

TDVS Benefits Bulletin 23-12

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This month's bulletin is 1,740 words and will take 6 ½ minutes of your time.

1 big thing: Honor Guard Grant Program

TDVS's [Honor Guard Grant Program \(HGGP\)](#) starts on **January 1, 2024**. The HGGP is dedicated to ensuring that every qualifying Tennessee veteran receives a dignified and honorable burial service. Through state-funded grants, the HGGP supports Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) in providing these essential ceremonial services.

All the background you need: All the information you need to take advantage of this program can be found on the [Honor Guard Grant Program](#) home page.

TDVS Updates

PACT Act Toolbox – Updates

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

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

What's new: VA has published a [final rule](#) in the Federal Register regarding the reevaluation of claims for DIC.

Why it matters: Certain claimants can elect to have VA reevaluate certain previously denied DIC determinations based on changes that establish or modify a presumption of service connection. Any award following a reevaluation may be made retroactively.

Yes but: There are some limitations –

- These provisions do not apply to a pending claim for DIC which was received by VA but not yet decided.
- A substitute claimant cannot elect a reevaluation if the original claimant had not made such an election prior to their death.
- These provisions do not apply to a claim for disability compensation submitted by a Veteran.

Here's more:

- The [plain language document](#) explaining this regulatory change.
- [Final Rule](#)
- [Federal Register](#)

Training Updates

What's next: Here's the training schedule for the remainder of the calendar year and a preview of 2024.

- **NO DECEMBER LUNCH & LEARN**
- January – Mandatory Quarterly Accreditation Training, January 23rd **or** 24th at 1 p.m. CST
- February - Lunch & Learn, Wednesday, February 14th, 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. CST
- March – Lunch & Learn, Wednesday, March 13th, 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. CST
- April – Mandatory Quarterly Regional Accreditation Training(s)
- [2024 Training Schedule](#)

Clarksville Vet Center Expansion

VA is adding a new Vet Center in Clarksville to improve access to counseling for Veterans and service members.

Details: The current Clarksville Vet Center Outstation will convert to a full-sized, independent Vet Center, staffed by a Vet Center Director, Outreach Specialist, Program Support Assistant, and three counselors. The location will remain at 141 Chesapeake Lane, Suite 101, Clarksville, TN 37040. The anticipated date of the transition is to be determined.

What's a Vet Center: [Vet Centers](#) are community-based counseling centers that provide a wide range of social and psychological services, including no-cost professional counseling to [eligible](#) Veterans, service members, and their families. Services include counseling for needs such as depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, and the psychological effects of military

sexual trauma. Vet Centers also provide referrals to connect Veterans with their VA health care or benefits.

VA and Veteran Benefit Updates

VA Releases 2023 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report

VA officially released the 2023 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report. **The report documents an increase in suicide rates in 2021** for Veterans and non-Veteran U.S. adults.

I need more:

- [VA Press Release](#)
- [Full Report](#)
- [Tennessee Veteran Suicide Data Sheet, 2021](#)
- [Veteran Suicide Data and Reporting](#)

Tennessee saw a slight decline from 39.9 in 2020 to 39.4 in 2021 in its Veteran suicide rate.

Yes, but: Tennessee's Veteran suicide rate is still too high. [Tennessee's Veteran suicide rate](#) is higher than both the National and Southern Region Veteran suicide rates. TDVS has taken several actions to reduce this rate and in support of Tennessee's participation in the Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Servicemembers, Veterans and Their Families.

Here's how you can access these recorded trainings and resources --

- [Governor's Challenge Psych Armor Training Portal](#)
 - **S.A.V.E.** - Signs of suicide, Asking about suicide, Validating feelings, Encouraging help and Expediting treatment
 - Communication Skills with Veterans
 - Advanced De-escalation Techniques
 - And many, many more!

Instructions to Join Tennessee's Governor's Challenge Training Portal

- [Tennessee's Efforts to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and Their Families](#) - March 2021 Monthly Training
- [VSO's Role in Suicide Prevention](#) - June 2021 Monthly Training

- [VA S.A.V.E. and a Review of General Suicide Prevention Efforts](#) - March 2022 Monthly Training
- [Suicide Prevention and TN Dept. of Health County Health Councils](#) - February 2023 Monthly Training
- [TDVS Inaugural Advocacy Summit](#) - October 2023

Here is a quick recap of available resources --

- [Veterans Crisis Line](#) (**Dial 988 then Press 1**) – Use when confronted with an immediate need for intervention.



- The [Tennessee Suicide Prevention Network \(TSPN\)](#) is a resource for training and suicide prevention, intervention and postvention resources for your organization, but not when confronted with an immediate need for intervention.
- Tennessee's [Department of Health](#)
 - [Suicide Prevention Mailing List](#)
 - [Suicide Prevention in Tennessee 2022 Annual Report](#)
 - [2021-2022 Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Services Statewide Directory and Resource Information Guide](#)

2024 VA Rate Tables

VA's new rate tables are now available on VA's website:

- [Veteran Compensation Benefits Rate Table](#)
- [Veterans Pension Rate Table](#)
- [Survivors Pension Rate Tables](#)
- [DIC Rate Tables](#)

Update on VA Home Loans

VA is taking two steps to ensure Veterans can stay in their homes:

- VA is calling on mortgage servicers to pause foreclosures of VA-guaranteed loans through May 31, 2024. During this pause we will work with servicers on workable home retention solutions for Veterans; and
- VA is extending the COVID-19 Refund Modification program through May 31, 2024. This extension will allow Veterans to obtain a zero-interest, deferred-payment loan from VA to cover missed payments and modify their existing VA-guaranteed loan to achieve affordable monthly payments for the duration of this extension.

Why it matters: By pausing foreclosures and extending the COVID-19 Refund Modification program, VA can continue assisting Veterans with their loans while it launches its newest home retention option, the **VA Servicing Purchase (VASP) program**. Through VASP, VA will purchase defaulted VA loans from mortgage servicers, modify the loans, and then place them in the VA-owned portfolio as direct loans. This will empower VA to work with Veterans experiencing severe financial hardship to adjust their loans – and their monthly payments – so they can keep their homes.

Where to get help: Any Veteran who is struggling with making their payments should engage VA at www.va.gov/housing-assistance or call 877-827-3702. VA has loan technicians working with Veterans to help them stay in their homes, including discussing available home retention options such as repayment plans, special forbearance, loan modification, and more.

Commemorative Plaques and Urns

VA has published a [proposed rule](#) in the Federal Register to provide upon request either a commemorative plaque or a commemorative urn for a veteran whose cremated remains are not interred in a national cemetery, a state veterans' cemetery, a tribal cemetery, a county cemetery, or a private cemetery.

Of note: Once a commemorative plaque or urn is furnished, the statute prohibits the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) from interring that veteran in a VA national cemetery or providing a government headstone, marker, or medallion for that veteran in any cemetery.

Here's more:

- The [plain language document](#) explaining this proposed regulatory change.
- [Proposed Rule](#)
- [Federal Register](#)

Presumptive Service Connection for Rare Respiratory Cancers Due to Exposure to Fine Particulate Matter

VA has published a [final rule](#) in the Federal Register to establish presumptive service connection for nine rare respiratory cancers in association with presumed exposure to fine particulate matter.

Here's more:

- The [plain language document](#) explaining this regulatory change.
- [Final Rule](#)
- [Federal Register](#)

Background: This final rule follows an April 26, 2022, [interim final rule](#) that established presumptive service connection for nine rare respiratory cancers in association with presumed exposure to fine particulate matter. These presumptions apply to Veterans who served in the Southwest Asia theater of operations during the Persian Gulf War, as well as in Afghanistan, Syria, Djibouti, or Uzbekistan, on or after September 19, 2001, during the Gulf War.

The nine rare respiratory cancers are:

1. Squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) of the larynx,
2. SCC of the trachea,
3. Adenocarcinoma of the trachea,
4. Salivary gland-type tumors of the trachea,
5. Adenosquamous carcinoma of the lung,
6. Large cell carcinoma of the lung,
7. Salivary gland-type tumors of the lung,
8. Sarcomatoid carcinoma of the lung, and
9. Typical and atypical carcinoid of the lung.

This interim final rule applied to claims filed on or after April 26, 2022, or that are pending before VA, the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims or the Federal Circuit Court of Appeals on April 26, 2022.

Practice Like a Pro

10-10D Saving Blank

There has been an issue in VetraSpec with the VA form 10-10D (*Application for CHAMPVA Benefits*) not saving the inputted information. The issue does not occur every time the form is generated. However, enough CSOs and VSOs had the issue that TDVS engaged Tyler

'No Signature' is a Bright Line issue that the Local Team will push back through the RDs for correction.

Solution: Ensure the required signature is attached to the form.

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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