



# IOWA COUNTY VETERANS NEWSLETTER

Published by the Iowa County Veterans Service Office: 303 W. Chapel Street, Suite 1300, Dodgeville, WI 53533  
Office Hours: M-F 8:00 am-4:30 pm Phone: 608/930-9865 Fax: 608/935-0358 Email: [vet@iowacounty.org](mailto:vet@iowacounty.org)  
Jeffrey T. Lindeman, County Veterans Service Officer

## WINTER, 2022

### COLA SUMMARY 2023

Retirement, VA Disability, SBP and SS Recipients Military retirees and veterans receiving disability payments from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will see their paychecks go up by 8.7% for 2023, triggered by inflation and an annual adjustment to the federal Cost of Living Allowance (COLA). That annual adjustment has averaged around 1.5% for the last 10 years. The Social Security Administration announced the adjustment rate. The VA is required by law to alter disability payment rates by that amount.

### VA PROGRAM OF COMPREHENSIVE ASSISTANCE FOR FAMILY CAREGIVERS EXPANDS TO VETERANS OF ALL ERAS

VA's [Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers](#) is expanding to include [eligible](#) Veterans and family caregivers of all eras.

Previously, PCAFC was only available to eligible Veterans who served on or after Sept. 11, 2001. This expansion opens the program to eligible Veterans of all eras, including those who served after May 7, 1975, and before Sept. 11, 2001.

PCAFC provides caregivers of eligible Veterans with resources, education, financial assistance, health insurance, beneficiary travel, peer support and more. The program is a cornerstone of VA health

care, ensuring that Veterans get the world-class care they deserve and that caregivers get the comprehensive support they need.

“For the first time, eligible Veterans of all service eras can participate in the VA’s Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers, we recognize the critical role family caregivers play in caring for Veterans, and through this expansion, we’re able to ensure that family caregivers of all eligible Veterans have access to the comprehensive support they deserve” says Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs Donald Remy.

This is the second expansion of PCAFC, and it will expand access to the program for tens of thousands of Veterans and their family caregivers. The [first expansion of PCAFC](#) began in Oct. 2020, as part of implementation of the VA MISSION Act of 2018. PCAFC has added approximately 20,000 active Veteran and family caregiver participants during the past two years.

Earlier this month, VA [announced](#) an interim final rule that will extend PCAFC eligibility for legacy participants, legacy applicants and their family caregivers, by three years to Sept. 30, 2025. Legacy Participants or Legacy Applicants are Veterans and their family caregivers who participated in PCAFC prior to Oct 1, 2020.

[Learn more](#) about the PCAFC expansion and VA’s Caregiver Support Program, reach out to a [local CSP team](#) or call our Caregiver Support Line at 855-260-3274 Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. ET, and Saturday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. ET.

## **VETERANS ENROLLED IN VA HEALTH CARE ELIGIBLE FOR NEW TOXIC EXPOSURE SCREENINGS**

Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers and clinics across the country will offer enrolled Veterans a new toxic exposure screening. These screenings are a key part of the [PACT Act](#), a new law that empowers VA to deliver care and benefits to millions of toxic exposed Veterans and their survivors.

The screening takes five to 10 minutes and begins by asking Veterans if they believe they experienced any toxic exposures while serving in the armed forces. Veterans who answer “yes” are then asked about specific exposures, including: open burn pits, Agent Orange, radiation, contaminated water, and other exposures.

Veterans enrolled in VA health care will be offered an initial toxic exposure screening then follow-up screenings at least once every five years.

“These screenings are an important step toward making sure that all toxic exposed Veterans get the care and benefits they deserve,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “At the end of the day, these screenings will improve health outcomes for Veterans—and there’s nothing more important than that.”

Veterans who report concerns about toxic exposures will be connected to information about clinical resources and benefits. These screenings are a part of VA’s broader efforts to provide world-class health care for toxic exposed Veterans.

Veterans can ask about receiving the screening at their next VA primary care provider appointment. If Veterans are not assigned to a Primary Care team or wish to be screened sooner than their next appointment, we invite them to contact their local facility and ask to be screened by the Toxic Exposure Screening Navigator.

VA began a pilot of this program on September 6. Since then, VA has screened more than 19,000 Veterans and found a 37% concern of exposure among those Veterans.

We encourage Veterans not currently enrolled in VA health care to apply now. Visit <https://www.va.gov/health-care/apply/application/introduction> to learn more.

## **VA WILL PRIORITIZE DELIVERING BENEFITS TO VETERANS WITH CANCER UNDER PACT ACT**

On National Cancer Awareness Day, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced it will prioritize the processing of Veterans’ benefits claims for cancers associated with the [PACT Act](#). VA will expedite these claims to ensure Veterans with cancer are getting timely access to the care and benefits they need and deserve.

The PACT Act added presumptions of service connection for more than [20 new conditions, including various cancers](#). These presumptions help Veterans get their earned benefits by reducing the evidence necessary for VA to find that a condition was caused by burn pits or other toxic exposures. They also simplify the claims process by eliminating the need to establish a link between the Veteran’s service and the claimed condition.

Since the PACT Act was signed into law August 10, Veterans have filed nearly 125,000 PACT Act-related claims. Of those claims, nearly 14,000 are for cancers covered by the PACT Act.

“We are working hard to get benefits to all Veterans who qualify under the PACT ACT as soon as possible, and Veterans living with cancer are at particular risk,” said **VA Secretary Denis McDonough**. “Expediting claims for these Vets will ensure that they get the care and benefits they need and so rightly deserve.”

This decision is a part of the Biden-Harris Administration’s [broader efforts](#) to care for those with cancer and end cancer as we know it. In addition to prioritizing claims for Veterans with cancer, VA will continue to prioritize the processing of claims for Veterans with terminal illnesses and those experiencing homelessness.

VA will begin processing all PACT Act-related claims Jan 1, 2023. In anticipation of the surge in new claims, VA is hiring at 56 regional offices and 39 other special processing and call centers within the United States and Puerto Rico. For more information about PACT Act and how to file a claim, visit [va.gov/PACT](https://www.va.gov/PACT). If Veterans, their families, caregivers or survivors have questions about PACT Act and wish to speak with someone to help, they may call 1-800-MyVA411 at any time.

## **NEARLY 113,000 CLAIMS ALREADY FILED FOR PACT ACT BENEFITS**

Veterans Affairs officials have already received nearly 113,000 new [disability claims](#) related to the [sweeping toxic exposure legislation](#) signed into law less than three months ago, an indication of the potential impact of the measure and the work ahead for the department.

Benefits officials began accepting claims for all presumptive illnesses included in the [Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act](#) (better known as the PACT Act) after it was signed into law by President Joe Biden on Aug. 10.

They include 12 types of cancer and 12 other respiratory illnesses linked to burn pit exposure in the Gulf War and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; hypertension and monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance (MGUS) for veterans who served in Vietnam; and radiation-related illnesses for veterans who served in several new locations in the 1960s and early 1970s.

Coverage for those issues had been a point of contention for years. In particular, veterans advocates lamented that too many serious problems believed linked to [burn pit exposure](#) were being ignored by VA leaders because of incomplete science linking the health problems with the toxic smoke from the waste fires.

In the 75 days since the signing, the department has received 112,949 new applications for disability claims related to the new presumptive illnesses, an increase in the benefits workload of more than 21% from the same period last year.

“For too long, toxic-exposed veterans and their families have had to fight their government for the benefits and health care they’ve earned,” Acting Under Secretary for Benefits Josh Jacobs said in a statement. “Thanks to the PACT Act, generations of veterans will be able to get the care and benefits they deserve.”

Depending on the severity of a veteran’s injuries, he or she may be eligible for up to \$4,000 in disability compensation. Presumptive status for service-connected illnesses cuts down on the paperwork veterans are required to file to receive the monthly checks.

VA officials have been urging veterans who believe they may be eligible to apply now, even though

claims will not be processed until January 2023. Payouts should begin by early spring.

The delay between accepting claims and processing them was designed to give VA officials time to put personnel and processes in place to ensure the flood of new claims can be smoothly integrated into the current benefits workflow.

Even so, senior officials have warned that the backlog of overdue first-time claims (ones that take more than four months to complete) is likely to rise early next year because of the new PACT Act cases. The backlog currently sits at more than 143,000 cases, roughly double what it was before the start of the coronavirus pandemic in America in March 2020. *Leo Shane III, Military Times*

## **VETERAN SERVICE ORGANIZATION HAPPENINGS**

### Arena VFW Post #9336

Arena VFW Post #9336 is offering their Steak Feed throughout the winter months. Carryout meals are available, call (608)753-2225 to order. Dine-in is also available Dates are listed below:

December 10, 2022  
February 11, 2023  
March 11, 2023  
April 8, 2023  
May 13, 2023

### Ridgeway American Legion Post #257

Ridgeway will be having their steak feeds again this winter season. The Post is located at 307 W Farwell St., Ridgeway, WI.

February 18, 2023  
March 18, 2023  
April 15, 2023

Be sure to step out and let one, or both, of these posts take care of the Saturday night cooking. Any Iowa County Veterans Service Organization is welcome to have events listed in the newsletter. Contact the Veterans Service Office at (608)930-9865.

*Information in the newsletter is compiled from various news sources and press releases.*

Iowa County Veterans Service Office  
303 W. Chapel Street – Suite 1300  
Dodgeville, WI 53533

**Veterans  
Newsletter**

**IMPORTANT DATES**

Saturday, December 24<sup>th</sup> – Christmas Eve  
Sunday, December 25<sup>th</sup> – Christmas Day  
Saturday, December 31<sup>st</sup> – New Year's Eve  
Sunday, January 1, 2023 – Happy 2023

**VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE CLOSINGS**

Christmas Eve Holiday  
Christmas Holiday  
New Year's Day

Friday, December 23<sup>rd</sup>  
Monday, December 26<sup>th</sup>  
Monday, January 2, 2023