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VA extends benefits to offshore Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans January 1st

Law also affects survivors of Veterans, certain dependents and Veteran homebuyers

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) begins deciding Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 claims, Jan. 1, 2020, extending the presumption of herbicide exposure that include toxins such as Agent Orange, to Veterans who served in the offshore waters of the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam War.

Prior to the measure, only Vietnam War Veterans who served on the ground in Vietnam or within Vietnam's inland waterways were eligible to receive disability compensation and other benefits based on a presumption of herbicide exposure.

Signed into law June 25, the law specifically affects Blue Water Navy (BWN) Veterans who served as far as 12 nautical miles offshore of the Republic of Vietnam between Jan. 6, 1962 and May 7, 1975, as well as Veterans who served in the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between Jan. 1, 1967 and Aug. 31, 1971. These Veterans can apply for disability compensation and other benefits if they have since developed one of [14 conditions](#) that are presumed to be related to exposure to herbicides such as Agent Orange. Veterans do not need to prove that they were exposed to herbicides. The specific conditions can be found by searching Agent Orange on www.va.gov.

“For six months, VA worked diligently to gather and digitize records from the Naval History and Heritage Command in order to support faster claims decisions,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “These efforts will positively impact the claims process for Veterans filing for these benefits.”

Qualifying recipients, in addition to affected Veterans still living, are certain survivors of deceased BWN and Korean DMZ Veterans.

Survivors can file claims for benefits based on the Veteran's service if the Veteran died from at least one of the 14 presumptive conditions associated with Agent Orange. The law also provides benefits for children born with [spina bifida](#) if their parent is or was a Veteran with certain verified service in Thailand during a specific period. The Blue Water Navy Act also includes provisions affecting the VA Home Loan Program. The law creates more access for Veterans to obtain no-down payment home loans, regardless of loan amount, and the home loan funding fee is reduced for eligible Reservists and National Guard borrowers who use their home loan benefits for the first time. Certain Purple Heart recipients do not pay a funding fee at all. VA's website describes these and [other benefits](#).

Veterans who want to file an initial claim for an herbicide-related disability can use VA [Form 21-526EZ, Application for Disability Compensation and Related Compensation Benefits](#) or work with a VA-recognized [Veterans Service Organization](#) to assist with the application process. Veterans may also contact their [state Veterans Affairs Office](#).

BWN Veterans who previously filed a claim seeking service connection for one of the 14 presumptive conditions that was denied by VA may provide or identify any new and relevant information regarding their claim when reapplying. To re-apply, Veterans may use [VA Form 20-0995, Decision Review Request: Supplemental Claim](#). As a result of the new law, VA will automatically review claims that are currently in the VA review process or under appeal.

For more information about the Blue Water Navy Act and the changes that will take effect visit <https://www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/blue-water-navy.asp>.

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