



IOWA COUNTY VETERANS NEWSLETTER

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Office Hours: M-F 8:30 am-4:30 pm Phone: **608/930-9865** Fax: 608/935-0358 Email: vet@iowacounty.org
Jeffrey T. Lindeman, County Veterans Service Officer

SUMMER, 2020

MADISON VA SELECTED AS A LEAD FACILITY TO REINTRODUCE VA HEALTH CARE SERVICES WHILE ENSURING SAFE ENVIRONMENT

The William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital (Madison VA) is working on a plan to reintroduce health care services as Wisconsin starts reopening after COVID-19 shutdowns. The facility will begin expanding some services May 20th.

“The safety of Veterans and staff is the highest priority when we consider how we provide health care services and procedures during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic,” John Rohrer, Director of the Madison VA said. “VA will take into account guidance from various agencies including federal, state and local government as we gradually reintroduce health care services. As a high reliability organization, safety is always paramount and will continue to guide our decision making.”

Each Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) selected facilities as Lead Sites to be the first to implement a phased approach to reintroducing health care services while ensuring a safe environment.

As one of the pilot sites, the Madison VA will begin marginally increasing specific procedures at the hospital starting May 20th. These procedures include some gastroenterology, cardiology, orthopedic and operating room procedures and preparing related lab, imaging and specialty clinics for that increase in procedure volume. In addition,

the Madison VA will be piloting a phased increase of face to face visits at our Beaver Dam Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC). This will result in a focused and incremental increase in procedures and face to face visits.

Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has developed a risk-based framework to prioritize non-urgent procedures, in addition to the urgent procedures currently being performed. Evaluation of factors such as patient health, staff safety and resource considerations will guide expansions and scheduling decisions. Rigorous safety measures including employee and Veteran COVID-19 screening, physical distancing and appropriate personal protective attire such as face coverings and frequent disinfection of high-touch services will remain in place at all VHA facilities.

While the hospital is beginning to increase volume of scheduled procedures, Veterans are reminded that walk-in clinics are not open at this time. Only patients with a confirmed scheduled appointment should present to the facility, unless they are experiencing a medical emergency. Veterans are also encouraged to present to the facility no earlier than 30 minutes before their scheduled appointment to assist in managing building capacity. Emergency medical and mental health care remains open and available.

If you're a Veteran patient who wishes to be seen, please call 888-598-7793 to make an appointment beforehand.

The Madison VA will continue to maximize personalized virtual care options like telehealth,

phone consults and wellness checks, as we know these services have been a valuable link to our Veterans during this challenging time. As additional facilities reintroduce services across the country, the Madison VA will share best practices learned with all facilities across the country.

For more information about the Madison VA Hospital, visit www.madison.va.gov or www.facebook.com/MadisonVAHospital.

WHITE PAPER IDENTIFIES GUAM 13 YEAR EXPOSURE PERIOD

Veterans who served in Guam from 1962 to 1975 were likely exposed to toxins including Agent Orange and should receive Department of Veterans Affairs benefits, according to a new report released this week. The white paper from the National Veterans Legal Services Program and Veterans Legal Services Clinic at Yale Law School shows that those veterans satisfy the VA's legal standard for exposure to Agent Orange and other herbicides. "The conclusion is based on an exhaustive review conducted over nearly two years of government, private, archival and oral history evidence of herbicide use in Guam during the Vietnam era," the groups said 11 MAY in a news release accompanying the report. "This white paper confirms the reports of countless veterans who served in Guam but whose claims the VA has wrongly rejected," said Bart Stichman, executive director of NVLSP. "It is time that the VA acknowledge the strong evidence of toxic herbicide exposure in Guam and care for veterans exposed."

At the height of bombing operations during Vietnam, more than three-quarters of all U.S. B-52 aircraft available for operations were based in Guam. The rapid buildup of U.S. airpower in Guam, along with climate conditions on the island, housing and water shortages and other challenges, prompted military leaders to work to prevent fires and control tropical growth using the herbicides. "Service members have said for years that they sprayed Agent Orange and other toxic herbicides all across Guam," said Brian Moyer, a Marine veteran who served in Guam from 1974 to 1976 and leads the group Agent Orange Survivors of Guam, a section of Military Veterans Advocacy. "So many of us were exposed and, sadly, many have already passed away—with no recognition from the VA."

The report says that the evidence collected over two years establishes, at minimum, "as likely as not" veterans who served on the island during those years were exposed to Agent Orange and other toxic herbicides. Widespread exposure is supported by evidence including contamination tests by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Defense Department in the 1980s and 1990s, according to the report. As a result, those veterans should be presumptively entitled to disability benefits for any diseases VA has associated with exposure to those toxins. "Like many of the early veterans' Agent Orange claims dismissed by the VA in the 1970s and 1980s, Guam veterans have been fighting for overdue recognition of their in-service disabilities," said John Rowan, National President of Vietnam Veterans for America. "Guam veterans now have an overwhelming case that will require the VA to finally recognize these meritorious claims."

"Official government accounts of herbicide mishandling, improper hazardous waste disposal, and high concentrations of dioxin across Guam establish exposure pathways to support claims of service connection based on herbicide exposure," said James Campbell, a law student in Yale's Veterans Legal Services Clinic. "We hope that veterans advocates and lawmakers will build on this report to address unremediated health risks and military pollution in Guam." Veterans exposed to Agent Orange are still waiting on VA to decide to add four additional diseases to the list of covered conditions, including bladder cancer, hypertension, Parkinson's-like symptoms and hypothyroidism. VA has delayed those decisions repeatedly. Senators earlier this year introduced a bill to force the issue, but that legislation has not come up in committee or received any votes so far.

Go to https://images.radio.com/connectingvets/2020.05.08_-_NVLSP-VLSC_White_Paper.pdf to read the White Paper dated May 8, 2020.

Volunteer Opportunity Awaits You!

Do you like to drive? Do you have a few extra hours each week or even each month to assist someone in need? Are you looking to assist your fellow Veterans? If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, there is a great volunteer opportunity for you.

The Iowa County Veterans Service Office along with the Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC) are seeking individuals willing to drive Veterans to non-emergency medical appointments. Drivers volunteer their time but do receive reimbursement for their round-trip mileage for each appointment. This volunteer experience is an excellent way to connect with fellow Veterans across Iowa County.

If you are interested in more information, please contact the ADRC at 608-930-9835.

MADISON VET CENTER

As of 1 Jun 2020, the Madison Vet center is going to start offering limited face to face sessions and slowly ramping up the pace. Jason Thilges is planning to return to holding office hours at the Health and Human Services building as soon as possible. If you would like to access this benefit, available to any combat veteran from any era, at no cost to the veteran you can contact the Madison Vet Center at (608)264-5342.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL BILL CLAIMS

More than one million veterans will soon be receiving instructions from Veterans Affairs officials on how to check if they are eligible for thousands of dollars in medical cost reimbursements as part of a court decision last fall. Starting 13 APR, department staffers will send letters to tens of thousands of veterans who were rejected for financial relief in recent years for bills they received for non-department emergency medical care. That move comes over VA objections concerning an ongoing lawsuit over the issue, which could add billions in new costs to the department's budget.

Last fall, the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims ruled that the department's current regulation for veterans who seek non-department medical care violates existing federal law. They ordered VA officials to re-examine more than 72,000 rejected claims and update their rules, arguing the department has a responsibility to cover the costs of the unexpected medical visits. The case centers on

veterans whose unpaid emergency room expenses were denied by VA officials under existing policies. The plaintiffs' both had part of their bills paid for by other insurance, but were left with several thousand in personal costs. VA officials argued in court that they did not need to handle the unpaid balance because the veterans were primarily covered under other insurance plans. The court ruled that violates both existing law and past legal precedent.

A VA Inspector General report last summer found \$716 million in improperly processed payments in cases involving veterans who sought medical care outside the department's health system in 2017, including about \$53 million that should have been refunded under existing rules. VA officials are considering appealing the ruling, and asked that any action on the cases be postponed until higher courts weigh in on the matter. But earlier this month, the appeals court rejected that motion and ordered letters be sent out starting 13 APR.

VA officials have estimated that full compliance with the court order could cost between \$1.8 billion and \$6.5 billion. Reimbursements may date back to cases decided by the department in 2016. The ruling also invalidated all VA decisions denying reimbursement for deductibles and co-insurance costs not covered in emergency visits at non-VA facilities. The letters come as many veterans are facing new debts related to work interruptions and other financial problems related to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. However, processing of the claims is likely to take several months, and may be stalled further by ongoing legal appeals.

THAT OLD, TATTERED FLAG

It is time again to retire the flags that have become too worn and faded to remain in service. The Mineral Point American Legion provides the location for the county-wide flag retirement ceremony. This year's ceremony will be on June 16th at 7:00 p.m. If you have flags you would like to have retired, you can drop them off at several locations around the county as well as at the Veterans Service Office.

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

**Veterans
Newsletter**

IMPORTANT DATES

May 25 th	Memorial Day
June 14 th	Flag Day
June 16 th	Flag Retirement – Mineral Point American Legion - 7:00 p.m.
July 4 th	Independence Day

VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE CLOSINGS IN 2020

Memorial Day	Monday, May 25 th
Independence Day	Thursday, July 4 th
Labor Day	Monday, September 7 th
Thanksgiving Holiday	Thursday/Friday, November 26 th & 27 th
Christmas Holiday	Thursday/ Friday, December 24 th & 25 th