Toolbox](#) to help you serve Tennessee Veterans and their families. It's an advocate's one-stop shop for all things PACT Act –

- VA Fact Sheets
- VA Web Resources
- TDVS Fact Sheet
- TDVS FAQs
- Bill Text, Summaries, and More
- Training Resources

What's new:

- Health Care Expansion
 - [Press Release](#)
 - [PACT Act Section 103 – Stakeholder Toolkit](#)
 - [VSO Presentation Brief](#)

TDVS' Knowledge Library

- Added [TDVS Benefits Bulletin 24-2](#) in VSO Tools – Benefits Bulletin - 2024
- Added Lunch & Learn Slides – [TCAD Programs & Services](#) – VSO Training Resources – Monthly Training 2024
- TN Department of Labor & Workforce Development, [DVOP and LVER Contact Roster](#)
- Added UPDATED [Installing and Accessing VA Systems for Tennessee Accredited Advocates](#) – VSO Tools - Tools
 - Accessing Microsoft 365 Tools (Outlook/TEAMS) Provided by VA

Training Updates

What's next: Here's the training schedule for the next few months:

- March – [Lunch & Learn](#), Wednesday, March 13th, 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. CST
- April – [Mandatory Quarterly Regional Accreditation Training\(s\)](#)
 - **Region 1-** Tuesday, April 2nd 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. CST (*Conference Room 1, Lowell Thomas State Office Building, 225 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, Jackson, TN 38301*)



- **Region 2** – Wednesday, April 10th 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. CST (*Veterans Hall, 308 West 7th Street, Columbia, TN 38041*)
- **Region 3** – Tuesday, April 16th 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. CST (*Veterans Memorial Building, 90 East Spring Street, Cookeville, TN 35501*)
- **Region 4** – Tuesday, April 30th 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. EST (*Conference Room A, American Job Center, 2700 Middlebrook Pike, Knoxville, TN 37921*)
- *****VSO/CSO Claims Filing Clinics** – Availability from 1 p.m. – 3 p.m. following each regional accreditation training.
- April – [TDVS Initial Accreditation Training](#), Monday April 22nd – Friday April 26th
- May – [Lunch & Learn](#), Wednesday, May 8, 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. CST
- [2024 Training Schedule](#)

VA and Veteran Benefit Updates

VA Efforts to Assist Veterans in Retaining Their Homes

VA has extended COVID-19 related programs to provide several loss mitigation options to allow for deferral or modification to existing VA home loans to assist Veterans in retaining their homes,

Dig deeper: VA extended the COVID Refund Modification, Disaster Extend Modification and Loan Deferment options through May 31, 2024, to assist Veterans impacted by the COVID-19 national emergency who are behind on their mortgage payments.

How it works: By strongly encouraging mortgage servicers to pause foreclosures and extend the options above, VA can continue assisting Veterans with their loans while it continues to develop its newest home retention option, VA Servicing Purchase (VASP) program. Through VASP, VA will purchase defaulted VA loans from mortgage servicers, modify the loans, and then place them in the VA-owned portfolio as direct loans.

I need more:

- https://www.benefits.va.gov/HOMELOANS/resources_circulars.asp

G.I. Bill Single Payment Account

Starting April 20, 2024, VA will no longer send a Veteran’s or family members’ benefit payments to more than one bank account. Importantly, no Veteran will miss a benefits payment of any type. For any students who do not consolidate their bank accounts for benefits by April 20, VA will consolidate them on their behalf, electing their non-education benefit pay account as their primary bank account.

What to do: This will require all Veterans and beneficiaries who receive GI bill payments and other benefit payments across multiple banking accounts to select one account by April 20, 2024. For example, if a Veteran receives GI Bill payments to one of their bank accounts and disability compensation payments to another, they will need to consolidate and select one account for all payments by April 20.

How to change my direct deposit info: The easiest way for beneficiaries to make this change is to log on to [Change Your VA Direct Deposit Information | Veterans Affairs](#). When they get to the pay information, there will be a box for the bank account information of their education benefit, and a box for the bank account information for the other benefit they receive. The beneficiary should then update the bank account information to use the same account for all benefits.

Dig deeper: This shift is happening as a part of VA's efforts to modernize the 50-year-old, antiquated GI bill payment system. Once fully deployed, the platform will improve claims processing and customer service by providing direct, online, one-stop access to GI Bill benefits and information.

Practice Like a Pro

Reviewing a VA Claims File

This month's Advocate Spotlight highlights the importance of a thorough review of the VA claims file. It is possible to give a claimant general advice about VA benefits without first seeing any records. However, there are too many variations in eligibility rules and there is too much at stake to take a chance on advising the claimant fully without first looking at all the claimant's relevant records.

How it works: TDVS facilitates access to several VA Systems, such as VBMS, SHARE and Caseflow, necessary to review a VA claims file by supporting issuance of a VA Personal Identify Verification or PIV card.

- Here are [step-by-step](#) instructions for using your PIV to access VA Systems.
- TDVS has also provided training on how to use [SHARE](#) and [Caseflow](#) (December 2021 Lunch and Learn).
- [Veteran Service Organizations \(VSO\) Caseflow Quick Reference Guide](#)

Dig deeper: Here are several more resources to take an even deeper dive into this issue.

- [Benefits Bulletin 21-6](#) provided step-by step instructions for tracking claim development with VBMS.
- TDVS's September 2021 Lunch and Learn -- [How to Read a Decision Letter](#) -- is another resource to refresh yourself on the basics.
- 2023 eFolder Modernization and Smart Search Functionality Deployment - [VSO Tools - Job Aids](#)
- TDVS is available to support in-person small group trainings on these and other topics to ensure you're practicing like a pro.
- NVLSP Veterans Benefits Manual, Chapter 16 - Reviewing VA Claims Files

Advocate Spotlight

Attention to Detail Results in Retroactive Award

A VSO's thorough review of the claims file and attention to detail resulted in a retroactive award of over \$138,000.

The details: The Veteran filed a claim for several issues shortly after discharge in July of 2014. He never received a response from VA and thought it meant he was not eligible for benefits. The Veteran recently sought advice on a different matter. The VSO reviewed the Veteran's VBMS claims file in preparation for the appointment and noticed that the 2014 claim had never been worked.

Why it matters: The VSO filed a claim alleging a Clear and Unmistakable Error (CUE) because VA never adjudicated the claim filed in July of 2014. CUE is one of the limited exceptions to VA's effective date rules and a powerful tool in seeking an earlier effective date.

Big win: This success story is the result of VSOs taking the time to be deliberate in their claim preparation and providing the best customer service possible to our veterans!

Do you have an advocacy success story or something you'd like to see included in an upcoming bulletin? If so, [share](#) for a future bulletin.

TDVS Benefits Bulletins Can Be Found on the [VSO Tools](#) Portion of TDVS's Website

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