

**TDVS Benefits Bulletin**  
**24-4**

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*This month's bulletin is 1,756 words and will take just over 7 minutes of your time.*

**1 big thing: Registration Now Open TDVS Annual Conference 2024 - "Leading the Nation - Tennessee Veteran Advocacy"**

[Register now for TDVS's Annual Conference 2024](#). It will be held September 30<sup>th</sup> – October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024 at the Chattanooga Convention Center & Chattanooga Marriott Downtown, 1 Carter Street, Chattanooga, TN.



## TDVS Updates

### TDVS' Knowledge Library

- Added [TDVS Benefits Bulletin 24-3](#) in VSO Tools – Benefits Bulletin - 2024
- Added [Quarterly Training Materials](#) – VSO Training Resources – Quarterly Training – 2024 – 2024 Spring Training
- Added [BVA Virtual Hearing Video Connect Test Instructions](#) – VSO Tools - Job Aids
- Added UPDATED [TDVS Accreditation Policy and Procedures](#) – VSO Tools – Publications - TDVS 2024 Accreditation Policy and Procedures

### Training Updates

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

- April – Mandatory Quarterly Regional Accreditation Training(s)
  - **Region 4** – Tuesday, April 30<sup>th</sup> 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 22<sup>nd</sup> – Friday April 26<sup>th</sup>
- May – Lunch & Learn, Wednesday, May 8, 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. CST
- June – Lunch & Learn, Wednesday, 12, 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. CST – TDVS Veteran-Ready Business Recognition Program
- [2024 Training Schedule](#)

## VA and Veteran Benefit Updates

### Save the Date – VA PACT Act Veterans Resource Fair

**VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System** has scheduled a VA PACT Act Veterans Resource Fair at the Memorial Building in Columbia, **Wednesday, May 22**. The event is scheduled for 2-6 p.m., with a speaking engagement at 3 p.m.

**In the weeds:** VA anticipates approximately 12-15 TVHS outreach teams (i.e., Women's Health, Suicide Prevention, Caregiver Support) can join us for the event designed to educate Veterans on the PACT Act and all the programs and services Tennessee Valley has to offer.

Memphis Veterans Economic Initiative Summit – April 24-25



The poster features a night cityscape of Memphis. At the top left is the VA logo and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs seal. Text reads: "Veterans, transitioning service members and families, join us for the: MEMPHIS Veterans Economic Initiative Summit April 24-25 — 8:45 a.m.-3 p.m." A QR code is on the right with the text "SAVE THE DATE JOIN US". At the bottom, it says: "This event is brought to you by Outreach, Transition and Economic Development, the Office of Equity Assurance and the Nashville Regional Office."

**LOCATION:**  
Riverside Missionary Baptist Church  
3590 S. Third St.  
Memphis, TN 38109

**REGISTER: VAEDI.COM** 

Final Rule – Schedule for Rating Disabilities: The Digestive System

VA has published a [final rule](#) in the Federal Register to amend the VA Schedule for Rating Disabilities (VASRD) by revising the portion of the schedule that addresses the Digestive System.

**I need more:**

- [Final Rule](#)
- [Federal Register](#)
- [VA Blog Post](#)

**Why it matters:** The changes add or modify rating criteria for 55 medical conditions in the rating schedule that incorporate medical advancements for treating certain disabilities and modern medical knowledge to compensate Veterans more accurately. The three biggest changes that will impact Veterans include the new evaluations for:

- celiac disease

- irritable bowel syndrome
- hemorrhoids

### Proposed Rule – Clarification of VA’s Processing of Survivors Benefits Claims

VA has published a [proposed rule](#) in the Federal Register that proposes to amend its adjudication regulations concerning survivors benefits claims.

**Background:** VA proposes to clarify that, if VA determines that a surviving spouse or child is eligible for dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC), VA would concurrently deny the co-existing claim for survivors pension, except where paying survivors pension would be more beneficial to the claimant, which would only be the case if the claimant is the veteran's surviving spouse and the claimant's application indicates that the claimant does not have any dependents, is currently in a nursing home, and has applied for or is currently receiving Medicaid.

**Why it matters:** The intended effect of this rulemaking is to streamline and improve the timeliness of the adjudication of claims processing for VA survivors benefits while ensuring that claimants receive the greatest benefit allowed by law.

#### **I need more:**

- [Proposed Rule](#)
- [Federal Register](#)

### Final Rule – Reproductive Health Services

VA has published a [final rule](#) in the Federal Register providing veterans and CHAMPVA beneficiaries access to abortion counseling and — in certain cases — abortions.

**Background:** VA will continue to provide access to abortion when the life or health of the pregnant Veteran or CHAMPVA beneficiary would be endangered if the pregnancy were carried to term, or when the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest. VA will also continue to provide access to a broad range of needed reproductive health care, including pregnancy care, maternity care coordination, fertility services, contraceptives, and much more.




#### **I need more:**


- [Final Rule](#)
- [Federal Register](#)
- [Information About Reproductive Health Services at VA](#)

## VA Launches New Financial Resource Website for Veterans

**VA has announced a new website** developed by the National Veterans Financial Resource Center (FINVET). [The website](#) will help Veterans manage financial stressors that can affect their mental health and wellbeing.

**Why it matters:** The website aims to boost protective factors that promote mental health and reduce suicide risk by helping Veterans learn about and manage their finances.

-  It connects Veterans to trustworthy financial tools, information, videos, calculators, and worksheets – serving as a one-stop website for Veterans to learn a variety of information to help meet their financial goals.
-  FINVET empowers Veterans to learn about financial goals such as meeting basic needs, saving or earning more money, lowering bills and debt, and protecting their assets.
-  The website pulls together resources from across more than 25 government agencies, including the Department of Labor, Federal Trade Commission, National Park Service, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

 **Ending Veteran suicide** is VA's top clinical priority and it has worked aggressively to expand support for Veterans in crisis - [more information about VA's efforts](#).

**The big picture:** The National Veterans Financial Resource Center was created by VA's Office of Suicide Prevention in alignment with the [National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide](#) and the [President's National Strategy for Reducing Military and Veteran Suicide](#).

*If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, contact the Veterans Crisis Line to receive free, confidential support and crisis intervention available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Dial 988 then Press 1, chat online at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](#), or text 838255.*

## VA Not Collecting Certain Pension Debts

**VA will not be collecting pension debts** associated with the June 2022 SSA income verification match. DMC is issuing letters to the 12,000-plus affected individuals.

**Background:** Between 2011 and 2022, challenges in data matching resulted in an inability to reliably verify the self-reported Social Security income for Veterans and survivors receiving a VA pension. Upon resuming income verification in June 2022, VA discovered that over 9,900

beneficiaries had higher incomes than reported, leading to overpayments in some instances over many years. As required by law, VA established debts for these Veterans and survivors and contacted them to recoup overpayments. Upon further review, it was also discovered that an additional 30,000 Veterans and survivors might also have pension debts that have yet to be established.

**Why it Matters:** In November 2023, recognizing the hardship such debts may impose on this vulnerable group, VA halted the collection of all established pension debts and the formation of new debts while exploring all possible relief options.

#### **Recent Developments:**

- Effective November 2, 2023, VA suspended the creation of new debts and the collection of existing debts related to this issue.
- On December 22, 2023, the VA Secretary issued guidance to not collect any debts arising from the June 2022 SSA income match and to refund any collections already made.
- January through early March 2024, VA worked with the Debt Management Center (DMC) and Veterans Benefits Administration's Office of Financial Management on mechanisms to stop collection of debts for beneficiaries.

#### **Current Status:**

- VA continues to run this match quarterly since June 2022 to further identify beneficiaries and identify income discrepancies earlier.
- VA will inform the 12,000-plus affected beneficiaries about adjustments to their pension debt balances.
- Beneficiaries will be notified of their updated debt balances and the reduction in debt amounts.
- Beneficiaries who have made payments based on prior notifications will be informed of the refunds.
- VA is developing updated procedural guidance for claims processors related to the additional 27,000 beneficiaries identified in the June 2022 SSA income match. VA anticipates resuming claims processing by May 2024.

#### **I need more:**

- [DMC's 11-22-23 VSO Update](#)
- [DMC Pension Dis-establishment Letter Example](#)

#### **Contacting DMC:**

- DMC's VSO only hotline is 612-970-5737 (please do not share with Veterans).
- Veterans and survivors can contact the DMC at 1-800-827-0648, available from 6:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. CT, Monday through Friday.
  - Translation services are offered in over two hundred languages and dialects.
- To send DMC an inquiry using [ASK VA](#), choose "Veterans Affairs- Debt" as the category. We recommend that VSO's using Ask VA to submit an inquiry on behalf of a Veteran also use the option to indicate this and indicate their relationship to the Veteran is VSO.
- Veterans can visit VA's Debt Portal at [www.va.gov/manage-va-debt](http://www.va.gov/manage-va-debt) for account information
- For details on why a pension debt was issued, contact the VA benefits hotline at 1-800-827-1000 or the National Pension Call Center at 1-877-294-6380.

### **Practice Like a Pro**

#### **Board of Veterans' Appeals - Virtual Hearings**

**TDVS is committed to holding as many Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA) hearings as possible** to support appeal resolution and timeliness.

**Why it matters:** The BVA has over 74,000 appeals waiting on a hearing. Approximately 1,500 of these are Tennessee Veterans. Tennessee has been successful in ensuring Veterans take advantage of every hearing opportunity BVA offers because of your partnership. 🏆 Your work in providing customer focused virtual hearing options was recognized with the prestigious Abraham Lincoln Pillars of Excellence Award. Check out [Commissioner Baker's message](#).

**How can I help:** Check out this [TDVS Fact Sheet](#) to learn more about how you can continue to support virtual BVA hearings.

### **Advocate Spotlight**

#### **TDVS Employee Recognized with Governor's Excellence in Service Award**

**VSO Lynn Bond is TDVS's most recent recipient** of the Governor's Excellence in Service Award. Lynn Bond is a 26-year Veteran of the United States Air Force retiring in 2013 as a Chief Master Sergeant. Lynn joined TDVS in 2019 and her favorite part of being a VSO is "improving the lives of Veterans and their families by connecting them with resources and benefits."



**Dig deeper:** The [Governor's Excellence in Service Awards](#) began in 2016 to recognize outstanding state employees who are at the forefront of improving the way Tennessee State Government delivers services.

*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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