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Next PACT Act deadline: Health care enrollment for Veterans deployed to combat zones





Health care enrollment for Veterans deployed to combat zones

Special enrollment period for Veterans who served in combat zones

August 24, 2023

By Hans Petersen
VHA NEWS editor and Air Force Veteran

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Until 11:59 p.m. Sept. 30, 2023, Veterans who deployed to a combat zone, never enrolled in VA health care and left the military between Sept. 11, 2001, and Oct. 1, 2013, are eligible to enroll directly in VA health care through the PACT Act. This special

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directly in VA health care without first applying for disability compensation benefits.

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VA encourages all of these Veterans to visit [VA.gov/PACT](https://www.va.gov/PACT) or call 1-800-MYVA411 to learn more and sign up for VA health care before the deadline.

Veterans who are enrolled in VA health care are proven to have better health outcomes than non-enrolled Veterans, and VA hospitals have dramatically outperformed non-VA hospitals in [overall quality ratings](#) and [patient satisfaction ratings](#). Additionally, VA health care is often [more affordable](#) than non-VA health care for Veterans.



This special enrollment period is a part of the PACT Act, the largest expansion of VA health care and

344,000 Veterans have enrolled in VA health care, and more than 4.2 million enrolled Veterans have been screened for toxic exposures.

“Don’t wait. Apply today.”

“Are you a Veteran who deployed to a combat zone but never enrolled in VA health care? You should sign up now. Even if you don’t need this care now, you may need it in the future, and once you’re in, you have access for life. But don’t wait – the deadline is Sept. 30 – so go to [VA.gov/PACT](https://va.gov/PACT) and apply today,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough.

Although this deadline is written into law for this specific group of Veterans, many other groups of Veterans are able to enroll directly in VA health care without first applying for other VA benefits – including many Vietnam Veterans, Gulf War Veterans, Veterans who deployed to a combat zone and transitioned out of the service less

health care by filing for VA disability compensation benefits or based on income. If a Veteran is granted service connection for any health condition, they become eligible for VA care.

The PACT Act also expanded VA disability compensation benefits for millions of Veterans, making more than 300 health conditions “presumptive” for service connection. This means that if an [eligible](#) Veteran has one of these health conditions and served in the applicable place during an applicable time, VA automatically assumes that the condition was caused by the Veteran’s service and provides compensation and care accordingly.

Since the PACT Act was signed into law, VA has delivered more than \$1.85 billion in PACT Act benefits to Veterans and their survivors. VA encourages Veterans and their survivors to apply for these benefits now at [VA.gov/PACT](https://www.va.gov/PACT).

health care and other benefits they earned

VA is currently in a full-court press to ensure that as many Veterans as possible enroll before September 30. To date, VA's PACT Act outreach campaign has included more than 2,000 events nationwide, \$13 million in paid media, 60,000 earned media clips, more than 400 million emails and letters to Veterans, the creation of [a one-stop-shop PACT Act website](#), and more. This is the largest outreach campaign in VA history, which has one goal in mind: ensure that all Veterans — and their survivors — get the health care and other benefits they deserve under the PACT Act.

More information on eligibility for the special enrollment period can be found at [VA.gov/PACT](https://va.gov/PACT). The period applies to Veterans who deployed to a combat zone, never enrolled in VA health care, and left the military between Sept. 11, 2001, and Oct. 1,

War or in combat against a hostile force during a period of hostilities after Nov. 11, 1998.

For more information about how the PACT Act is helping Veterans and their survivors, visit VA's [PACT Act Dashboard](#). To apply for care or other benefits today, visit [VA.gov/PACT](https://va.gov/PACT) or call 1-800-MYVA411.

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22 Comments

Lawrence D. Pool August 31, 2023 at 16:39 - [Reply](#)

I am sure you have heard similar stories.

I left active duty on 20 July 1979 with exactly 20 years of service as a Marine infantryman. Then, I knew absolutely NOTHING about the VA Service. It was not until I was nearing the end of my second military career in Civil Service that I haphazardly learned about it.

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“DENIED,” “DENIED,” and “DENIED.”

Lawrence D. Pool
GySgt USMC (Retired)

Enrique Pacheco August 31, 2023 at 06:07 - [Reply](#)

I served in VIETNAM during October 1966 to October 1967. I entered the US Air Force from February 1960 to July 1968. My career was serving as a Jet Engine Mechanic on fighter jets. Over the 8 years I was exposed to toxic fumes emanating from JP 4, JP 7 and others. After I was discharged from active duty, I began having medical issues with my lungs, hearing loss, sleep problems, etc. All I get from the VA is denials. Can someone help me?

Robert Garcia September 1, 2023 at 09:07 - [Reply](#)

Mr. Pacheco, Get yourself a good Veteran's Service Officer from either the V.F.W, American Legion ,city or county VSO near you. They should be able to help it has worked for me. Good luck!

Edward Cranford August 30, 2023 at 22:52 - [Reply](#)

Why do you keep extending the deadline for the Pact Act when you can't take care of the claims from the Vietnam Veterans? Don't you have some kind of triage to handle these claims?

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Tom Spanton August 30, 2023 at 22:02 - [Reply](#)

plus years at a whopping \$.41.5 a mile. Then the reduction for first \$3.00 or \$6.00 up to \$18.00 for a 30 day period. Let's see if that should get rectified. ???

Robert Garcia September 1, 2023 at 09:09 - [Reply](#)

Congress makes the rules not Biden!

Marine August 30, 2023 at 21:43 - [Reply](#)

A ruse to sign more people up for va health care

Dale Wall August 30, 2023 at 21:08 - [Reply](#)

The requirement for Vietnam Veterans to receive disability under the PACT Act is another slap in the face to those of us with hypertension. The required blood pressure of 160/100 over “a sustained period of time” would mean most would have suffered a stroke or worse. It amounts to another carrot on a stick, nothing more. Vietnam Veterans were the only soldiers subjected to chemical warfare (Agent Orange) by this country. But, we still need to fight our Congress to get fair recognition and compensation for the long term effects of Agent Orange.

Robert Garcia September 3, 2023 at 09:13 - [Reply](#)

Dale, you are so right about the V.A. criteria for for meeting their threshold for hypertension. I'm on 3 different meds just to control HBP and had to jump through hoops

Pact Act no matter what you think about it did open the door for my supplemental claim. Good luck!

rene alvidrez August 30, 2023 at 19:51 - [Reply](#)

I was exposed to radiation at McGregor Range FtBliss, before it was closed down. I developed 2 cancer tumors on my kidney and had to have a partial nephrectomy.

Scott C August 29, 2023 at 13:49 - [Reply](#)

I'm a disabled veteran, I also have worked for the VA for 24 years and I can't stand when guys come in and mouth off that they are 100% like they get a free pass to act like a prick. I just look at them and say really me too. Sit down we give everyone the same quality treatment whether you're 100% or 0%. I have helped WW2 vets, including my own grandfather, that have a laundry list of issues but never complain like some other era's of veterans. Our providers spend as much time with a vet as is needed even if they go past the scheduled time.

Dennis K. August 31, 2023 at 14:34 - [Reply](#)

I hear everything you just said. I feel the same way. I'm a viet vet and have a guilt about using up recourses that some of these kids running around with less than four limbs might need. But, I had a conversation with my primary care doctors nurse. (crusty as this old sailor) She said you older ww2 and vietnam

guys but with all the problems associated with the red tape and the VA, I'm glad I went to the trouble I went to too get in. It's still better than civilian.

Kirt Love August 26, 2023 at 08:59 - [Reply](#)

Notice the cut off dates for combat veterans. 2001 to present. Like those of us in Iraq in 1990 just played game boy, and scratched our butts. Some like myself where sent out front of the troops over and over, saw plenty of combat. Really weird things. My unit should not of even made it, they were used to flush out tanks at night – draw fire so the forward observers could pick there targets. 68% projected casualties in the first 8 seconds. I know, I saw the records back in Germany because I was the staff duty driver for battalion.

Besides, individuals mean squat to VA. Like the current 32,000 claims in limbo – some for years. Real priority with VA? You can bet there is a zero missing on that number. Those in limbo VA wont own up to. Tens of thousands of Gulf war vets are being ignored or denied out right in all this. Because VA has gotten rid of all reporting methods and statistics that would ever report this.

Its not for lack of coming forward. VA is ignoring everyone out there that isnt wealthy or famous. Ive been writing non-stop in news.va.gov and VA

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to respond to directly. 18 emails and so far its his staff and others that respond. Mostly to attack people around me or anyone that helps me. Especially VISN 17 folks at Temple and Waco VAMC that get his misdirected wrath.

I served on the VA Gulf War Advisory Committee to address healthcare and benefits.

<https://www.va.gov/gulfwaradvisorycommittee/>

It was blown off in 2009. Shinseki then gutted the other – the RAC in 2012. By 2013, Gulf war vets had no where to turn. Sec of VA Shinseki resigns in disgrace but no one fixes the damage he did.

Feb 2023 I shake the VA RAC tree in Hawaii. Made it into Stars and Stripes. Sec of VA Denis McDonough is in Waco trying to dodge me locally that same day as the only critic of the PACT act then. As I was in Waco Tribune about that. He knew who I was and dodged me.

If he can keep dodging me, then he is dodging all of you that have a real opinion. Because you never see him debate someone who is critical. VA prescreens the media to make sure interviews are pro-government. Even made sure the War Horse Symposium was toothless. No one could get a question to him or others, other than hand picked people. I know, I was there and furious at the censorship.

As long as your “Armies of one” out there, VA is going to pick you off. Media is not on your side, and neither is Congress. Just like those poor

86% rejected. Thats what awaits you PACT act vets, just like the 92% rejection rate for Gulf war vets of 1990.

Your silence is consent, and in 2023 VA has steam rolled us all with it. Right now the the loudest of them all and VA plans to ignore me in plain sight. Because they are very happy with there general 86% claim denial rates. Why change that?

Just like the \$14,000 ER visit they forced me into and wont pay. Anything to cripple and harm a vocal veteran. Watch, Im saying this one a VA website and right in there faces. Crickets. VA is counting on your silence.

Edward G Ruebensam II August 28, 2023 at 12:35 - [Reply](#)

I agree with you. Everything is for military members who served after the Desert Shield/Desert Storm.

Robert Garcia September 3, 2023 at 09:18 - [Reply](#)

We older vets are dying off, problem solved for Uncle Sam!

thomas l benford August 30, 2023 at 18:32 - [Reply](#)

i agree with you 100% i served Desert Shield/Storm with 2nd Armor Division Forward Garlstadt West Germany and to the VA we dont exist but i still press foward with my claims..denied..denied..denied..i thank

[Elyse Montgomery](#) August 21, 2023 at 10:27 [Reply](#)

Fire Fighting Foam and liquid I worked with this product many times 69-73: 3-Norfolk, 1-Philadelphia Navy Yard, 1-Rhode Island, plus 1-during Assault Boat Engineer instruction at Little Creek Amphibious Base. Testing/weighing of extinguishers along with refilling of dri-chemical, and Purple-K powder were on the list I see nowhere is this subject mentioned

Robert Garcia August 24, 2023 at 18:59 [Reply](#)

As a follow up to my recent post, no matter how much money congress throws at the V.A. system it still must be managed properly to succeed. The system here in North Texas is improved but still has a ways to go. Contract employees are a mixed bag to include doctors and C&P Examiners. Vietnam way a while back but if you were there ,you don't forget. Air Force crew member, Vietnam 1970&1973.

Robert Garcia August 24, 2023 at 18:33 [Reply](#)

I have mixed reviews of the V.A., some positive and some not so good. All combat vets deserve good medical care they deserve. Unfortunately the flood gates have been opened to try and accommodate all without the resources on both the medical and benefits side. Vietnam combat vets are on the average if still alive at least 70+ years old. Why is the V.A. not giving priority to these veterans? If there is a system giving this

...
August 21, 2023 at 10:17 [Reply](#)

The PACT Act...

How the VA handles it is shameful. I have talked to many other Viet Nam Veterans who are having the same issues that I am currently having, getting my exposure to Agent Orange medical issues accepted by the VA.

The PACT Act states, and I quote,

“What does it mean to have a presumptive condition for toxic exposure?

To get a VA disability rating, your disability must connect to your military service. For many health conditions, you need to prove that your service caused your condition.

But for some conditions, we automatically assume (or “presume”) that your service caused your condition. We call these “presumptive conditions.”

We consider 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.”

Yet I keep getting the run around about having to PROVE that I had high blood pressure PRIOR TO TAKING DOCTOR PRESCRIBED MEICATION!! That i have been taking for the past THIRTY YEARS!! Shameful VA. Like has been said on other comments on this blog, the VA needs to follow the

issues. Shameful VA.

You know, as I always close these posts with, it is too bad that our government doesn't have to jump through all of these types of hoops before they send our youngest and best off to war in some armpit of a country around the world!

I suspect that there would be much less war on this planet.

Scott J Drew

US Army

Viet Nam Oct 1964-Apr 1967

David August 24, 2023 at 16:31 - [Reply](#)

I totally agree..the Va is a JOKE..

when i was discharged in 1971..no nothing

they just showed me the door.

no mention about benefits or clinic i could go

to for my medical problems..

and they claimed they gave me a whisper test

instead of a audio exam...

Robert Garcia August 24, 2023 at 19:15 - [Reply](#)

Scott, I know what you are talking about. I put in a claim almost 30 years ago for

hypertension and of course it was denied.

With the advent of the Pact Act, hypertension was added to the Agent Orange list. Like you I

have been on bp medicine for decades and

the dosage has only gone up. Get yourself a competent veterans service officer and go

from there. If you have heart issues, put in a

Bob.

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The VA Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses will

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Last updated August 29, 2023



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