

PACT Act Virtual Exchange & Women Veterans Empowerment
#BringWomenVeteransHome2VA #ChooseVA
Frequently Asked Questions

Discussion	
Questions	Answers
<p>1. Eligibility for VA benefits and services has been expanded recently. Can you please explain how?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Congress has recently passed legislation that expands access to benefits for Veterans who have been exposed to toxic substances. • Talk about why this is needed (maybe from your perspective as a Veteran). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For more information on this go to Accessing new toxic exposure health care and benefits - VA News
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For those who don't know, can you tell us more about the PACT Act? • The SFC Heath Robinson Honoring our PACT Act is a new law that expands VA health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances. Helps provide these Veterans—and their survivors—with the care and benefits they've earned. • Expands and extends eligibility for VA health care for Veterans exposed to toxins, including post-9/11 Veterans. • Adds 20-plus more presumptive conditions for burn pits, Agent Orange, and other toxic exposures. • Adds more presumptive-exposure locations for Agent Orange and radiation. • Requires VA to provide a toxic exposure screening to every Veteran enrolled in VA health care. • Helps VA improve research, staff education, and treatment. • And if you aren't enrolled in VA health care, now is your chance. The following pertains to Post-9/11 Veterans: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ We're extending and expanding VA health care eligibility based on the PACT Act. We encourage you to apply, no matter your 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit www.VA.gov/PACT to learn more about how the PACT Act might impact you.

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separation date. Your eligibility depends on your service history and other factors.

- If you meet the requirements listed here, you can get free VA health care for any condition related to your service for up to 10 years from the date of your most recent discharge or separation. You can also enroll at any time during this period and get any care you need, but you may owe a copay for some care.
- At least one of these must be true of your active-duty service:
 - You served in a theater of combat operations during a period of war after the Persian Gulf War, or
 - You served in combat against a hostile force during a period of hostilities after November 11, 1998
- And this must be true for you:
 - You were discharged or released on or after October 1, 2013
 - We encourage you to enroll now so we can provide any care you may need now or in the future. Enrollment is free.
- A full list of presumptive conditions can be found at www.va.gov/PACT. We'll share the top 5 PACT Act conditions claims that we've seen come in: Hypertensive Vascular Disease, Allergic Rhinitis, Maxillary Sinusitis, Bronchial Asthma, and Malignant Growth of Genitourinary System.
- Every enrolled Veteran will receive an initial toxic exposure screening and a follow-up screening every five years. Veterans who are not enrolled, but who are eligible will have an opportunity to enroll and receive the screening.

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<p>2. Who will the PACT Act impact?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extends to Vietnam, Gulf War, and Post-9/11 eras • Veterans assigned to a duty station in (including airspace above) certain locations during specific periods of time on or after: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • August 2, 1990: Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, or United Arab Emirates • September 11, 2001: Afghanistan, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Uzbekistan, Yemen, Somalia, and more. • New locations for Vietnam era Veterans: Any U.S. or Royal Thai military base in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia at Mimot or Krek, Kampong Cham Province, Guam or American Samoa or in the territorial waters off of Guam or American Samoa, and Johnston Atoll or on a ship that called at Johnston Atoll. • If they served in any of these locations and time periods, VA determined that they had exposure to burn pits, Agent Orange, or other toxins. 	
<p>3. Besides disability compensation, what other benefit areas are impacted by this legislation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The most significant benefit is access to health care and treatment. • This might also impact eligibility for other benefits as, depending on the new disability rating, an eligible Veteran might find new opportunities available to get assistance that they might need such as life insurance or VR&E. 	
<p>4. What do you advise Veterans and family members do?</p>	

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- Read through the new presumptive conditions and location lists. Before we jump into the conditions, let's talk about what a presumptive condition is:
- VA considers a condition presumptive when it's established by law or regulation. If you have a presumptive condition, you don't need to prove that your service caused the condition. You only need to meet the service requirements for the presumption.
- VA presumes that certain conditions were caused by your military services. Full stop.
- There is a SITREP video entitled "Presumptive Condition and Service Connection Filing for VA Disability" that gives a quick overview of the difference between a "presumptive condition and service-connection" for more details.
- New Agent Orange presumptive conditions:
 - High blood pressure (hypertension)
 - Monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance (MGUS)
 - Veterans may also be eligible for disability compensation based on other Agent Orange presumptive conditions. These conditions include certain cancers, type 2 diabetes, and other illnesses.
 - Burn pit and other toxic exposure presumptive conditions:
 - Asthma that was diagnosed after service
 - Chronic bronchitis
 - Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
 - Chronic sinusitis
 - Brain and neck cancers
 - Kidney cancer
 - Melanoma
 - Reproductive challenges and cancers of any type (important flag for Women Veterans)
 - Female reproductive cancers:
 - We consider these female reproductive cancers presumptive:
 - Breast cancer

To learn more about Presumptive Conditions go to

<https://bit.ly/3OCJg1E>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cervical cancer ○ Ovarian cancer ○ Uterine cancer ○ Vaginal cancer ○ Vulvar cancer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If you have not received a Toxic Exposure Screening we encourage you to get one. Here’s the BLUF: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ All Veteans enrolled in VA health care can receive one. Not enrolled? Apply now. ○ The screening is 5-10 minutes to identify and document any potential exposures to toxins during your service. ○ We recommend screening at least once every 5 years ○ You can get these done at VA medical centers/clinics and even virtually ○ Just ask at the screening at your next VA appointment ● And if you’ve previously had a now presumptive condition that was denied? Reapply now. 	
<p>5. Where can I get more information on the new eligibility criteria?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Visit va.gov/PACT. There you’ll find an overview of the PACT Act, benefits, and health care for Vietnam, Gulf War, and Post-9/11 Veterans and their survivors. ● Our team also created the PACT Act Roadmap—which is an easy way to understand where you currently are with the process (or start the process) and how to apply for benefits and health care. 	<p>To learn more go to www.VA.gov/PACT</p> <p>The VA Outreach Events Calendar lists events all over the country. va.gov/outreach-and-events/events</p> <p>PACT Act Roadmap is at https://bit.ly/3IB5TQw</p>
<p>6. Is there a deadline for applications?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There is no deadline to apply for benefits. However, if you apply before August 9, 2023, and we grant your applications, we’ll likely backdate your benefits to the date of the bill signing. This means we’ll pay you the amount you would have received from August 9, 2022, to the date we grant your application. That’s a year of backpay. ● 	<p>Visit Choose.VA.gov for more information on VA benefits and services and how to apply.</p>

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<p>7. What happens if Veterans apply after August 9</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The PACT Act is here to stay, and Veterans can and should apply anytime for the benefits they’ve earned. • Additionally, Veterans who apply after August 10 of this year may still be eligible to have their benefits backdated by one year. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For example, if a Veteran applied in December of 2025, they could have their benefits – if granted – backdated to December of 2024. ○ But, in that case, they would miss out on their earliest possible effective date of August 10, 2022, meaning that they would miss out on a couple years of benefit payments. ○ That’s why we’re encouraging Vets and survivors to apply now – so they get the earliest possible effective date and the most possible benefit payments. • Bottom line: the sooner you apply, the more benefits you may be eligible for. So don't wait, apply today. 	
<p>8. Is priority given to Veterans with a cancer diagnosis or terminal illness?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VA prioritizes processing of claims for any Veteran who has a terminal illness, including cancer. VA also prioritizes claims for Veterans, such as: • Veterans experiencing extreme financial hardship or homelessness, • Veterans over the age of 85, • Medal of Honor or Purple Heart recipients, and former prisoners of war 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unfortunately, some veterans have paid the ultimate price and have passed away from a terminal illness like one of the cancers that is now a presumptive condition of the PACT Act. Is there any assistance for surviving spouses or family members? How can they get help? 	

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<ul style="list-style-type: none">Survivors are eligible too. Dependency and Idemnity Compensation (DIC) is tax-free monthly payment available to an eligible surviving spouse, dependent children, or parent(s) of a Veteran or Service member who died on active duty, due to a service-related injury or illness, or from a presumptive condition.	
<p>9. Do I have to hire a lawyer to help me apply?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">You should never pay someone to help you apply for your PACT Act benefits. Beware of unaccredited individuals who prepare, present, or prosecute VA benefits claims, or hold themselves out as being authorized to do so, are in violation of Federal law.VA accredits three types of representatives—Veterans Service Organization (VSO) representatives, attorneys, and agents—to help ensure that claimants have access to responsible and qualified representation on their VA benefits claims.VVA and VFW are VA accredited.The VA Office of General Counsel maintains a list of VA-recognized organizations and VA-accredited individuals that are authorized to assist in the preparation, presentation, and prosecution of VA benefit claims at https://www.va.gov/ogc/apps/accreditation/index.asp.	<p>For more information on avoiding fraud and safely applying for your benefits read https://bit.ly/420VPHe.</p> <p>Accredited Organizations to help with claims: https://bit.ly/43sOrFC</p>
<p>10. Veterans have told me that they are concerned that their benefits might be reduced if they submit a PACT Act-related application.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">In general, Veterans who currently receive compensation for a service-connected condition will not have their previously awarded claims re-adjudicated simply because they file for new benefits under the PACT Act. VA’s practice is not to look at previously processed disabilities when a new claim is filed that is not related to the existing claims, unless required by law. In other words, when you submit a new claim, typically only those new conditions are reviewed.	

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<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When you file a new claim, most likely your benefits will increase or stay the same. In fact, since 2021, less than 1% of Veterans who file new claims have their benefits reduced. As of April 18, 2023, the approval rate for Veterans filing PACT Act-related claims was 80.6%.	
<p>11. If a Veteran is already rated 100% total and permanent for other injuries, is there any benefit to filing under the PACT Act?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Veterans are always encouraged to file a claim for any condition they believe is due to their military service even after they have been awarded a 100% combined disability rating for their service-connected disabilities. Establishing service connection opens the door for other available benefits.• Veterans may be entitled to higher payment amounts called Special Monthly Compensation (SMC) for certain types of severe impairment such as blindness, amputations, or the need for aid and attendance. SMC is additional compensation payable to Veterans above the basic levels of compensation. VA also provides specially adapted housing, automobile adaptive equipment and clothing allowances necessary to accommodate service-connected disabilities.• Additionally, Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) benefits are payable to eligible survivors of Veterans who were in receipt of, or entitled to receive, compensation at the time of death if their service-connected disabilities were rated totally disabling (i.e., 100%) for at least 10 years immediately preceding death. However, if the Veteran passes before 10 years, VA must be able to connect the Veteran’s death to a service-connected condition.• The PACT Act is the most significant expansion of Veteran benefits and health care in more than three decades, and it allows VA to ensure more Veterans and survivors get the care and benefits they earned. Veterans are encouraged to apply for	

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<p>benefits before August 9, 2023 and get the care and benefits they have earned.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On the flip side, we’ve seen some Veterans unsure if they should apply because they don’t think they’ll get a rating OR they have and received a “0” percent rating. Let’s clarify what that actually means... • If a Veteran receives a 0% disability rating for a service-connected condition, we call this a non-compensable disability. Although Veterans will not get a monthly payment with a non-compensable disability, service condition entitles the Veteran to VA health care for that condition and other VA benefits. With a 0% disability rating, VA is confirming the condition is related to the Veterans’ military service. If the condition worsens, Veterans are encouraged to file a claim for increase. VA can assist with gathering the needed evidence and/or requesting a new VA examination to evaluate the condition. 	
<p>12. If a Veteran is not currently enrolled in VA health care, what is the first step they should take to change that?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit choose.va.gov/health. • You can apply online, by phone, by mail, or in person. • Show up. Bring your DD214. We’re here to help. 	<p>Apply for VA health care. Go to Choose.VA.gov for more information</p>
<p>13. BLUF:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who does the PACT Act apply to? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If you served between 1955 to the Post-9/11, you’re eligible. ○ We are in the special enrollment period right now, so come to VA. If you aren’t enrolled into VA health care, do it now. Get a screening. File a claim. ○ Don’t let the list of 26 conditions limit you—just coming into VA and we can figure it out. Allow us to serve you. ○ Survivors are eligible too. Dependency and Idemnity Compensation (DIC) is tax-free 	

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<p>monthly payment available to an eligible surviving spouse, dependent children or parent(s) of a Veteran or Service member who died on active duty, due to a service-related injury or illness, or from a presumptive condition.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Visit va.gov/PACT, visit your local VA facility, or call 1-800-MyVA411○ Tell your buddies.	
<p>14. What forms should I be looking for if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. I'm NOT READY to file but need time to get all my information b. I'm READY to file	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. VA Form 21-0966 Instructions for Intent to file b. VA Form 21-526EZ Instructions to apply for benefits and submit any supportive evidence.