



The above mural honoring our Veterans through the era's is on display in our hallway and was created by local artist Galen McCarthy

VICTOR SIERRA OSCAR COMMO CHECK!

Vol 2 Number 3

"America's Veterans embody the ideals upon which America was founded."

March 2019

This publication is for all Veterans, their families and their communities, compiled solely by the Jackson County Veterans Service Officer. The information provided herein is to keep you informed of upcoming events, newsworthy items and historical data of interest.

Proud member of



MN and National Associations of Veteran Service Officers



"In the aftermath, we are because they were." R.J. Heller,

OFFICE INFORMATION

The Jackson County Veterans Service Office is located at:

402 White St. (Door 6)
Jackson, MN 56143
507.847.4774

jeff.gay@co.jackson.mn.us

Monday 8am-4:30pm
Tuesday 8am-4:30pm
Wednesday 8am-Noon
Thursday 8am-Noon
Friday Closed

(Available for after hour appointments case-by-case)

www.co.jackson.mn.us/veterans

You can find us on FaceBook too

VA APPEALS MODERNIZATION ACT

WASHINGTON (Press Release) — Today, February 09, 2019, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that it has implemented the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017, which was signed into law Aug. 23, 2017, and represents one of the most significant statutory changes to benefit Veterans in decades.

"This is a historic day for VA, its stakeholders and, most importantly, for Veterans and their families," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. *"The implementation of the Appeals Modernization Act comes as a direct result of collaboration among VA, Congress and Veteran Service Organizations to deliver on Veterans' longstanding desire for reform of the legacy appeals system. Beginning today, Veterans will have greater choice in how VA reviews their disagreement with a VA claims decision and enjoy timely resolutions of disagreements through a streamlined process."*

Effective today, (February 09, 2019) Veterans who appeal a VA claims decision have three decision review options: **Higher-Level Review**, **Supplemental Claim** and **Appeal to the Board of Veterans' Appeals**.

- In the Higher-Level Review option, a more experienced adjudicator will conduct a new review of the previous decision.
- Veterans who select the Supplemental Claim option may submit new and relevant evidence, and VA will assist in developing new evidence under its duty to assist.
- If Veterans appeal a decision to the Board, they can choose one of three dockets: direct review, evidence or hearing.

VA's goal is to complete Supplemental Claims and Higher-Level Reviews in an average of 125 days, and decisions appealed to the Board for direct review in an average of 365 days. Under the legacy process, decisions averaged three to seven years.

VA remains committed to reducing significantly the inventory of legacy appeals. VA's fiscal year 2019 budget included funding for 605 additional appeals employees, which VA used to establish two new Decision Review Operations Centers at the St. Petersburg, Florida, and Seattle, Washington, regional offices. The former Appeals Resource Center in Washington, D.C., was converted to a third Decision Review Operations Center.

For more than 18 months, VA has worked toward full implementation of the Appeals Modernization Act, but reform has been a goal for VA and its stakeholders for years. In March 2016, VA sponsored an "Appeals Summit" in which VA, Veterans Service Organizations, Veterans advocates and Congress worked together to design a new appeals system. The summit resulted in the drafting, passage and implementation of the Appeals Modernization Act.


MARCH SPECIAL DAYS

"It was one of those March days when the sun shines hot and the wind blows cold: when it is summer in the light, and winter in the shade."

~ Charles Dickens

March is:

NATIONAL RED CROSS MONTH
NATIONAL WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH
NATIONAL IRISH-AMERICAN MONTH
(and Irish-American Heritage Month)

- 1 – World Day of Prayer / **Navy Reserve Birthday**
- 3 – National Anthem Day
- 4 – HUG A GI DAY!!!!!! **HUG** 
- 10 – **DAYLIGHT SAVINGS TIME BEGINS!** **A GI DAY**
- 11 – Johnny Appleseed Day
- 12 – MACV Veterans Legal Clinic – FREE advice
VAMC, Minneapolis, MN, 9AM-2PM
- 13 – Veterans Job Fair, VAMC, Minneapolis, MN, 1PM
- 16 – Farm & Home Days – Jackson *We'll be there!*
- 17 – **St Patrick's Day!** / **Submarine Day**
- 20 – International Earth Day / Nat'l Agriculture Day
- 20 – **VETERAN'S DAY ON THE HILL!**
BE HEARD! Join the Vets in St Paul! 10:30AM
- 23 – MDVA Women Veterans Conference
YMCA Community Center, Maplewood, MN 9:45AM-4PM

When we think of the month of March some of us think about "the Ides of March" of "Daylight Savings Time" beginning. For others there are visions of Leprechauns, shillelaghs, Irish whiskey and green beer.

If it's the latter you prefer remember, Leprechauns are "little people" so respect them, a shillelagh is not a club to do shenanigans with, beer is not naturally green it has an additive so be sure not to imbibe it until YOU turn green (or pee green). Irish Whiskey? Now there's a nectar of goodness any good Irishman can enjoy! **But keep in mind, whether ye're be Irish or not, EVERYBODY is Irish on the 17th!**



IF YOU'RE GONNA DO THAT YOU'RE GONNA NEED ONE OF THESE...



If you don't, You'll need one of these to pay the fines & new insurance rates...

DESIGNATED DRIVER

VETERANS DAY ON THE HILL

This year's Veterans Day on the Hill rally will take place Wednesday, March 20.

Take some time and rub shoulders with other Veterans for a display of solidarity for Veterans issues. Bring others along to join the throng, others can be family

members and friends who may not be Veterans but show support!

Veterans Day on the Hill is hosted by the Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers, the Minnesota Commanders' Task Force, and the United Veterans Legislative Council of Minnesota.

The schedule will be:

- 10:30 - Free Veterans and supporters pre-rally lunch presented by the DAV of MN at the St. Paul Armory (600 Cedar St.)
- 12:45 - Veterans March to the Rally, starting from the Veterans Services Building (20 W. 12th Street)
- 1:30-2:30 - CTF, UVLC, and MACVSO present Rally in the Rotunda

Permalink: <http://mn.gov/mdva/news/events/index.jsp?id=1066-363395>

Need a ride there? I might have a deal for you, just give me a call... 507.847.4774

"The only thing that makes battle psychologically tolerable is the brotherhood among soldiers. You need each other to get by."

~ Sebastian Junger

VA TELEHEALTH - Video-to-Home



MISSION: The SFVAHCS Telehealth mission is to provide the right care in the right place at the right time through effective, cost-effective and appropriate use of health information and telecommunications technologies.

VISION: To make the home and local community into the preferred place of care whenever possible and practical.

Video-to-Home technology is essentially "real-time telehealth" where a telecommunications link allows instantaneous interaction between the patient and a member of their care team. You see them and they can see you...

Visits that do not require a physical exam are well suited to this, such as:

- Coughs, colds sinus congestion
- Medication questions
- Minor rashes, aches or pains
- Wound Care
- Mental Health Consults
- Nutrition consults & classes
- Social work

If you have had surgery or have been treated for a severe cut you can also use VA Telehealth to follow-up on your **wound care!**

Jackson County Veteran Service Office March 2019

Video to Home is for visits that are not emergent and do not require a physical exam. If your health care team is unable to treat your symptoms through a CTH visit, you may be asked to come into the clinic for an office visit.

When scheduling your next non-emergent VA appointment ask for Video-to-Home!

Why use a “Video-to-Home”?

- *Video to Home avoids extra travel and increases convenience thus saving fuel costs & travel!*
- *No fighting traffic & parking is not a problem*
- *Decreased funds spent on daycare (you don't leave your home!)*
- *Your appointment is in the comfort and privacy of your own home*
- *Or use the Jackson CVSO telehealth computer*
- *Less time to take off work*
- ***NO CO-PAY!!!!!!***
No co-pay (even to see specialists) when using Video to Home



Technology needed, one of these:

- Your smartphone, or
- Tablet Computer w/camera, or
- Computer w/camera, speakers & microphone

Using this program requires you to have Access to e-mail. Remember, if you are not connected to Wi-Fi on your device data charges may apply. If you are using an Apple device, download the VA Video Connect app.

For more information please contact:

Sioux Falls VA Health Care System
2501 W. 22nd St. - Sioux Falls, SD 57105
800.316.8387 - 605.336.3230

National Telehealth Technology Help Desk (NTTHD)
866.651.3180

If you are not serviced by the Sioux Falls VA please call your servicing VA and ask about telehealth options.

To test your device before a CTH visit follow the steps:

- **Go on-line to www.siouxfalls.va.gov**
- **Scroll ¾ way** down the page and click on the button labeled “Video to Home (CTH) Test”
- **For help** call the Help Desk at **866.651.3180**

NOTE! Your Jackson County Veteran Services Office offers a dedicated workstation in our facility for this purpose without charge. Please call 507-847.4774 to schedule its use once you have an appointment with the VA CTH.

CHECK YOUR CLAIMS AT HOME...

Did you know you can check on your VA claims from the convenience of your home? Just go on-line to  **eBenefits** My Gateway to Benefit Information

www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/homepage. You can also file your own claim on-line, manage your records and more at this site.

Your VA is providing many services on-line now to provide you more control of what you are due as a Veteran. On-line services, telehealth, My HealtheVet and more.

However, with all this convenience there are many things that you probably would not know to explore or ask, this is where your local Veteran Service Officer can help as well as knowing what you will need for supporting documentation,

Now with the video-telecommunications kiosk is up and running in our Jackson office you can use it for all your VA exploration needs!

If you have any questions using “eBenefits” write them down and then call your local CVSO for clarification. In most cases it's best to see your CVSO first.

NEW MISSION ACT
US Dept. of Veterans Affairs

Under the New Mission Act the St. Cloud VA has established a Community Care Service Line– This is to be used for asking for appointments through local community Care. **But as always certain conditions must be met. All community care requires prior authorization. Call 320-255-6401. More updates will follow in April.**

On June 6, 2018, President Trump signed the John S. McCain III, Daniel K. Akaka, and Samuel R. Johnson VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act of 2018 (the MISSION Act). Certain provisions of the Act were further amended by the Department of Veterans Affairs Expiring Authorities Act of 2018.

This Act will fundamentally transform elements of VA's health care system, fulfilling the President's commitment to help Veterans live a healthy and fulfilling life.

A transformed VA health care system will:

1. **Ensure easy and reliable access to care when Veterans need it.**
2. **Provide exceptional care to Veterans anytime, anywhere.**
3. **Serve as a trusted, caring partner, helping Veterans and their families be healthy and well.**

Veterans deserve access to the best health care providers, state-of-art facilities and cutting-edge technology. The VA MISSION Act of 2018 will strengthen VA's ability to deliver the quality care and timely service Veterans have earned.

Consolidating Community Care VA has been providing care to Veterans through community providers for decades, but the programs

have grown in number and complexity over the years, making them complicated to access and administer. The MISSION Act will consolidate VA's community care programs, making community care work better for Veterans and their families, community providers, and VA staff.

Strengthening VA's Workforce

The MISSION Act gives VA greater ability to recruit and retain the best medical providers through greater access to an education debt reduction program and improved flexibility for bonuses for recruitment, relocation and retention. VA will also pilot a scholarship program for eligible Veterans to receive medical training in return for serving in a VA hospital or clinic for four years.

Strengthening VA's Infrastructure

On average, VA buildings are nearly 60 years old, with only half built since 1920. The MISSION Act will strengthen the Department's ability to manage its real property portfolio and build a high-performing, integrated health care system.

Expanding Caregivers Eligibility

The MISSION Act will expand eligibility for VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) under the Caregiver Support Program. The PCAFC is currently available to eligible Veterans who incurred or aggravated a serious injury in the line of duty on or after September 11, 2001. The expansion implemented by the MISSION Act will open the Program to eligible Veterans and their caregivers from all eras.

Over the course of the next year, VA will focus on establishing systems, writing regulations, training staff, and developing an implementation timeline to expand eligibility for PCAFC to include eligible Veterans from all eras of service.

VA will proactively communicate throughout the implementation and deployment process to ensure information is easily accessible, simple to understand, and meets the needs of Veterans and their loved ones.

www.va.gov/oei/missionAct/index.asp

"CONNECT YOUR DOCS"

No, it's not "connect the dots" silly, it's a whole other program which, in essence, helps do the same type thing. You get to share (or connect) your records with other doctors in the system that you might see.

Connect Your Docs



The Veterans Health Information Exchange (VHIE) allows this safely and securely via electronics.

What are the benefits of VHIE? Sharing portions of your electronic health records will help reduce the need for patients and families to hand-carry records between health care providers.

What type of information will be shared using

"Connect Your Docs"? Once you sign a VA form 10-0485 to participate VA health information will be shared. Below is a list of information your other health provider will be able to see. The list is **NOT ALL INCLUSIVE** and other items may be shared as needed.

- Allergies
- Medications
- Vital Signs
- Immunizations
- Chemistry and hematology Reports
- Procedure Results (e.g., X-ray reports, etc.)
- Discharge Summaries
- Medical History
- Records of Physicals
- Progress notes

GETTING STARTED

Participation is voluntary and FREE! You must provide your permission before any information is shared. You can do this by mail, FAX, in person or on-line.

- **To sign-up in person** Visit your VAMC's Release of Information Office and complete the needed form.
- **To sign-up via mail or FAX** you can obtain the form at www.va.gov/vler or your local CVSO.

For more information and instructions to sign-up electronically please go on-line to www.va.gov/vler. Once you complete the paperwork you're signed authorization is good for ten (10) years. **Also, the information is secure through the Internet using the eHealth Exchange.**

Last, but not least, when will this benefit me? Whenever you see a VA care provider that you normally don't see especially when you may be away from home on business or on vacation.



HUG A GI DAY! MARCH 4TH...

Sometime during World War I soldiers started interpreting the initials "GI" as "Government Issue" or "General Issue". By the time World War II came around it was starting to gain meaning as the generic enlisted man (*person*).

In 1996, Adrienne Sioux Koopersmith created "Hug A G.I. Day". She selected the only day on the calendar that was also a military command to salute and celebrate the men and women who risk their lives for our country and our freedoms.

Find a G.I. you know and give them a hug. Is your G.I. too far away to give a hug? Send him or her a virtual one via text, e-mail, phone or even snail mail. Use #HugAGIDay to post on social media.



**I want to be your favorite HELLO
And your hardest GOODBYE**

NY TIMES – WOMEN IN THE MILITARY

We're asking servicewomen and veterans to share their experiences in the military for a coming story. Tell us about your accomplishments, the challenges you faced, a fact about women in the military that would surprise most people or one unforgettable story you'll never forget from your time in the service.

We're looking for photos, anecdotes, journal entries and more. Alternatively, if a woman in your family served in the military, please tell us about that person, why she is important to you and send us a photo.

To participate go on-line to the link below. Remember, if you get this newsletter as an e-mail or download it the below link is in "Hypertext", **simply hover your mouse over the link and press the "Ctrl" key and your mouse simultaneously or you can copy and paste the URL into your browser.**

www.nytimes.com/2019/02/13/magazine/servicewomen-military.html?em_pos=small&ref=headline&nl_art=0&te=1&nl=&emc=edit_war_20190215

VETERANS JOB FAIR

There is an upcoming Veterans Job Fair to be held at the VA Medical Center in Minneapolis on Wednesday March 13th. If you're looking for a new job or you are unemployed you're welcome! For more information you can see the poster below or go on-line to:

<https://mn.gov/mdva/news/events/?id=1066-371374>



Veterans Job Fair

WHEN: Wednesday, March 13th, 2019

TIME: 1:30 pm to 4:00 pm

WHERE: Minneapolis VA Medical Center
One Veterans Drive
Minneapolis, MN 55417
in the Auditorium

Sponsored by the TSES Program

FEATURED BUSINESSES

No registration required, please come prepared for a potential interview and don't forget your resume.

We will also be providing on-site resume review and interview preparation.



- Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs
- Cyber Warrior Foundation Inc.
- Hearthside Foods
- VBA
- DEED
- Deluxe
- Mail of America
- ProStaff
- Mains' Services
- Cargill
- LockLeed International
- Common Bond
- USPS
- State of MN
- York Solutions
- Enterprise Holdings
- MN Helmets to Hardhats
- Wells Fargo
- Parsons Corp
- Endeavor Air
- Allied Universal
- Minneapolis VA
- JDOG Junk Removal and Hauling
- Science Museum of MN
- Mystic Lake Casino
- 3M
- GS4 Security
- Hyatt Regency
- Hamline University
- Goodwill-Easter Seals Minnesota

BOOTS TO BUSINESS PROGRAM!

Are you a Veteran and want to start your own business? Expand your existing business? Here's your chance to get some help & hints on developing

the basics in preparing a business plan, marketing your business and more!

Boots to Business (B2B) Reboot is an entrepreneurial education and training program offered by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). The course provides an overview of entrepreneurship and applicable business ownership fundamentals. Veterans of all eras, Active Duty Service members (including National Guard and Reserve), and spouses are eligible to participate.

During Reboot, participants are introduced to the skills, knowledge, and resources they need to launch a business, including steps for developing business concepts, how to develop a business plan, and information on SBA resources available to help. The program is facilitated by subject matter experts from the SBA and their extensive network of skilled business advisors.

Participants that complete an in-person B2B Reboot course can elect to further their study through one of many B2B online courses, offered at no cost to Service members, Veterans and military spouses. If you've already attended an in-person B2B course, visit <https://sbavets.force.com> to sign up for one of the online B2B follow-on courses.

See the flyer for more information, and registration information.



BOOTS TO BUSINESS REBOOT
with the U.S. Small Business Administration

STARTING OR GROWING A VETERAN-OWNED BUSINESS

Sign up for Boots to Business Reboot, an entrepreneurship training program for veterans and their spouses.

OWNING A VETERAN-OWNED SMALL BUSINESS

Veterans have the character, discipline and skills needed to succeed as small business owners and entrepreneurs. Wondering what it takes and how you can prepare? Enroll in Boots to Business Reboot.

ABOUT BOOTS TO BUSINESS REBOOT

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Friday, April 19, 2019

8:00 AM - 4:00 PM CST

HIWAY FCU

840 Westminster Street
St. Paul, MN 55130

For more information contact:

Don Jackson
don.jackson@sba.gov
(612) 370-2335

To join the B2B community:

<https://sbavets.force.com/s/login/SelfRegister>

To register for a Reboot class:

<https://sbavets.force.com/>



The Boots to Business program is provided through the coordinated efforts of the SBA and its valued partner network. All SBA services are extended to the public on a nondiscriminatory basis. Reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities will be made if requested at least two weeks in advance.

LEARN MORE AT
WWW.SBA.GOV/BOOTS2BUSINESSREBOOT

AND FOLLOW US AT
WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/BOOTS2BUSINESS

AND ON
TWITTER.COM/BOOTS2BUSINESS

With that said, there is help closer to home for you to help begin planning and developing your small business

Jackson County Veteran Service Office March 2019



dream. It's the SBDC located on the campus of SW MN State University, Science and Technology Building, 1501 State Street, Marshall, MN 56258 or on-line at www.sbdassistance.com/. You may call them at 507.537.7386.

"A small business is an amazing way to serve and leave an impact on the world you live in." - Nicole Snow

MINNESOTA ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY VETERAN SERVICE OFFICERS

The new website for the Minnesota Association of County Veteran Service Officers (MACVSO) is active! To view it just go on-line to www.macvso.org

There are still some enhancements and updates to be made but the essential information is there to help you find local CVSO's statewide and benefit information.

Besides being a resource for locating local CVSO's statewide (along with their contact information and mighty handsome photographs) the website includes news stories and a history of the organization as well as a page for contacting the organization directly.



MACVSO is the Minnesota partner of the National organization, NACVSO. The program provides the initial and subsequent training for your CVSO to provide them with the latest information to assist you. All of your MN CVSO's are members of the program.

MILITARY FAMILY ASSISTANCE CENTERS



The Military Family Assistance Center (FAC) program has been around for quite some time but largely unknown. It's a Department of Defense (DoD) mandated program and there are offices in every state.

The nearest offices to the Jackson area are Mankato and Montevideo. They are located in the armories in these communities. Their main office is located in Cottage Grove, MN.

The mission of the FAC is to provide assistance to servicemembers and military families prior to, during and following military deployments, to include training. They are a conduit of information directing people to the best possible resource to help resolve their issue.

The FAC's have built a network of relationships with government, privately owned businesses, organizations and individuals who can aid in the resolution of various situations.

FAC Specialists are able to assist Servicemembers from all branches of service regardless of status, and

their family. They are available 24/7, 365 days a year. Their services are confidential.

These offices are not CVSO's but share a relationship with CVSO's in their respective areas. They do not work with VA claims or benefits but can direct people to where they can receive this service.

The FAC has several essential services they focus on and they include, but may not be limited to:

- Crisis Intervention
- Exceptional Family Member
- TRICARE assistance
- DEERS (Information)/ID Card Locations
- Point of contact for legal and pay issues
- Financial counseling/training
- Community Resources
- Emergency FAC Services
- Support/Mentor Family Readiness Groups

For more information call 888.234.1274 go to the MN Guard website <https://minnesotanationalguard.ng.mil/> or find them and "Like" them on Facebook at www.facebook.com/mn.militaryfamilyassistancecenters

BLUE WATER/BROWN WATER DISTINCTION - ELIMINATED

Very recently, the Federal Circuit issued an opinion in *Procopio v. Wilkie*, holding that, for determining the presumption of Agent Orange exposure, the operative phrase "served in the Republic of Vietnam" covers service on the Vietnam mainland (foot-on-land requirement), inland waterways and now, service on a ship which came within 12 miles of the mainland.



In one fell swoop, *Procopio* did away with the blue water/brown water distinction. Recall that, for the longest time, the VA distinguished between two types of Naval service in Vietnam. The first, Brown water navy veterans, referred to veterans who served on ship or other vessels which entered inland waterways; blue water navy veterans, on the other hand, referred to navy veterans whose vessels remained offshore and never entered inland waterways.

Veterans organizations and other veteran's advocacy groups had long criticized the brown and blue water distinction as inaccurate and unfair. Studies showed that many blue water veterans were likely to have been exposed to Agent Orange just as much as blue water veterans. With the *Procopio* opinion, some 50,000 to 70,000 additional navy veterans will now be presumed exposed to Agent Orange.

There are some considerations yet for those who may have already filed so please call your local CVSO if you fall into any blue/brown water category.

Jackson County Veteran Service Office March 2019

MARCH IS RED CROSS MONTH

"I request that during that month (March) our people rededicate themselves to the splendid aims and activities of the Red Cross."

~ President Franklin D. Roosevelt

1st Presidential Proclamation of March as Red Cross Month, 1943

Each year, the president of the United States proclaims March "**Red Cross Month**". We use this month as a chance to honor and celebrate the everyday heroes who help fulfill their mission. This March, we encourage you to uncover your inner hero. Choose one or more of the options below. Be a hero today!

- *The American Red Cross is a charitable organization, not a government agency. It depends on volunteers and the generosity of people like you to perform their mission.*
- *An average of 91 cents of every dollar the American Red Cross spends is invested in humanitarian services and programs. Everything they do depends on the needs of the people they serve.*
- *The American Red Cross is part of the world's largest volunteer network found in 187 counties.*



American Red Cross

Since the founding of the Red Cross by Clara Barton on May 21, 1881, it has been dedicated to

servicing people in need. The first congressional charter was received in 1900 and to this day they are tasked by the federal government with providing services to members of the American armed forces and their families as well as providing disaster relief in the United States and around the world.

Part of the job of the Red Cross for Servicemembers is sending care packages, rendering care to families and delivering emergency messages to Servicemembers.

They are there for natural disasters and train the volunteers as compassionate care givers and in the aiding of injured and displaced. They provide training in first aid and Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) to individuals in your community.

This March you are encouraged to uncover your inner Hero... Please do one or more of the following: Volunteer, Give Blood or Take a Class.

Be a hero today!

Any of these can save a life...

The Red Cross motto: "*Per Humanitatem ad Pacem*" or "*With humanity, towards peace*".

"If 'pro' is the opposite of 'con' what is the opposite of 'progress'?"

~ Paul Harvey

PRESS RELEASE

VA PRESS RELEASES

VA Announces Broad Suicide Prevention Partnership & Safe Firearm Storage Partnership

WASHINGTON — Today the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that it has recently formalized two partnerships aimed at preventing Veteran suicide.

Effective January, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) began collaborating with VA to advance and improve the quality of life for Veterans to prevent suicides. Through this partnership, VA and AFSP have been exchanging research on suicide and prevention efforts. AFSP has also begun sharing VA suicide-prevention messaging.

Effective last November, the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) began working with VA to develop a program that will empower communities to engage in safe firearm-storage practices. The program will include information to help communities create coalitions around promoting and sustaining firearm safety with an emphasis on service members, Veterans and their families.

"We want all Americans to know that suicide is preventable," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "By working with local organizations and community partners, we're confident that we can make a meaningful difference to reduce suicide among Veterans."

These innovative partnerships highlight the shared mission between the VA, nonprofit organizations and local communities to end suicide among those who have served or are currently serving.

Research shows there is no single cause for suicide: It is the outcome of multiple contributing factors and events. However, environmental factors, such as access to lethal means, increase the risk for suicide. Firearms are one of the most deadly and common methods for suicide among Americans — particularly for service members and Veterans.

Veterans in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, and those who know a Veteran in crisis, can call the Veterans Crisis Line for confidential support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. **Call 800-273-8255 and press 1**, you may also chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat, or text to **838255**.

Reporters covering Veteran mental health issues can visit ReportingOnSuicide.org for important guidance on how to communicate about suicide.

See here for Secretary Wilkie's recent opinion editorial outlining VA's progress on preventing Veteran suicide.

VA To Provide Capability For Veterans To Access Their VA Health Data On Apple iPhones

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will release new capabilities this summer providing Veterans who receive care at VA with the ability to access their personal medical data using the Health Records on iPhone feature from Apple.

Veterans will see an aggregated view of their allergies, conditions, immunizations, lab results, medications, procedures and vitals in the Health app on their iPhone. Health Records on iPhone also brings together hospitals and clinics outside VA with the existing Apple Health app. Veterans can see their available medical data from multiple providers, including VA, whenever they choose.

This new capability has been made possible through the recently announced Veterans Health Application Programming Interface (Veterans Health API). This Veterans Health API allows Veterans to access their health records within innovative applications on their mobile devices or in their web browser.

“Our Health API represents the next stage in the evolution of VA’s patient data access capability,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “By building upon the Veterans Health API, we’re raising the bar in collaborating with private sector organizations to create and deploy innovative digital products for Veterans. Veterans should be able to access their health data at any time, and I’m proud of how far we’ve come to accomplishing this.”

Launched in 2010, VA Blue Button, a feature of My HealthVet, opened the door for Veterans to download a copy of their VA health records online. The new capability using VA’s Health API and Apple’s Health app furthers VA’s commitment to make it easy for Veterans to securely access their own health data.

Veterans with Apple iPhones will be able to access the app on their device. After a visit to a VA health care facility, the participating Veteran’s Apple device will automatically receive updated health record information within 24 hours from the visit using the built-in Health app from Apple on their iPhone. Beyond the effort on the Apple iPhone, VA looks forward to partnering with others to bring similar capabilities to other mobile platforms.

Lighthouse, considered the “front door” to VA’s vast data stores, is the department’s API management platform. Since launching Lighthouse in March 2018, VA has delivered a developer portal, a Benefits Intake API, a Facilities API and a Veterans Health API. VA’s Veterans Health API is part of VA’s commitment to health IT modernization, and will contribute to VA’s expansive electronic health record modernization program.

For more information about the Veterans Health API, visit <https://developer.va.gov/explore/health>.

Sinai Tax Exclusion Could Mean Refunds For Nearly 3,000 Troops

About 3,000 troops who served in the Sinai Peninsula going back to June 9, 2015, soon will receive amended tax forms showing they qualify for the combat tax exclusion, which will allow them to file an amended tax return to get refunds for those years.

Most changes in the tax reform that was signed into law in December won’t affect service members until they file their 2018 tax returns in the spring of 2019, except for tax cuts they may see this year. But the combat tax exclusion for the Sinai Peninsula is a notable exception, said Army Lt. Col. David Dulaney, executive of the Armed Forces Tax Council.

In 2015, defense officials designated the Sinai Peninsula as a qualified hazardous duty area, making troops stationed there eligible for imminent danger pay or hostile fire pay. But the region wasn’t designated as a combat zone, and lawmakers pushed for further reclassification, citing the danger the troops face.

Under tax law, troops serving in designated combat zones can exempt active-duty pay and other specialty pays from their annual income calculations, which can amount to a significant drop in income taxes.

Under the tax reform law passed in December, those who are receiving or have received imminent danger pay or hostile fire pay while serving in the Sinai, dating back to June 9, 2015, qualify for the tax refund. Dulaney said he has worked with the Defense Finance and Accounting Service to ensure troops who served in the Sinai during that period will get IRS Form W-2C to use with their amended returns.

Officials estimated nearly 3,000 troops will be eligible for the refund, since about 900 per year have rotated in and out of the Sinai since 2015, Dulaney said. They’re still determining exact numbers, he added.

Need help filing these amended returns? Contact your tax assistance center at a military base near you with personnel trained in tax preparation specific to the military community by IRS and the military legal community, or contact Military OneSource, which has tax consultants available to assist.

Senior reporter Leo Shane III contributed to this report.

VFW-Supported Bills Clear House

Today, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to pass the VFW-supported H.R. 840, *Veterans’ Access to Child Care Act*. Sponsored by Congresswoman Brownley, the bill would expand a successful child-care pilot program, which has helped tens of thousands of veterans complete their VA mental health care appointments “Access to child care should not be a barrier for veterans who need care to cope with their mental health conditions,” said VFW Executive Director Bob Wallace. “The Senate must pass this bill immediately to show they

are also serious about improving access to care for veterans and eliminating veteran suicide.”

On Thursday, the House also passed H.R. 450, the Preventing Crimes Against Veterans Act of 2019, which would punish with up to five years imprisonment whoever defrauds veterans of their earned benefits. Stay tuned to the Action Corps Weekly for updates on these important bills.

Registration opens for 2019 National Veterans Wheelchair Games

Event to be held July 11-16 in Louisville, KY

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that Veterans interested in registering for the 2019 National Veterans Wheelchair Games can do so online Jan 7 through Apr 15.

Presented by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), the world’s largest sports event for Veterans who use wheelchairs will be held July 11-16 at Robley Rex VA Medical Center in Louisville, Kentucky.

The event is a sports and rehabilitation competition to engage Veterans who use wheelchairs due to spinal cord injuries, amputations or other neurological conditions.

“I encourage every Veteran interested in competing at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games to register for this important event,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “The games exemplify VA’s commitment to supporting Veterans as they navigate through recovery and rehabilitation to active, independent lives. Sports and recreation play an important role in this journey, enhancing Veterans’ positive mental health and physical well-being.”

Each year, Veterans challenge themselves and cheer on their fellow Veterans in the excitement-packed games. This year, David Zurfluh, national president of PVA and a service-disabled Air Force Veteran, plans to compete alongside hundreds of other Veterans at the games.

The National Veterans Wheelchair Games offer 19 different competitive events, including air guns, archery, basketball, bowling, field events, hand cycling, nine-ball, power soccer, quad rugby, slalom, softball, swimming, table tennis, track, trapshooting and weightlifting. Athletes compete against others with similar athletic ability, competitive experience or age.

For more information about the games, visit www.wheelchairgames.org. Follow VA Adaptive Sports on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram at [@Sports4Vets](https://www.instagram.com/Sports4Vets).

“There is a certain enthusiasm in liberty, that makes human nature rise above itself, in acts of bravery and heroism.”

~ Alexander Hamilton

PURPLE HEART RECIPIENT CLAIMS TO BE ACCELERATED

VA Secretary Wilkie testifies that VA will accelerate disability benefits claims processing for Purple Heart Medal recipients

WASHINGTON — Today at a congressional hearing VA Secretary Robert Wilkie announced that effective in April, it will provide priority disability benefits claims processing for the initial claims from discharged combat Veterans who have been awarded the Purple Heart Medal.

Secretary Wilkie announced his decision at a hearing before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies.

“Those who hold the Purple Heart, the recognition of wounds taken in battle, will now receive priority consideration when it comes to claims before the Department of Veterans Affairs,” said Secretary Wilkie.

The Veterans Benefits Administration will amend its priority processing categories to include initial claims received from Purple Heart recipients on or after April 1, 2019.

Purple Heart recipients are already treated on a priority basis at VA hospitals and are exempt from co-payments for their medical care.

The Purple Heart award is the oldest U.S. military decoration and is awarded to U.S. service members for wounds suffered at the hands of the enemy. General George Washington awarded the first purple-colored heart-shaped badges to soldiers who fought in the Continental Army during the American Revolution. In 1932, it was revived to commemorate Washington’s 200th birthday.

MDVA Women Veterans Conference

March 23, 2019 | [Women Veterans Events](#)

All ages, eras, transitioning military women are welcome to the 2019 MDVA Women Veterans Conference at the YMCA Maplewood Community Center.

The event will take place from 9:45 a.m. to 4 p.m. and will include:

- *Breakfast and Lunch (provided)*
- *Day Care option*
- *Workshops*
 - *Acupuncture*
 - *Massages*
 - *Yoga*
 - *Henna Tattoo Session*
 - *Talk Session*
- *Keynote Speaker*

Jackson County Veteran Service Office March 2019

- o Dajon Ferrell - Military Sexual Trauma Survivor, Veteran
- Minnesota Woman Veteran of the Year Award to be presented by the Women Veterans Initiative
 - o [Click here for the Nomination Form](#), submissions due Feb. 28

To attend the conference **you must register** at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/2019-mdva-women-veteran-conference-tickets-52093873177?aff=ebdssbdestsearch>

Saturday, March 23, 9:45 a.m. - 4 p.m.
 YMCA Maplewood Community Center
 2100 White Bear Avenue - Maplewood, MN 55109



2019 MDVA Women Veterans Conference
 Saturday, March 23, 2019 · 9:45AM - 4PM · YMCA, Maplewood Community Center

Celebrate Women's History Month!

free!

- Breakfast & Lunch provided
- Day Care Option
- Workshops
 - Acupuncture
 - Massages
 - Yoga
 - Henna Tattoo Session
 - Talk Session
- Keynote Speaker:
 - Dajon Ferrell - Military Sexual Trauma Survivor, Veteran
- Minnesota Woman Veteran of the Year Award to be presented by Women Veterans Initiative

ALL Ages, Eras, Branches, Transitioning Military Women WELCOME!

YMCA, Maplewood Community Center
 2100 White Bear Ave, Maplewood, MN 55109

To register, or for more information: www.MinnesotaVeteran.org/WomenVeterans • 1-888-LinkVet

HEROES AMONG US

The Military Order of the Purple Heart will be hosting Heroes Among Us at Rochester VFW Post #1215 from 5 to 9 p.m. on Saturday, April 27.

100% of the proceeds go to the Military Order of the Purple Heart - Lloyd Swenson #7110 and the MN POW/MIA Riders Association.

Tickets are \$50 in advance, \$55 at the door. \$350 for a table of eight includes premium seating, table topper, and recognition.

For tickets, contact Mark Ugland (507) 272-8999
 Auction item donations, contact Craig Ugland (507) 259-2608

INFORMATION

Please place these numbers close by in case you would ever need to call one. We hope that the need never arises but we also understand that it's a real possibility. Better to be prepared and to know where to call for help when help is needed...

National Suicide Prevention Hotline

1-800-273-8255

NATIONAL PROBLEM GAMBLING HELPLINE

1-800-522-4700



Veterans Crisis Line
 1-800-273-8255 PRESS 1

OR TEXT TO "838255"



Veterans Linkage Line™

minnesotaveteran.org | **1-888-LinkVet**
 (546-5838)

REMEMBER THIS:

"The nation which forgets its defenders will be itself forgotten."
 - Calvin Coolidge

**HOW COPY? OVER...
 GOOD COPY! OUT!**

DON'T FORGET - LIKE US ON FACEBOOK!

www.facebook.com/JacksonCountyMNVeteranServices
 or visit online at www.co.jackson.mn.us/veterans

See ya next month!



The sole responsibility for content is Jeffrey Gay, Jackson Veteran's Service Officer.

