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## Veterans Advocate Newsletter April 2024

Olmsted County, Minnesota sent this bulletin at 04/01/2024 04:47 PM CDT



## Olmsted County Veterans Advocate Newsletter

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April 2024

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## CVSO Office Updates

Hello, Olmsted County's finest and welcome to April!!

Your Olmsted County Veteran Service staff will be out of the office from April 16th through the 18th, for our annual spring training provided by Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs. This training is vital to provide updates on state veteran benefits.

While service officers are in training, please note that you may contact the VA directly for questions and claim status updates at 1-800-827-1000. If you are in crisis, please call 988 and press 1 for the veterans crisis line. All phone calls and emails will be returned as soon as possible upon our return.

We are so grateful for your continued patience as we navigate changes in our office while working hard to make sure each veteran's concern is addressed. You are all so appreciated!



Tiffany Canfield  
Veteran Services Manager

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## Veteran Service Office Snapshot

February 2024

Total claims submitted to VA:

- Compensation: 82
- VA Healthcare: 11
- DIC: 3
- Burial: 22
- Survivor's Pension: 0
- CHAMPVA: 3
- Records Request: 8
- Special Monthly Pension: 2

Points of contact with veterans (office visits, incoming mail, phone calls returned, emails returned, etc.):

Veterans in office: 613

Outreach visits: 5

Total phone calls: 519

Average number of calls per day: 13

Average call length: 2 minutes and 18 seconds

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## Goodbye from Nathan Pike

Auf wiedersehen, sayonara, au revoir or goodbye. Moving forward or just simply moving. Yes, confirming what rumors there may be, I am leaving Olmsted

moving. Yes, sometimes what rumors there may be, I am leaving Olmsted County Veteran Services and my wife & I are relocating away from southeastern Minnesota. As the veteran's world is a small world you will see me around. I do plan on volunteering for the annual Chester Woods disabled veteran's deer hunt with DAV Chapter 28. I realize this announcement has likely caught some folks flatfooted, no worries though as Tiffany and the team will continue to provide excellent service. I know that interviews are being conducted for backfilling my position as of this article. I know that Tiffany will find a great new service officer and the OC Veterans team will be up and running in short order. Sometimes change is needed to provide new perspective and refocus on what is important in life. Be well, be kind, stay healthy and be the best person you can be for yourself, family and friends.

Respectfully,

Nathan D. Pike  
OC Veterans 2011-2024

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## Karen's Korner

### Free Gun Locks Available

Sadly, an average of 100 Minnesota Veterans die by suicide each year. Two-thirds of these deaths are by guns.

To help prevent Veteran suicide, MDVA is partnering with the VA Healthcare System to distribute free gun locks. According to the [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs](#), a locked gun can mean the difference between a tragic outcome and a life saved for someone in crisis. Though Veterans are well-versed in firearm safety, all gun owners should understand that during emotional or stressful times, delaying access to a gun could mean the difference between life and death. Gun locks can prevent someone in crisis from tragically taking their own life.

In an effort to reduce these preventable tragedies, MDVA is offering free gun locks. To request a gun lock, please email [SuicidePrevention.MDVA@state.mn.us](mailto:SuicidePrevention.MDVA@state.mn.us) with your name and address. This information will not be shared; requests are confidential.

For more information on MDVA's suicide prevention efforts, visit [MinnesotaVeteran.org/EndVetSuicide](https://MinnesotaVeteran.org/EndVetSuicide).

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## Veterans Day on the Hill 2024

# VETERANS DAY ON THE HILL 2024

**WHEN:**  
**APRIL 17TH, 2024**

**DAV of MN Presents:**  
**Free Veterans and Supporters Lunch**

**Doors Open @ 10:00AM FOR COFFEE**  
**LUNCH @ 11:30AM**

(One Block from Capitol at 600 Cedar Street, St. Paul)


**Veterans March to the Rally @ 1:00pm**  
(Short Walk from Armory to State Veterans Service Building  
20 West 12th St. St. Paul)

**NO MEMBERSHIP IN  
ANY ORGANIZATION  
REQUIRED.  
ALL SUPPORTERS ARE  
WELCOME!**




**Topics Include:**

**CTF, UVLC, and MACVSO Present:  
Rally in the Rotunda 1:15-2:00pm**



ANY QUESTIONS PLEASE CONTACT-  
TRENT@DAVMN.ORG:

PASSING A CLEAN  
VETERANS OMNIBUS  
BILL  
INCREASING THE  
AMOUNT OF THE PROP  
TAX VALUE EXCLUSION  
**NEW THIS YEAR!!**  
A MINIBUS RUNNING  
FROM THE ARMORY TO  
THE HOUSE AND  
SENATE OFFICE  
BUILDINGS 10-1130.  
MAKE YOUR  
APPOINTMENTS TO SEE  
YOUR LAWMAKERS!



[TRENT@DAVMN.ORG](mailto:TRENT@DAVMN.ORG)

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## Direct Deposit

### ATTENTION!!

**By April 20, 2024, you must have a single bank account for all VA benefit payments**

Check your direct deposit information in your VA.gov profile (\*see below). If you currently have more than one bank account listed for disability compensation, pension, and education benefit payments, you'll need to update your information. You must have the same account listed for all benefits.

We're making this change to help protect you from fraud and to make sure we can pay you on time, every time, without error.

You can update your direct deposit information for these 3 types of benefit payments in your VA.gov profile:

- Disability compensation payments
- Education benefit payments
- Pension payments

You'll need your bank account and routing number.

For more information on how to change your direct deposit, please click on the following link: <https://www.va.gov/change-direct-deposit/>

\*When you create an account in VA.gov, you can access and manage your VA benefits, health care and information online. To create an account for VA.gov, please click on this link: <https://www.va.gov/resources/creating-an-account-for-vagov/>

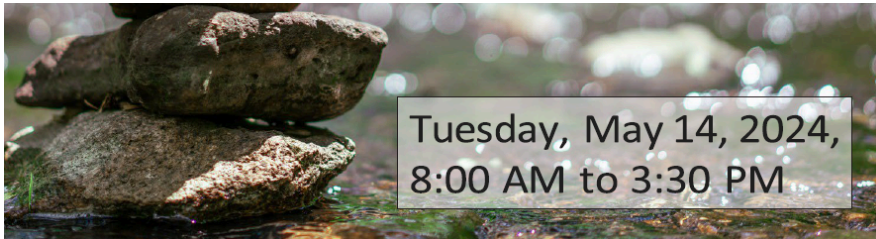
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## Women Veterans Wellness Retreat



VA U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# Women Veterans Wellness Retreat



Tuesday, May 14, 2024,  
8:00 AM to 3:30 PM

This retreat is designed for women veterans. We come together to grow in community and to support wellness. The wellness focus is on mindful eating, nature-based healing, creative arts, and more!

**\*\*Registration is open until 4/12/24, to women veterans currently enrolled in VA care through the Minneapolis VA Health Care System.**



Scan the QR code  
or call 612-725-8194 for  
details and registration.

### Virtual New Patient Orientation



MINNEAPOLIS VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

## Virtual NEW PATIENT ORIENTATION



Ease into your VA health care experience with expert advice from our dedicated team. Your opportunity to learn, ask, and feel confident about your journey within our healthcare system. We're here to assist you every step of the way. Join us virtually and make your transition to Minneapolis VA Health Care System seamless!

**Dates for 2024:** March 13th, May 8th, July 10th, September 11th, November 13th

**Where:** Microsoft Teams

**Time:** 4:00 pm – 5:30 pm CT

- The first step is a new patient orientation to give you information about your VA health care benefits and the health care services we offer.
- We'll also provide information to assist you in navigating the VA, both the building and the system.
- We'll discuss topics such as Community Care, benefits, service-connected compensation, pension, travel benefits and much more!

#### To Join our New Patient Orientation!

Either Scan QR code  
or



**Dial-in information (audio only)**  
**Dial:** 1-872-701-0185 (toll free), then  
**Enter Access code:** 62 336 238#

**For Orientation Questions Contact:**  
**Veteran's Experience Office:** 612-629-7377  
**Patient Advocacy Office:** 612-467-2106



## Expansion of Healthcare Eligibility

VA has announced that they are expanding healthcare eligibility to all veterans who served in the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan, or any other combat zone after 9/11/2001. Originally, the PACT Act called for a phased in approach, but at the direction of President Biden, **VA has instead opened this expanded eligibility to VA Healthcare effective March 5, 2024.**

Eligible veterans are encouraged to enroll in VA healthcare; you can do so online at <https://www.va.gov/health-care/apply/application/introduction>, by phone at 877-222-8387, by visiting a local VA medical facility or by contacting your local county [Veteran Service Officer](#).

For more information please review VA's official statement [here](#).

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## Family Testimonial

### Family Urges Others to Seek Care through PACT Act Expansion

Jerald Starks, 54, who died from acute myeloid leukemia last month, had received VA health care under the PACT act. He had been exposed to burning oil fields in Saudi Arabia while serving, his mother said.

"I implore you to take steps right now to see if you qualify for care under this act," said Michelle Starks, Jerald's wife. "If you do it right now, then you'll have the assurance that you can be proactive and get the care that you need, and that could help your family and even save your life."

"You don't need to be sick to file a claim," said Sue Ricker, Minneapolis Veterans Affairs health administrator chief. "Even if you don't think you need health care today, or you might need it tomorrow or the next day or 30 years from now, all you have to do is enroll, and you'll have access for life." ...[Read more](#)

Veterans who may qualify are encouraged to visit [VA.gov/PACT](#), meet with enrollment staff at the Minneapolis VA, or call 1-800-MYVA411.

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## Veteran and Caregiver Virtual Town Hall

On March 14, 2024 Minneapolis VA Health Care System and Veterans Benefits Administration leadership hosted a virtual townhall for Veterans and caregivers residing in Northern Minnesota catchment area. More than 60 Veterans attended.

The next Townhall will be on June 16, 2024. See the Minneapolis VA web/event page for details: <https://www.va.gov/minneapolis-health-care/events/>

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## Vietnam War Commemoration

### 50th Anniversary Vietnam War Commemoration presented by Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs

Thursday, June 13 - Saturday, June 15  
10 a.m. - 6 p.m. Mall of America®

- \* Historical displays from the Minnesota Military and Veterans Museum
- \* American Veterans Traveling Tribute Wall
- \* Veterans benefits information and community services
- \* Commemorative Program Friday, June 14 at 11 a.m.

Commemorative Program Friday, June 14 at 11 a.m.

For more information see [MinnesotaVeteran.org/Vietnam50](http://MinnesotaVeteran.org/Vietnam50)

## Minnesota Warriors Hockey

**USA Disabled Hockey**

# WANTED:

Veterans or Armed Forces members must have been discharged under Medical, Honorable, or General conditions.  
[www.mnwarriors.com](http://www.mnwarriors.com) for further eligibility information.

Seeking:  
New Skaters, Seasoned Skaters and volunteers.

Cities:  
Metro - St. Cloud - Duluth - Rochester  
Iron Range -Mankato

Comradarie with fellow Veterans  
Competitive play  
Learn to play  
Co-Ed  
Female Only  
501c3

Contact: Nick Cossalter  
[ncossalter@mnwarriors.org](mailto:ncossalter@mnwarriors.org)  
218-780-0313

**DONATE**

QR codes for donation (PayPal and Venmo)

**MINNESOTA WARRIORS HOCKEY**

Nick Cossalter [ncossalter@mnwarriors.org](mailto:ncossalter@mnwarriors.org)

## Free Online Learning Courses for Veterans

As a commitment to offer valuable resources to you, the National Association of County Veteran Service Officers (NACVSO), is excited to provide you with complimentary access to a wide array of IBM SkillsBuild courses. These courses are industry-aligned and come with credentials.

You can explore a diverse range of topics, including but not limited to Artificial Intelligence, Cybersecurity, Mindfulness, and Health Improvement.

For a first introduction to IBM SkillsBuild, click [HERE](#)

They will then follow-up in a few weeks with more information, including links to webinars that you can join to learn more about IBM SkillsBuild.

## Motor Vehicle Fees

## **Motor Vehicle Fee Exemptions for Veterans rated at 100% s/c**

Effective **May 22, 2023**, 100% service connected disabled veterans receive the following fee exemptions:

- \* Most registration fees for a total of two vehicles with registration starting on or after January 1, 2024. The two vehicles may be in either Passenger, Motorcycle, Recreational or Non-Commercial 1-ton class. Personalized plate messages, special plate annual contributions and impound plate and reinstatement fees still apply.

Effective **January 1, 2024**, 100% service connected disabled veterans receive the following fee exemptions:

- \* Most title fees on any vehicle purchased on or after January 1, 2024
- \* Most title fees on any vehicle transaction done on or after January 1, 2024, provided the veteran is listed as a title owner or lienholder. Examples of transactions include, but are not limited to: Duplicate Title, Title Transfer, Repossession and Add Title transactions to surrender an OS title.
- \* All fees for any type of drivers license or ID card, including Standard, Real ID and EDL.
- \* Salvage inspection and fast track fees still apply

Effective **June 30, 2024**, 100% service connected disabled veterans receive the following fee exemptions:

- \* Motor Vehicle Sales Tax on any vehicle purchased on or after July 1, 2024

### **The following documents can be used:**

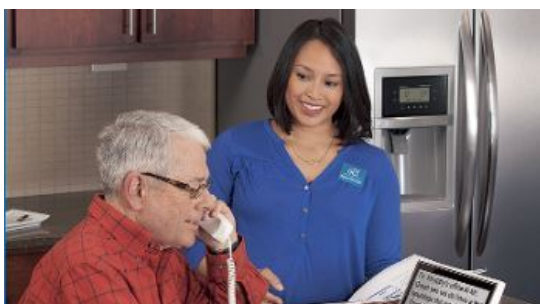
- \* Annual VA Benefits Letter
- \* Annual VA Benefits Letter with Total Disability for Individual Unemployability
- \* VA Decision Letter
- \* Department of Defense Issued Military ID Card

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## **FREE Captioned Phones**

FREE captioned phones for those with hearing loss. If you have a difficult time hearing and/or understanding people on the phone this is for you. Adjustable volume and tone control to make hearing easier. Large screen with adjustable font, text size, and colors to make seeing the captions easier.

April Currier  
OEI Installer  
Outreach, Education, & Installations  
Supporting CapTel Captioned Telephone  
Rochester, MN  
507-577-3616  
[April.Currier@oeius.org](mailto:April.Currier@oeius.org)





[Click here for more information](#)

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## CapTel Phone Tips

If you have a CapTel phone, here are a few tips that they gave us:

### Too Bright? Turning Off Keypad Lights:

The dial pad on your CapTel phone has lights that make it easy to see the keys. Sometimes, however, you may want the keypad lights dimmed. For example, if you prefer a dark room when you sleep, you can set the keypad lights to turn off. When keypad lights timeout is selected (keypad lights off), the dialing pad lights turn off after approximately 30-60 seconds of inactivity. The keypad lights remain on whenever you are using the phone. The way you turn off keypad lights depends on which model CapTel you use. Click below for instructions.

[CapTel 2400i](#)

[CapTel 840/840i/880i](#)

### More ways to reach CapTel:

Check out the newly-updated Live Chat feature on CapTel's website, which provides yet another way to connect with us. Its new process helps direct you to the right team member to assist with your specific topic, whether it's to request technical support, ask sales questions, or even explore job opportunities.

On the CapTel website:

- Click on the "Chat" icon in the lower right corner.
- Choose which type of question/comment you have, then click on "Type a message" to type in the corresponding letter (a, b, or c).
- Click on the arrow to submit.
- Chat opens a text window with the appropriate CapTel team member.
- Type your responses back and forth. Remember to click on the arrow to submit.
- When your chat session is finished, click on Close.

Remember, you can also push the blue button on your phone to reach the Customer Support team.

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## Women Veterans Benefits

On March 21st, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced that it is delivering disability compensation benefits to a record number of women Veterans. Right now, 702,557 women Veterans are receiving [disability compensation benefits](#) from VA — an all-time record and an increase of 180,959 women Veterans (or 26%) over five years ago.

The average woman Veteran who receives disability compensation benefits from VA has a 68% combined disability rating, and they receive an average of

\$26,809 in earned disability compensation benefits per year from VA. The average grant rate for women Veterans is 89.2%, meaning that 89% of women Veterans who have applied for disability benefits with VA have received benefits for at least one condition.

Women Veterans are the fastest growing cohort at VA, and — in addition to delivering record levels of disability compensation benefits — VA is now serving more women Veterans in its health care system than ever before. The sharp increase in women Veteran benefits in recent years is largely due to the PACT Act, which has empowered VA to expand health care and benefits to millions of Veterans who were exposed to toxins and other hazards while serving the country.

President Biden believes the nation has a sacred obligation to take care of Veterans, which is why he made supporting Veterans a key pillar in his Unity Agenda for the nation. Expanding access to benefits and services for women Veterans has been a key priority for VA and the entire Biden-Harris Administration. During his State of the Union address to the nation, President Biden reinforced his commitment to ensure all Veterans get the care and benefits they earned and deserve.

“Women Veterans have fought in every war since the American Revolution, but they have not always been able to access the care and benefits they’ve earned and deserved. But now, at VA, we’re making sure that those days are over,” **said Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs Tanya Bradsher, the first woman Veteran deputy secretary of VA.** “These record numbers demonstrate that we’ve made tremendous progress in recent years, but they are still just the beginning — we won’t rest until every woman Veteran is coming to VA.”

“We want women Veterans to come to VA for their health care and benefits, which is why we’re hosting women Veteran outreach events across the country throughout this month and throughout this year,” **said VA Under Secretary for Benefits Josh Jacobs.** “To all the women Veterans out there, we encourage you to visit [VA.gov](https://www.va.gov) or call 1-800-MYVA411 to apply for your earned benefits today. We will do everything in our power to serve you, just like you’ve served our country.”

In recognition of Women’s History Month, VA’s regional offices are hosting or participating in 139 outreach efforts specifically focused on women Veterans. In addition to disability compensation benefits, VA’s concerted efforts to reach out to women Veterans are helping them get education benefits and well-paying jobs: despite only making up 16.5 % of the Veteran population, women Veterans received 27.5% of [Post 9/11 education benefits](#) and 26.4% of [Veteran Readiness and Employment benefits](#) in 2023.

Over the past two years, VA has also dramatically expanded health care for women Veterans. Specifically, VA expanded [breast cancer screenings and mammograms](#) for Veterans with potential toxic exposures; [supported access to reproductive health services](#), including contraception, [in vitro fertilization](#), [abortion counseling and – in certain cases – abortion care](#) for Veterans and VA beneficiaries; and [dramatically expanded one-on-one maternity care coordination](#) for women Veterans. Women [Veterans are also enrolling in VA health care](#) at higher rates under the PACT Act, and VA recently hosted its [first Women Veterans Experience Action Center](#), helping more than 340 women Veterans apply for the care and benefits they deserve. Additionally, [as announced by the White House this week](#), VA and the Department of Defense are launching a new Women’s Health Research collaborative to explore opportunities to promote joint efforts to advance women’s health

research and improve evidence-based care for Veterans and service members.

In every VA regional office, VA has Veteran Coordinators who function as the primary contact for women Veterans. These coordinators are able to provide specific information and comprehensive assistance to women Veterans, their dependents, and beneficiaries concerning VA benefits and related non-VA benefits. Each VA medical center nationwide also has a [Women Veterans Program Manager](#), who helps coordinate all the services women Veterans might need. Women Veterans can also call, text, or [chat online](#) with the Women Veterans Call Center at 855-829-6636 to get help and find available resources and services in their area.

To learn more about VA disability benefits, visit VA's benefits [website](#). For more information on women's health care at VA, visit <https://www.womenshealth.va.gov/>.

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## DAV Transportation

### **\*A friendly reminder from our DAV Transportation Department\***

DAV Transportation is a **COURTESY SERVICE** to help veterans get to VA and Community Care appointments ONLY. Unfortunately, there is not the capacity to assist with transport to C&P Exams.

If you are in need of transportation to a C&P exam, please reach out to Tiffany Canfield (507-328-6358). She will discuss other options with you.

Seats are very limited so please call Kati to schedule your ride **AS SOON AS you are made aware of your appointment date.**

Kati sends out the drivers schedule for the week every Monday, so it is very important you get in touch with her **at least five business days before your appointment.**

Lastly, **please** be kind! We know your appointment is important and we are doing our best to assist. Due to the volume of folks needing rides, we are unable to accommodate day of, day before, or any last minute changes.



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## Preston Veterans Home

**The mission of the Minnesota Veterans Homes is “serving those who have served” by providing quality health care in an environment of trust, dignity and sharing.**

Admission Requirements: All Residents must require skilled nursing care. Eligible Residents come from two categories:

- Veterans who were discharged under honorable conditions from any branch of the U.S. armed forces and are a current resident of Minnesota.
- Spouses of eligible Veterans. Spouses must be at least 55 years old and meet residency requirements.

\*\*Veterans or Veteran spouses must meet [Minn. Stat. 197.447](#).

**Residents contribute to the cost of their care according to their means.**  
Additional information is available from our Veterans Benefits Coordinator.

Minnesota Veterans Home - Preston  
1864 First Minnesota  
Preston, Minnesota 55965  
Phone: 1-507-808-8910  
Online at: [MinnesotaVeteran.org/Homes](http://MinnesotaVeteran.org/Homes)

[Click here for application](#)

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## Calling All WWII Veterans

If you know of any living **WWII veterans** who could use a little love and appreciation for their service, please contact Commander Jim Anderson, Disabled American Veterans SE MN Chapter 28. Due to confidentiality, our office cannot release any names or personal information, so we're counting on our readers to reach out to Jim. You can email him at [davsemn28@gmail.com](mailto:davsemn28@gmail.com) or give him a call at 507-251-2187.

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## WWII Veterans Eligibility Expansion

**\*\*This is an updated press release\*\***

The Department of Veterans Affairs announced that all World War II Veterans are now eligible for no-cost VA inpatient and outpatient health care.

Under this expansion, all WWII Veterans who served between Dec. 7, 1941, and Dec. 31, 1946, are now eligible for VA health care, regardless of their length of service or financial status. These Veterans will not have to pay inpatient or outpatient copays, enrollment fees, or monthly premiums.

VA is reaching out by phone and mail to encourage WWII Veterans who are not currently enrolled in VA care to apply today. Veterans who enroll may also keep their private providers, Medicare, and most other insurance to meet their health care needs.

"These members of Greatest Generation answered the call to serve when our nation – and the world – needed them most. Now, it's our job to serve them in every way that we can," said **VA Under Secretary for Health, Dr. Shereef Elnahal**. "We are proud to provide world-class, low- or no-cost health care to these heroes at VA, and we encourage all of them to enroll today."

All WWII Veterans are encouraged to enroll in VA health care – the best, most-affordable health care in America for Veterans. Veterans who are enrolled in VA health care are proven to have better health outcomes than non-enrolled Veterans, and VA hospitals have dramatically outperformed non-VA hospitals in [overall quality ratings](#) and [patient satisfaction ratings](#).

Veterans who were not approved for VA health care in the past due to income limits should apply again; income levels no longer apply due to this expansion. VA cannot automatically enroll these Veterans in health care; WWII Veterans must [apply for VA health care](#) if they are not currently enrolled.

While World War II Veterans will no longer have to pay inpatient or outpatient copays, they may still have to pay modest medication or urgent care or long-term care copayments in some cases, depending on their [eligibility and service connection](#).

.....

This expansion is made possible through the Joseph Maxwell Cleland and Robert Joseph Dole Memorial Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2022 ([Cleland-Dole Act](#)), signed in December 2022.

To apply for VA health care, visit [VA's health care enrollment website](#), call 1-800-MyVA411 (800-698-2411), or [visit your nearest VA medical center or clinic](#).

### UPDATE TO THE RELEASE

Nursing home care is free (no copays) for nearly all World War II Veterans who are eligible for nursing home services at VA, including (1) anyone in need of such care for a service-connected disability, (2) anyone in need of such care who also has a service-connected disability rated at 70 percent or more. However, contrary to the language of the release, not all World War II Veterans are eligible for nursing home care under this new law.

Additionally, as stated in the release, all World War II Veterans are eligible for VA health care and will not have to pay inpatient or outpatient copays. However, these Veterans may still have to pay modest copayments for medication or urgent care or long-term care in some cases, depending on their [eligibility and service connection](#).

We at VA apologize for this mistake and any confusion that it may have caused. We are continuing to reach out directly to these Veterans to inform them of the expansion of care available to them, and we urge any WWII Veteran to enroll in VA health care today.

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## Camp Bliss Events

### Female Veterans Getaway

May 3 - 5, 2024

Register by April 5, 2024

### Veterans Turkey Hunt Getaway

May 17- 19, 2024

Register by April 12, 2024

[Click here for more information & to register](#)

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## Camp Lejeune News

### VA covers cost of Parkinson's care for family members of Veterans who served at Camp Lejeune

WASHINGTON — The VA announced that family members of Veterans exposed to contaminated drinking water at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune from Aug. 1, 1953 to Dec. 31, 1987 are now eligible for reimbursement of health care costs associated with Parkinson's disease under the Camp Lejeune Family Member Program.

These family members are also eligible for health care reimbursement for esophageal cancer, lung cancer, breast cancer, bladder cancer, kidney cancer, leukemia, multiple myeloma, renal toxicity, miscarriage, hepatic steatosis, female infertility, myelodysplastic syndromes, scleroderma, neurobehavioral effects, and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

"Veterans and their families deserve no-cost health care for the conditions they developed due to the contaminated water at Camp Lejeune." said VA's Under

Secretary for Health Dr. Shereef Elnahal, M.D. “We’re proud to add Parkinson’s to the list of conditions that are covered for Veteran family members, and we implore anyone who may be living with this disease — or any of the other conditions covered by VA’s Camp Lejeune Family Member Program – to apply for assistance today.”

Veterans who served at Camp Lejeune are also eligible for no-cost Parkinson’s health care and other VA benefits. Recent studies have also shown that the risk of Parkinson’s disease is 70% higher for Veterans stationed at Camp Lejeune.

Thanks to the PACT Act, the biggest expansion of Veteran health care and benefits in generations, Veterans and their families can also now file lawsuits for harm caused by exposure to contaminated water at Camp Lejeune.

To apply for health care reimbursement under the Camp Lejeune Family Member Program, visit the [CLFMP program website](#). To apply for Veteran benefits related to Camp Lejeune, visit [VA.gov/CampLejeune](http://VA.gov/CampLejeune).

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## State Soldiers Assistance Program

### **(SSAP) Providing benefits for Minnesota Veterans for 100 years!!**

The State Soldiers Assistance Program (SSAP) has provided a variety of benefits for Minnesota Veterans and their families for the past 100 years.

Talk to your [County Veterans Service Officer](#) today to learn more about these benefits and others that you may be eligible for!

**Dental:** Provides \$1,500 in annual dental assistance and \$6,500 in lifetime assistance for extractions and dentures to Veterans, spouses, and dependents.

**Optical:** Provides \$600 in annual optical assistance to Veterans, spouses, and dependents for exams, prescription eyewear and contact lenses.

**Disaster Relief Grants:** Provides financial assistance, upon activation by the Governor, for individuals impacted by a natural disaster.

**Veteran Relief Grants:** Provides broad financial assistance to a Veteran or surviving spouse.

**Subsistence:** Provides a form of short-term disability to Veterans and surviving spouses who cannot work at their normal occupation for at least 30 days or to surviving spouses within a year of the passing of the Veteran. Assistance includes rent/mortgage, utilities, health care premiums, and cash assistance.

**Surviving Spouse and Dependent Education:** Provides a tuition waiver and an annual \$750 stipend to surviving spouses or dependents of certain veterans at any University or College within the M-State or University of Minnesota systems. Benefits are available until a bachelor’s degree is attained, regardless of age.

**Housing/Voucher Deposit Assistance Program (VDAP):** Covers the security deposit for any Veteran or surviving spouse who is moving into subsidized housing and in receipt of a housing choice voucher.

More details online at: [MinnesotaVeteran.org/Benefits](http://MinnesotaVeteran.org/Benefits)

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## Medical Equipment Available

Are you in need of medical equipment, such as a wheelchair (both manual and electric), walker, electric hospital bed, crutches, etc? Do you have medical equipment that you want to donate to other people in need?

The Kasson American Legion has medical equipment for use by anyone in the area (veterans, cancer patients, accident victims). The equipment is free to use and all they ask is that you return it when you are done so someone else can use it.

For more information, please call Dick Denny at (507) 259-2081. **Equipment pick up and drop off is by appointment only.**

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### Women Veterans Over 40 Discussion Group

This group will provide an opportunity for women veterans 40 years old and over to come together for support and community while learning creative ways to choose joy, spread joy and receive joy using evidence-based approaches to support stress relief, resilience, productivity and healthy living.

Sessions include:

- \* Discussion on relevant physical, emotional, spiritual health and wellness topics
- \* SMART goal development and accountability
- \* Aromatherapy education for overall wellness and application for targeted support
- \* Education and preparation of aroma stick, rollerball or spray for application at home

**Hosted by:** Dr. Leticia N. Callies, DMin, MA, CCA

**Where:** VFW Post 1215 (back conference room)  
2775 - 43rd Street NW  
Rochester, MN 55901

**When:** Tuesdays - April 2, May 7, June 4, July 2,  
August 6, September 3, October 1,  
November 5 and December 3

**Time:** 6 - 8 pm

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### ID Cards at the Rochester VA Clinic



VA Health Identification Cards may be obtained at the Rochester VA Clinic **by appointment only** on the following dates:

May 16, 2024

July 18, 2024

September 19, 2024

November 21, 2024

You **MUST** be enrolled and eligible for care in order to receive a Veteran's Health Identification Card!!

Please call the VA at 1-866-414-5058 to make an appointment in Rochester.

\*The Minneapolis VA Medical Center issues ID cards daily.

There are different types, and different ways to obtain Veteran ID Cards. Click [HERE](#) for more information.

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### **PTSD Support Group**

Olmsted County Veteran Services is offering a support group for veterans that have been diagnosed with PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), or those who have signs and symptoms of PTSD, and their family members. Sometimes the most painful injuries aren't physical. Whether it's PTSD, TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury), combat stress or any other mental health condition, we're here to help you get through it. The group is facilitated by Jennifer Shumaker, veteran and Olmsted County Veterans Service Officer.

Where: VFW Post 1215  
2775 - 43rd Street NW  
Rochester, MN 55901

When: April 25, May 30, June 27, July 25, August 29, September 26,  
October 24 (due to Halloween), November 21 (due to  
Thanksgiving) and December 19 (due to Christmas)

Time: 6:30 to 8 pm

For more information, please email: [jennifer.shumaker@olmstedcounty.gov](mailto:jennifer.shumaker@olmstedcounty.gov)  
or call 507-328-6355

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### **Post-9/11 Veteran Service Bonus**

The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) has a long history of awarding service bonuses to Minnesota Veterans who served in America's wars. Starting in 1919 after World War I, through World War II, the Korean War, Vietnam War, Persian Gulf War, and now the Global War on Terrorism. MDVA recognizes the sacrifices and courage Minnesotans took to defend our country.

The 2022 Legislature passed, and Governor Walz signed, the first-ever Veterans Omnibus Bill that included funding for a service bonus payable to eligible Veterans who served from 9/11/01 to 8/30/21. MDVA is honored to facilitate this program for eligible Veterans, currently serving service members, or Veterans' beneficiaries.

### **Application Process**

Due to the large volume of applications, users may experience some issues with the application portal. Thank you for your patience.

MDVA began processing payments the week of July 25, 2022. Applicants can expect their mailed check approximately 12 weeks after approval.

The application opened July 7, 2022, and will run until June 30, 2024, or until funds have been exhausted.

[Visit the application portal](#), review and answer the initial pre-screening questions to assist in determining your eligibility.

If it is determined that you may be eligible for the bonus, you will be directed to the application.

- If you have previously applied for the Minnesota GI Bill or Veteran Owned Business Certification, you will login with your existing username and password.
- If you have never applied for the Minnesota GI Bill or Veteran Owned Business certification, you will be prompted to create an account.

If it is determined through the pre-screening questions that you may not be eligible for the Post-9/11 Veteran Service Bonus, then you will be directed to your [County Veteran Service Office](#) for additional assistance or guidance.

Please see the [MDVA website](#) for Frequently Asked Questions.

#### **\*\*UPDATE\*\***

Governor Walz Signs Veterans and Military Affairs Bill into Law

On May 15, 2023, Governor Tim Walz signed into law a comprehensive veterans and military affairs bill that will move the state closer to its goal of becoming the fourth state to end veteran homelessness, expand service bonuses for veterans, fund Veteran's Homes, and invest in the readiness of the Minnesota National Guard.

#### **Service and Retention Bonuses**

The bill includes an additional \$15 million for service bonuses for post-9/11 era veterans and Gold Star Families and \$3 million for reenlistment bonuses for members of the Minnesota National Guard. **The bill also expands eligibility for the 9/11 bonuses to include veterans who currently live in Minnesota but were not Minnesota residents when they entered service.**

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## **Guiding Partners to Solutions**

### **New outreach program connects social workers with residents in need in various community locations**

Olmsted County, in partnership with Family Service Rochester, is pleased to bring its Guiding Partners to Solutions (GPS) program to residents in need at various community locations.

GPS is a team of social workers that serves county residents struggling to connect with resources or services they may need. GPS works to reduce barriers and connect individuals and families with housing, cash, food, and insurance assistance and provides help in applying for these benefits.

Guiding Partners to Solutions (GPS) social workers will be available at the following locations:

- Tuesdays, 8 – 10 am

Riverside Central Elementary School  
506 - 5th Avenue SE, Rochester **NOTE: This is only open to families with children at Riverside Central. This is NOT open to the public.**

- Thursdays, 11:30 am – 1 pm  
The Salvation Army Social Services Center  
115 - 1st Avenue NE, Rochester
- Thursdays, 1:30 – 5 pm  
Rochester Public Library  
101 - 2nd Street SE, Rochester

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## Saturday Meal Programs

### Christ United Methodist Church 400 – 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW, Rochester, MN

#### Saturday Noon Meal Program

- \* 11 am: coffee, hot chocolate and light snacks
- \* Noon: Hot meal served

Please enter the church via the west door on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and join us in the lower level of the church in Wesley Hall

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### Holy Cross Lutheran Church Ruby's Pop-Up Pantry 2703 - 9th Avenue NW, Rochester, MN

Ruby's Pantry is for ANYONE that eats! There is no income or residency requirement and Ruby's Pantry is for anyone looking to extend their monthly grocery budget. Each guest donates a \$25 donation and receives an abundance of grocery items. Please bring two totes or baskets. Drive thru distribution. Ruby's Pantry is not government funded and is a 501 C3. Each donation is used to cover operational costs like trucking, gas, and warehouse staff. All of the food is donated by corporate food donors making it possible to reach more families each month at locations across Minnesota and Wisconsin.

#### Next Pop-Up Pantry is Saturday, April 13, 2024

**DAYS AND HOURS:** 2nd Saturday of the Month. Registration begins at 9 am. Food bundles available 9 -10:30 am

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## Seasons Hospice Ongoing & Special Programs

All grief group participants of Seasons Hospice must be registered 24 hours in advance. To register or for more information, click on the blue button and you will be directed to their website.

[Seasons Hospice](#)

[Calendar of Events](#)

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## Jobs at the MN Department of Veterans Affairs

Interested in serving Veterans? Looking to make a difference in your community? Consider a career with the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA)! Roles in healthcare, nursing, facilities management and program management are featured below. MDVA proudly offers competitive pay, generous benefits as a State of MN employee, welcoming and supportive teams, and most importantly, meaningful careers.

To see full job posting and apply:

1. Go to <https://mn.gov/mmb/careers/> and select your applicant type: External Applicants or Current Employees or Accessible Applicant Portal.
2. On the Careers landing page, enter the Job ID in the Search Jobs field. Click on the posting.
3. Select "Apply for Job" button. New users will need to create an applicant account to apply.

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## JOBS

VA Jobs

CircaWorks.com - Find a Job

All Craft Exteriors

FedEx

IMAA

Project Legacy

Empower CTC

CareerForceMN.com

Federal Bureau of Prisons

Mayo Clinic

Allina Health

Community Health Service Inc.

teachersoncall.com

Mark Sand & Gravel

Bimbo Bakeries

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### Local Service Organization Meetings

For a full list of local organizations and meetings, please click on the blue button.

#### Local Meetings



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**"To promote the interests and welfare of veterans, their dependents and survivors and to enhance their quality of life through counseling, claims assistance, education, advocacy and special projects."**

### Olmsted County Veteran Services

2100 Campus Dr. SE, Suite 200  
Rochester, MN 55904  
507-328-6355

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