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Serving Those Who Served

The Official Newsletter of the Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs



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Commissioner's Corner



Commissioner's Corner

Greetings teammates,

I would like personally thank all of you, our great Commonwealth veterans/veteran service organizations and the entire Commonwealth of

Kentucky family for rallying around our Ft. Campbell/101st Airborne teammates in late March and early weeks of April. It was a challenging time for our 101st teammates and their families as they cope with the loss of their nine fallen Screaming Eagles, after the tragic training accident on the night of Wednesday, March 29, 2023. The outpouring of support from our communities, national/state/local government leaders and military leadership was incredible and showed how much the Commonwealth of Kentucky values our service men and women, and the sacrifice they make for our Nation.

As we enter the month of May and approach Memorial Day, let us think about our fallen brothers and sisters in arms who gave all, either in times of war or peace, for the defense and good of our Nation. Let us remember the Gold Star families, especially our 101st Combat Aviation Brigade families, for their loss and grief, and that they may find peace and comfort in their loved ones' valiant sacrifice and service to our Nation. And let us not forget why we served our Nation, why we should continue serving our communities, and why we must continue carrying the torch in honoring the legacy and spirit of our fallen brothers and sisters.

Very respectfully,

Commissioner Whitney P. Allen, Jr.

Kentucky Department of Veteran Affairs

Latest VA News

Budget Cut Proposals Would Hurt Veterans

Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs

WASHINGTON — While the President's Budget details a <u>plan</u> to honor our country's sacred obligation to care for America's Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors, the proposal to cut a broad range of critical programs by 22% would threaten critical services for Veterans – both at VA and across the federal government. **The proposed 22% budget cut to VA would:**

- Threaten Medical Care for Veterans. The proposal would mean 30 million fewer Veteran outpatient visits, and 81,000 jobs lost across the Veterans Health Administration, leaving Veterans unable to get appointments for care including wellness visits, cancer screenings, mental health services, and substance use disorder treatment.
- Undermine Access to Telehealth. Access to remote care through telehealth is
 essential for Veterans, particularly in rural areas. By reducing funding for necessary
 IT infrastructure and support, the proposal would impair VA's ability to expand
 video-to-home telehealth services and limit the availability of medical equipment
 that can be provided to Veterans so they can attend important telehealth
 appointments from home.
- Worsen Wait Times for Benefits. Under the proposal, the Veterans Benefits
 Administration would eliminate more than 6,000 staff, increasing the disability
 claims backlog by an estimated 134,000 claims and forcing Veterans and their
 surviving loved ones to wait longer for the benefits they have earned, including
 pensions, life insurance, GI Bill educational supports, and employment services.

- Prevent Construction on the Health Care Facilities that Veterans need. Veterans deserve to receive care in state-of-the-art facilities, but the median VA hospital was built nearly 60 years ago compared to just 13 years ago in the private sector. This proposal would cut up to \$565 million for major construction projects, including critical clinical upgrades to hospitals and clinics. These cuts would negatively impact Veteran health care across America.
- Fail to Honor the Memory of All Veterans. The proposal would require VA's
 National Cemetery Administration to eliminate approximately 500 staff, jeopardize
 NCA's ability to maintain the final resting place of Veterans to national shrine
 standards, and delay the opening of 5 new national cemeteries that will serve nearly
 1.6 million Veterans and eligible family members.

Beyond the direct impact on Veterans who use VA, these proposed cuts would negatively impact Veterans who access critical services across the federal government. **Specifically, these proposed cuts would:**

- Cut Housing for Veterans. Every Veteran deserves a good, safe home in this country they fought to defend. The proposal would eliminate funding for Housing Choice Vouchers for as many as 50,000 Veterans, putting them at greater risk of homelessness.
- Increase Food Insecurity for Veterans. About 1.3 million Veterans rely on SNAP.
 This proposal would take food assistance away from Veterans who are older by adding burdensome, bureaucratic requirements, and it would limit states' flexibility to protect especially vulnerable people currently subject to work requirements. That would increase the likelihood that Veterans and their families go hungry.
- Deprive Veterans of mental health, substance use, and other health services. This proposal would mean deep cuts to Department of Health and Human Services community mental health centers, mental health and substance use prevention grants, and other public health programs. Supporting Veterans and their families in the community, especially those not enrolled in VA health care, has been a priority for HHS and these cuts could reduce access to timely care and services.
- Eliminate Job Training and Other Supports to Homeless Veterans. The proposal would mean that 4,200 fewer Veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness would receive job training, counseling, and job readiness services provided through the Department of Labor's Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program.

This analysis assumes an across-the-board reduction of roughly 22% compared to currently enacted FY 2023 levels for non-defense discretionary accounts. That aligns with proposals to return discretionary spending to FY 2022 levels on an ongoing basis while exempting defense spending.

VA, NIH launch study of Gulf War Illness

Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs

April 17, 2023 — The Department of Veterans Affairs and National Institutes of Health began a joint, five-year study that aims to explain the chronic symptoms of <u>Gulf War Illness</u>. The study may lead to more definitive diagnostic criteria for Gulf War Illness, development of new diagnostic testing, and potential treatments.

Gulf War Illness affects multiple systems in the body and includes chronic symptoms such as fatigue, headache, memory and cognitive difficulties, joint and muscle pain, poor sleep, and problems with gastrointestinal and respiratory function. This disease affects about a third of the nearly 700,000 men and women who served in the Persian Gulf during operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

This week, the first Veteran arrived at the National Institutes of Health Clinical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, to participate in the study. Veterans who served in the Gulf War and meet the enrollment criteria can inquire about participating in the study by emailing vhawas.indepth@va.gov.

"Effective treatments for Gulf War Illness have remained elusive, forcing health care providers to mostly focus on easing patient symptoms," said **VA Chief Research and Development Officer Rachel Ramoni, DMD, ScD**. "VA and NIH's collaboration will bring together experts who will meticulously investigate the underlying causes of Gulf War Illness symptoms. With the help of the Veterans who volunteer for the study, researchers will lay the groundwork for care that will meaningfully improve the lives of the hundreds of thousands of Veterans living with this disease."

"This is an important collaboration that we hope will lead to many answers to those suffering from Gulf War Illness," said **Director of National Institute of Neurological**<u>Disorders and Stroke</u> **Walter Koroshetz**, **M.D.** "Taking advantage of the resources available only at NIH, this comprehensive study will take a new look at this illness and uncover biological mechanisms that may pave the way to treatments."

VA researchers will screen 1990-91 era Gulf War Veterans through the Miami VA Medical Center and the California and Washington, D.C., sites of VA's War Related Illness and Injury Study Center. Veterans will then be referred to NIH to gain more insight into Gulf War Illness. NIH researchers will identify how the illness presents itself — in ways that can be measured or observed — in each participant. The research will focus on the immune and autonomic nervous systems, as well as the body's energy-production pathways. Eligible Veterans will visit the NIH Clinical Center for up to two weeks, with most Veterans staying at the Clinical Center. Travel arrangements to and from the Clinical Center will be coordinated with the patient and the study team. Comprehensive testing will be done during the 14 days to look at multiple body systems affected by Gulf War Illness and how these systems operate functionally and structurally at rest as well as when the body is placed under stressors. Among other tests, researchers will administer a peak exercise challenge to trigger symptom flares. The procedure has been used to explore the mechanisms of other chronic illnesses, such as myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome.

VA researchers will maintain a data repository of participants, oversee Veterans' overall experience in the study, and help to communicate individual participants' study findings to their VA care providers as needed.

Learn more about the Gulf War Illness study here.

What's New at KDVA?

Signing of House Bill 29

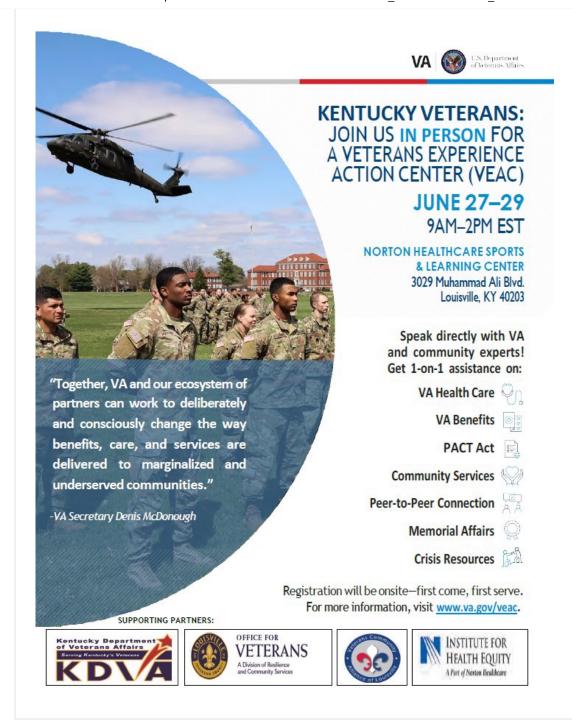


residency requirement, veterans in neighboring states like Ohio and Tennessee can have the option of having their interment here in our Commonwealth. On April 7, 2023, Governor Andy
Beshear signed House Bill 29 into
effect at the Frankfort Capital Building,
KY. HB-29 removes the state residency
requirement for our five state veteran
cemeteries which allows more
veterans access to interments when
the time comes.

With the removal of the state



Veterans Experience Action Center June 27-29



Naming Ceremony Bowling Green Veteran Center



On April 19, 2023, the Bowling Green Veteran Center was named the Robert E. Spiller Veteran Center in Bowling Green, KY. Robert Spiller was a Colonel in the U.S. Army and major supporter of our veterans in the commonwealth. He supported the construction of the Bowling Green Veteran Center throughout the process but sadly passed before it can be finished. The center is scheduled to be completed in 2024.



Check out the story ABC13 WBKO News did on our naming ceremony for the Bowling Green Veteran Center due to be completed in 2024.

https://www.wbko.com/2023/04/19/beshear-names-bowling-green-veterans-center-honor-late-col-robert-e-spiller/?

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Celebrating 100 Years

Edwin Smith



On April 12, 2023, Stephen Buford(left), KDVA director of benefits, and Donald Walbert(right), KDVA veterans benefits representative, attended World War II veteran Edwin Smith's 100th Birthday celebration in Glasgow, KY. A letter from Governor Andy Beshear, a KDVA Certificate and Commissioner Challenger Coin were presented to Mr. Smith during the event.

Edwin Smith flew aircraft and provided support missions. During a routine training mission in Weatherford, Texas, he was a copilot in a B-29 Superfortress Bomber leading 10 men on a practice run. The B-29 collided with another B-29 killing 18 servicemen and leaving Edwin Smith as one of the two survivors of the crash. He suffered extreme injuries and was hospitalized for 36 days. He and the other survivor, Corporal Earl E. Wishmeier became close friends and stayed in contact with each other until Wishmeier passed in 1993.

Albert Wess



Commissioner Allen, NAVBETS KY Tri-County Chapter Commander Kathleen T. Cursh-Gray and Vice Commander Joe Knight celebrated Army World War II/Red Ball Express Albert B. Wess, Sr. 100th Birthday on April 15th, 2023 in Lexington, Kentucky.



From the speech by Jeff Thoke, Honor Flight Bluegrass chairman of the board: On August 21, 1944 the Red Ball Express was created and named after the red dots commonly used to indicate priority express trains in the United States. The U. S. Army needed truck drivers to drive two and a half ton trucks loaded with supplies to the front lines.

Albert Wess was among 23,000 truck drivers and 6,000 trucks driven mostly by African American troops. He and the other truck drivers were going through the thick of it being

bombed and shot at all while dealing with narrow roads, night drives without headlights, and even having to resupply and refuel our forces in the middle of fights.

Albert Wess and the other Red Ball Drivers were acknowledged by General Patton as critical to the advance across France to liberate the country.

Memorial Day Kentucky Veteran Cemeteries' Service



The Annual Memorial Day Ceremony at Kentucky's five state veteran cemeteries will be held as follows:

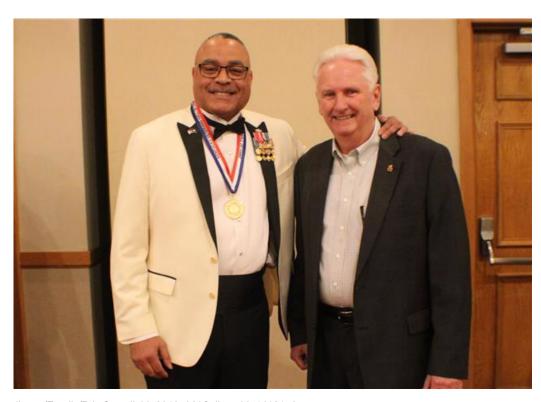
- KVCW: 11:00 CST May 29, 2023, Robert Kaminski- The Kentucky DAV State Commander US Army Veteran
- KVCC: 11:30 EST May 29, 2023, Ft. Knox Commanding General Major General Johnny K. Davis
- KVCN: 11:00 EST May 29, 2023, LTC (Ret) William H Clark- U S Army
- KVCNE: 10:00 EST May 29, 2023, Clayton (Whitey) Marshall- US Army Veteran
- KVCSE: 11:00 EST May 29, 2023, Major (Ret) Mark Suhrie- US Marine corps

Each Memorial Day service will include posting of the colors, singing of the National Anthem, wreath laying, Guest speaker, and playing of taps,

If you have any questions about the Memorial Day ceremony, please contact the cemetery in question.



Donald Walbert, Sherrie Davis, Hope King and Amber Roy participated in Ft Campbell Career Skills Program Fair to advocate for the soldiers and families of Ft. Campbell and make them aware of KDVA and the benefits KDVA provides. April 19, 2023.



Commissioner Allen with VFW Kentucky Department Adjutant/Kentucky Trust Fund Program Board Member Carl Kaelin, pose for pictures at the VFW-Kentucky Department Spring State Conference Banquet on Saturday, March 18, 2023.



Lexington VAMC Executor Director, Russell Armstead (left), and Commissioner Allen (right), pose with Air Force Veteran and past VFW Kentucky Department/Joint Executive Council of Veterans Services Commander Edwin Vincent, at the Lexington Fisher House Ribbon Cutting ceremony on Friday, March 24, 2023.

KDVA Present Pillar of Excellence to Governor Beshear



KDVA staff Stephanie Belt and Kirk Shepherd presented Governor Andy Beshear our 2023 Abraham Lincoln Pillar of Excellence Award in Frankfort, KY. The award was for the work done on the Annual Commanders' State Conference.



KDVA Women Veterans Conference

KDVA Women Veterans State Conference

June 6, 2023



- VA Women's Health Reengagement Training
- Meet Key VA and State Women Veteran Leaders
- Learn more about Benefits and Entitlements
- Discuss Key Women Veterans Issues and Challenges

9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Buffet Lunch Provided



Crowne Plaza Hotel 830 Phillips Ln Louisville, KY 40209



Parking at the Hotel is Free

Did you know...

VA offers a wide range of mental health services to Veterans. The goal of VA mental health care is to support recovery and enable Veterans who experience mental health problems to live meaningful lives in their communities and achieve their full potential.

World War II Veterans Event

The South Central Kentucky Cultural Center Honors and Remembers World War II Veterans of the Barren

Saturday, May the 20th from 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM

*There will be 7 speakers/reenactors relating stories of service during WWII of Veterans from Allen, Barren, Hart, Metcalfe & Monroe Counties, stationed around the museum. Speakers will highlight Veterans' experiences from:

- Pearl Harbor
- "Flying the Hump"
- The Pacific Theater
- "Hazel's Boy" The Home Front
- An Allen County Veteran's Story
- The European Theater from the perspective of a B-26 Radio Operator
- Merrill's Marauders

*A WWII Exhibit of additional Veterans' stories will be in the 2nd floor Snavely Gallery, Don't miss our recent addition of the WWII Aviation Mural in the main stairway, AND other WWII Information and photos from local families and period newspapers about the Home Front will be displayed throughout the museum.

*There will be binders, scrapbooks & Midway Reunion Albums to browse of WWII Veterans from Allen, Barren, Hart, Metcalfe, and Monroe Counties.

*Refreshments from Recipes of the WWII Ration Era, music of the time AND

*Weather permitting A WWII Jeep and a 1930s era car

Women Veterans Event



Veteran Interest Events/Trainings

(May 3)--Training on Assessment of PTSD and Suicide Risk Management in Veterans via zoom, 3:00 pm to 4:00 pm Webinar- Free- Register https://deploymentpsych.org/CBT-SP-12-13-Apr-23#registration

(May 9)--NAMI Lexington- KYGives23 is happening on Tuesday Lexington KVC Kentucky has a chance to be a part of Kentucky's 11th Annual Day of Giving – an opportunity to unite our community around causes in which we truly believe and help nonprofit organizations connect to the larger community.

(May 12)--KYSTARS Consumer Conference at the Clarion Hotel 1950 Newtown Pike, Lexington, Ky 40511. To Register

https://co.clickandpledge.com/advanced/default.aspx?wid=196100

(May 13)--BIAK BRAIN RUN.WALK. & ROLL 2023 7:30 am – Registration Opens, 8:30am 5 K Runners start, 8:40 am- 5 K Walkers start, 9:00 am- Stroll & Activities Start. E. P. Tom Sawyer State Park 3000 Freys Hill Road Louisville, Ky 40241. Contact Lauren Broadus 317-523-6092 Pick up shirts on 05/12.

(May 20)--Out of the Darkness Walk. Registration 8:00 am Walk end 12:00 pm Sparks marina Park – 300 Howard dr. Contact Contact Phone: 619-894-0384 Contact Email: melani@gmail.com & mtran@afsp.org

The Out of the Darkness Community Walk is a journey of remembrance, hope, and support. It unites our communities and provides an opportunity to acknowledge the ways in which suicide and mental health conditions have affected our lives and the lives of those we love and care about.

(May 21)--Mindfest- A Mental Health Festival 12:00 pm to 6:00 pm Cost Free

Roots 101 African American Museum 124 North 1st Street Louisville, Ky 40202. Mindfest is a free community mind strengthening event infused with music, food, entertainment, art, yoga, vendors, panel discussions, and more.

The MindFEST mission is to break stigmas surrounding mental health, connect families with mental health services, and create a fun, family oriented, learning environment that promotes mental health.

MindFest LLC organizes and shares mental health resources with the community during our annual festival. We also host engaging, fun and educational activities that promote mental health and wellbeing

(May 22)--PTSD Awareness 5K Lexington, KY 2:00pm If interested contact Latisha Crabtree at crabtree.latisha@yahoo.com If you're looking for support and/or resources, please visit www.afsp.org/get-help and www.afsp.org/resources.

(May 24)--Run For the Wall 8:00 am to 9:00 am Cost – Free held at Robley Rex Department of Veteran Affaira Medical Center. 800 Zorn Avenue Louisville, Ky 40206

Latest PACT Act News



BE VIGILANT OF PACT ACT SCAMS

On August 10, President Biden <u>signed the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson</u>
Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act (PACT Act) into
<u>law</u>. This law helps millions of Veterans and their survivors by:



- Extending VA health care eligibility for Veterans with toxic exposures and Veterans of the Vietnam, Gulf War, and Post-9/11 (Post-September 11, 2001) eras
- Expanding benefits eligibility for Veterans exposed to toxic substances and their survivors



Tips to Avoid PACT Act Scams

Scammers are taking advantage of new opportunities to commit fraud. There's been an increase in PACT Act-related <u>phishing (email)</u>, vishing (phone), and <u>so cal media scams</u> targeting Veterans to access their PACT Act benefits or submit claims on their behalf.

Veterans should be cautious of anyone who guarantees a lucrative financial benefit or service.

Do's

- You may submit your application securely online via VA.GOV or in person at any Regional Office. You may file your daim directly with VA and then, VA will assist in gathering evidence necessary to support it. There are no costs or hidden fees to apply.
- Be cautious of companies who advertise VA benefits can only be obtained with their help. These companies may not be recognized by VA and may be attempting to charge illegal fees.
- Be cautious of aggressive companies who may try to pressure you to sign their contract through frequent communications or by insisting "you must act now or lose your chance for benefits."
- Be cautious of companies who daim to be contacting you on behalf of VA or to have a special relationship with VA. Contact VA at 1-800-827-1000 if you are unsure about the authenticity of any message received.
- Validate: If you are interested in working with a Veteran Service Organization (VSO), agent, or attorney, use the Office of General Counsel <u>Acceditation tool</u> to confirm and validate their credentials.

Don'ts

- Do not sign a contract agreeing to pay an unauthorized company a percentage of your benefit payment in exchange for their assistance with your VA daim. If you need help filing a daim, there are representatives of VSOs, agents, and attorneys who have been accredited by VA to assist you.
- Do not sign a blank form for someone else to complete later. Always review the completed form before signing and keep a copy for yourself.
- On not be fooled by companies who advertise they have special relationships with medical professionals and can guarantee your benefits award. If they are defrauding the Federal government, you could be held responsible for paying those benefits back.
- O not provide your social security number, medical records, or other personally identifiable information to anyone offering daims assistance before confirming their credentials using the Office of General Counsel Accreditation tool.
- Do not sign forms that are not <u>VA generated</u> or third-party authorization for someone to provide "behind-the-scenes" claims assistance.

www.VA.gov/PACT is the official source of PACT Act information.

We want Veterans and survivors to apply now for their PACT Act-related benefits.

To report suspected scams, please contact the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) Hotline (va.gov). File a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission. Visit the Cybercrime Support Network for additional resources to help Veterans, service members, and their families combat cybercrime.



Learn more and sign up at <u>VA.gov/PACT</u>
Download the <u>VA Health and Benefits App</u>
Call us at 1-800-MyVA411 (1-800-698-2411)
Find a VA at <u>VA.gov/find-locations/</u>

Useful VA Links

- VA Housing Assistance Page Information about home loans, eligibility, interest rates reductions and other related topics: https://www.va.gov/housing-assistance/
- **National Center for PTSD** Provides information and resources to veterans, care providers and organizations relating PTSD: https://www.ptsd.va.gov/
- Covid-19 Vaccine Updates Latest updates on Covid-19 guidance and vaccinations: https://www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/
- VA Lisfe Insurance (VALife) https://www.benefits.va.gov/insurance/valife.asp
- **Veterans Readiness and Employment (VR&E)** job training, education, employment coaching, etc.: https://www.benefits.va.gov/vocrehab/index.asp

Upcoming Veterans Dates and Events

- -- Loyalty Day (May 1)
- -- Public Service Recognition Week (May 7-May 13)
- -- Victory in Europe Day/V.E. Day (May 8)
- -- Military Spouse Appreciation Day (May 12)
- -- Armed Forces Day (May 20)
- -- KDVA Memorial Day Services--Check our Social Media in the coming Days for services details at our 5 State Veteran Cemeteries (May 30)
- -- Memorial Day (May 30)

Resources for Veterans



Flood Relief

Have you been affected by flooding in Eastern Kentucky? The Governor's Office has prepared a list of resources designed to help you make it through this challenging time.

> Click here for more information: https://governor.ky.gov/disasterresponse/flood-resources

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