



# Butler County Veterans Service Commission Newsletter

**October 2021**

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On a rainy September 22<sup>nd</sup> laid a flag draped casket, guarded by two individuals, to honor National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. This outreach event named The Silent Watch, lasted for 17 hours with two guards standing silently in memory of those veterans that abruptly took their own life. The 17 hour event is symbolic of the 17 Veterans who take their lives each day. The casket was guarded by two individuals from 7:00 AM to 12:00 AM in 20 minute intervals. Our agency recorded 68 unique volunteers of all ages, with 102 time slots filled in by those volunteers. All time slots were filled and the casket was guarded for the entire 17 hour event.

While the number of suicides is on the decline from previous years, it's still not enough.

Suicide is a grim and morbid topic of discussion but the conversation must happen. The decision to take your own life is permanent and not a solution to any problem or adversary one is facing. One life is too many and our agency is devoted to ending Veterans suicide.

Our agency is proud to have hosted this event and will hold it every year until Veterans suicide is no more.



Our agency will stand in silence for those lost and ready to act for those that are in need of help.

If you are having thoughts of suicide or harming yourself, please reach out to someone. You are not alone. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is operated 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. To contact the Veterans Crisis line, please call 1-800-273-8255.

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**Hours of Operation:**

**Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. and 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. (Excluding Holidays)**



# Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) Updates

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On December 21, 2021, COVID-19 legislation that permits GI Bill® students to receive Monthly Housing Allowance (MHA) at the resident (in person) rate, while taking approved courses converted to online training due to COVID-19, will end.

## **What is the COVID-19 Legislation?**

In March 2020, Congress enacted and later extended many COVID-19 provisions that are set to expire on December 21, 2021. As a result of the provisions, many institutions were afforded an opportunity to modify training to an online modality, although that modality may have been prohibited as part of a program's approval. As we are approaching the expiration of these provisions, it is important that the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) emphasize that an institution must return to an approved modality on or before December 22, 2021.

## **What does this mean?**

If your institution is operating in an unapproved modality, you must return to the modality that was approved on February 29, 2020, before COVID-19 provisions were effective. Returning to your approved modality must occur on or before December 22, 2021.

Important: If your institution has a term that spans December 21, 2021, and it is unable to return to its approved modality on or before December 22, 2021, do not certify that term to VA, as VA cannot authorize benefits for a term that is not operating in an approved modality.

## **How will this impact GI Bill Students?**

If your institution is normally approved for online learning, when enrolling for courses in 2022 or any subsequent term, students will need to enroll in approved resident (in person) classes to continue receiving their MHA at the resident rate. Otherwise, they will receive the online rate (half the national average).

If your institution is one that is normally approved only for resident training and is only approved for online training due to the COVID-19 legislation, students will need to return to resident (in person) training after December 21, 2021, in order to continue receiving GI Bill benefits. Students who choose to continue training online after December 21, 2021, will lose their GI Bill benefits, such as a monthly housing allowance, beginning December 22, 2021.

## **Next Steps for Terms that Span December 21, 2021**

If your institution is normally approved for online training, certify your student's enrollment as you normally would. If your students are enrolled in courses that span December 21, 2021, they will continue to receive MHA but at a reduced rate.

If your institution is not normally approved for online training, you should be cautious when approving In-residence students who are attending online as a result of the COVID-19 provisions and have no intention of returning to the classroom for terms that span December 21, 2021. They risk being terminated from the program and you risk losing any further VA education benefits payments.

If you have questions about your institution's approved modality, please contact your State Approving Agency.



# Veterans Healthcare Administration (VHA) Updates

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## VA VETSmile pilot program to improve affordable dental care access for Veterans

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs launched a new initiative with community dental care providers to help improve dental care access for Veterans enrolled in VA health care who are currently ineligible for VA dental services.

VETSmile: Connecting Veterans with Dentists in their Communities started early July to help eligible Veterans access free or discounted dental services at pilot sites in New York City and New Jersey through dental care providers at New York University College of Dentistry, Zufall Health Center and Rutgers School of Dental Medicine.

VETSmile is a Community Provider Collaborations for Veterans pilot program authorized under Section 152 of the VA MISSION Act of 2018. It is the pilot program with a waiver request submitted to Congress under this authority.

“VETSmile is an opportunity for us to bridge the gap in Veterans’ access to continuous, accessible and affordable oral care, which is crucial for their overall wellbeing,” said Center for Care and Payment Innovation Acting Executive Director Roshni Ghosh, M.D. “VHA’s Center for Care and Payment Innovation plans to rapidly accelerate efforts to broaden VETSmile dental care partnerships in additional states after implementation at initial sites.”

For eligible Veterans who do not have regular dentists, partnering dental care sites will provide dental care and services. Depending on the community provider, the services offered to eligible Veterans will include:

1. Acute emergency dental care.
2. Preventive oral care.
3. Treatment of oral disease.
4. Dental restoration, endodontics and periodontics.

Additionally, dental care partners provide Veterans with oral health education to encourage adoption of routine oral hygiene practices.

VETSmile expects to serve 3,900 Veterans through 9,000 Veteran patient visits in the first year. The numbers are expected to increase as the pilot reaches other geographic locations.

The program will carry on for the next five years and will be assessed for scaling or an extension. Sustained partnerships with the American Dental Association, the National Association of Community Health Centers, and VA Dentistry support the development and success of this pilot.



# Benefit Rundown – Veterans Affairs (VA) Healthcare

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## I Need Hearing Aids!

This is the most common need amongst our Veteran population. There's no question that if you raised your right hand to serve this country, you were probably exposed to loud noises in service. VA Health Care is an amazing and sometimes mis-understood benefit. Within this section we will discuss VA Health Care, some misconceptions and how to get enrolled so you can get hearing aids or other services VA Health Care provides!

First, to gain eligibility through VA Health Care, it is important to remember some key misconceptions we have heard numerous times in our office that are absolutely false.

“I am not a combat Veteran so I don't qualify” or “I am taking away benefits that other Veterans deserve more than I do”. Nothing could be further from the truth. There are three basic eligibility criteria that must be met. You must have a certain amount of active military time (length) in service pending on the dates you served, must have a discharge under other than dishonorable conditions and meet the gross household income threshold established by the VA. This is the basic eligibility criteria.

It is important to know VA Health Care is not insurance. For the Veterans who are preparing to retire, often look into VA Health Care because when they retire, they would not be eligible for Medicare. VA Health Care is not insurance. You cannot use your civilian doctor(s) and expect the VA to pay for treatment. If you want the VA to pay for the treatment, you have to utilize a VA Medical Facility. Since it is not insurance, there are no monthly premiums, however a veteran may have to make co-pays for doctor's visits and prescriptions depending on which of the eight priority groups the Veteran falls into. This is determined by Service Connected Disability percentage, gross household income and other service factors also known as enhanced eligibility.

Unfortunately, not every Veteran is eligible for VA Health Care. Veterans were told while still serving, that they would have VA Health Care at any time, for life. While some Veterans will qualify under enhanced eligibility, if you don't meet an enhanced eligibility requirement, your time in service, character of discharge, medical expenses and household income play a factor on being granted eligibility. Yes, there are times that a Veteran's household income does exceed the limit established by law and they do not qualify for VA Health Care. But how do you get your hearing aids or other services if you are over income?

In last months Newsletter, we discussed Service Connected Disability Compensation. This route is often referred to as the back door into VA Health Care. If you are granted disability compensation at 10% or greater, you are automatically granted eligibility into VA Health Care despite your income. Remember those loud noises you were exposed to in service that caused a nagging ringing or cricket sounds in your ears? There's a possibility of being granted disability for hearing loss or tinnitus (ringing in ears) as related to service.

We encourage every Veteran to see one of our Service Officers to discuss all benefits they are eligible for!



## The Spotlight

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The Spotlight is a story of noteriety for a particular veteran to shine! Mr. John Davis deserves the Spotlight!

Mr. Davis is a United States Navy Veteran having served from 1977 to 1981. Recently, Mr. Davis participated in the 40<sup>th</sup> National Veterans Wheel Chair Games in New York City.

Mr. Davis got involved with the Wheel Chair Games through the Dayton Ohio VA Medical Center Spinal Cord Injury Clinic. He had been encouraged by other patients seen in this clinic to include his medical treatment team. He had thought about it a lot and decided he was going to participate.

“I am going to have some fun!”, Mr. Davis said.

Mr. Davis utilized our agencies Transportation Services to get him to his appointments so he could train for the games. His recreational therapist at the VA was a coach and his doctor was apart of the medical team involved with the Wheel Chair Games.

He competed in field events that included the Javelin, Discus and Shot Put. He also participated in Bowling and 9 Ball. Mr. Davis expressed his favorite event was “All of them!”.

“It was a life changing experience and I have made friends all over the country!” said Davis.

While Mr. Davis did not win in a competition he participated in, he is forever grateful for the camaraderie he experienced. Mr. Davis plans on participating in the 2022 Wheel Chair Games in Tempe, Arizona where he exclaimed “I’m bringing home the gold!”.

Let us all congratulate Mr. Davis on his endeavors and experiences through this agency and his participation in 2021 National Veterans Wheel Chair Games!

Mr. Davis, the Spotlight is on you!





## Agency Services

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### Service Work

The Butler County Veterans Service Commission employs a staff of Ohio Department of Veterans Services Certified/ Nationally Accredited Service Officers who work as advocates for the veterans of Butler County. It is with honor that these Service Officers work to assist the veterans of this county in filing for appropriate Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits and answer Department of Defense (DOD) inquiries.

The Butler County Veterans Service Commission is not the VA. The Veterans Service Commission is a county agency funded by local tax dollars and was created by Ohio law to assist veterans in receiving all benefits possible.

For more information, please contact our office staff to schedule an appointment for Service Work.

### Transportation Services

The Butler County Veterans Service Commission is committed to providing quality transportation to and from the VA medical facilities within our district for veterans who reside in Butler County. This transportation is free of charge to eligible veterans.

Budget constraints limit transportation assistance to no more than two (2) transports per week. Any exceptions are coordinated in advance between VA Provider and the Administration of this agency.

For more information or to register, please contact our office staff.

### Financial Assistance

We can assist with food, hygiene, transportation expenses, rent/mortgage, utilities, clothing, day care expenses and more.

The Veterans Service Commission exercises extreme care in determining those individuals who are to be helped and to make sure no one entitled to relief is overlooked. The law under which the Veterans Service Commission operates is under the Ohio Revised Code 5901.

For a Financial Assistance appointment or to receive a checklist of required items, please contact our office staff.

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