

## **Veterans Services- March. 2024 Ex-officio Report**

### **Staff Update:**

Currently I have 3 personnel attending the Cal-Vet accreditation academy to become accredited. Bonnie Steward will be attending the second half of the course on April 11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> 2024. Courtney Frame & Sharon Neu will be attending the 1<sup>st</sup> portion of the accreditation course on April 8<sup>th</sup> 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> and will return for the second half in July, 2024

### **Winter Conference:**

VSO Jonathan Brown along with VSR-II Tisha Holy attended the winter conference in Wheatland from Feb. 11<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup>. There were multiple subjects covered to include regulation changes that will affect mental health, respiratory, hearing loss and Tinnitus ratings for future claims. One of the biggest changes will be for Tinnitus ratings. It will no longer be rated as its own separate issue. Tinnitus will only be rated as a symptom of another condition. This means, if a veteran has a diagnosis for Tinnitus but does not have any other diagnosis that Tinnitus is a symptom of that can be connected to their service, the veteran will not receive compensation for Tinnitus. However, the VA did not know when this change will go into effect. I will update as I receive more information. Tisha Holy and I will be conducting training sessions on all that was covered at the training conference to ensure the Veteran Service Rep.'s in the office have the information pertaining to any changes in regulations for future claims processing.

### **2024 Expanded VA Health Care Eligibility:**

I have attached information pertaining to The Pact Act and how it has expanded VA health care eligibility for veterans. Beginning on March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024, VA has made health care available to millions of veterans that previously may not have been eligible without first receiving a VA disability rating. These veterans can now apply direct to the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) for healthcare without applying for any disability compensation first. If a veteran was exposed to toxins while serving their country, they are now eligible to receive VA health care. This include veterans that were exposed while

in a war zone and those who were exposed during training. Please see the attachment for additional information.

**Feb 2024 VSO Summary:**

191 Walk In clients up from 157 last month

76 Scheduled Appointments up from 60 last month

392 Phone calls up from 383 last month.

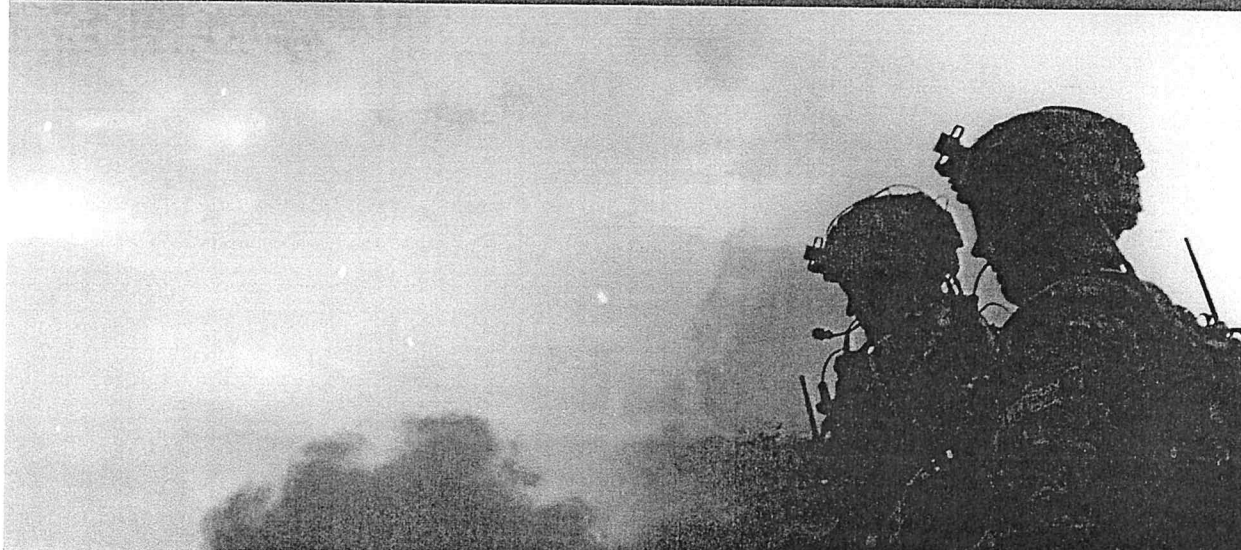
**South Lake Tahoe Update:**

There are no changes to the services provided to the Veterans that live in and around South Lake Tahoe.

# **The PACT Act**

## **2024 Expanded Health Care Eligibility Stakeholder Toolkit**

**March 2024**



## Key Message

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- Beginning March 5, we're making millions of Veterans eligible for VA health care years earlier than called for by the PACT Act.
- Specifically, all Veterans who were exposed to toxins and other hazards while serving our country - at home or abroad - will be eligible to enroll directly in VA health care without first applying for VA benefits.
- That includes all Veterans who served in the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan, or any other combat zone after 9/11.
- It includes all Veterans who deployed in support of the Global War on Terror.
- And it includes Veterans who never deployed but were exposed to toxins or hazards while training or on active duty here at home - by working with chemicals, pesticides, lead, asbestos, certain paints, nuclear weapons, x-rays, and more.
- We're doing this because VA care is proven to be the best, most affordable health care in America for Veterans - so we want as many Veterans as possible to come to us for their care.
- So, to all the Veterans out there: don't wait, apply for the care you deserve at [VA.gov/PACT](https://www.va.gov/PACT).
- Even if you don't need this care today, you might need it tomorrow, or the next day, or 30 years from now. It's quick and easy to apply. And once you're in, you have access for life.

## Elevator Speech

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Beginning March 5, VA is making three new groups of Veterans eligible for VA health care years earlier than called for by the PACT Act:

1. Veterans who were exposed to toxins or other hazards during military service;
2. Veterans who were assigned to certain duty stations in Southwest Asia or parts of Africa;  
and
3. Veterans who deployed in support of certain operations after 9/11.

Here's what that means for Veterans:

If you served in Vietnam, the Gulf War, Iraq, or Afghanistan, you can enroll.

If you deployed to any combat zone after 9/11, you can enroll.

If you deployed in support of the Global War on Terror, you can enroll.

And even if you never deployed but were exposed to toxins or hazards while training or serving on active duty here at home – by working with chemicals, pesticides, lead, asbestos, certain paints, nuclear weapons, x-rays, and more – you can enroll, too.

Bottom line: all Veterans exposed to toxins and other hazards – at home or abroad – are eligible to enroll in VA care beginning March 5.

This is the biggest expansion of care in generations, and VA wants you to apply as soon as possible.

It's quick and easy to enroll. You don't need to be sick or file a claim to become eligible; all you have to do is show that you served in one of those locations or operations – or participated in one of the activities that could have exposed you to toxins or hazards. VA health care is proven to be the best, most affordable care in America for Veterans – and Veterans who come to VA have better health outcomes.

Even if you don't think you need this care today, you might need it tomorrow, or the next day, or 30 years from now. All you have to do is enroll, then you have access for life.

So don't miss this opportunity: better, more affordable health care is waiting for you. Go to [VA.gov/PACT](https://VA.gov/PACT) and get it.

## Collateral and Resources

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- [VA.gov/PACT](https://va.gov/PACT) – the best place for Veterans and their families to learn about all things PACT Act and apply today.
- [VA's Health Care Application Website](#)
- [VA Health Care Eligibility Website](#)
- [Video: How VA health care and benefits can help you save](#)
- [Video: Save money on health care with VA \(30 seconds\)](#)
- [Video: Save money on health care with VA \(15 seconds\)](#)
- [Downloadable General PACT Act PSA 1](#)
- [Downloadable General PACT Act PSA 2](#)
- [Blog: How to Spread the Word about the PACT Act](#) (includes nearly 20 fact sheets in 10+ languages)
- [Accessing PACT Act Benefits and Services Journey Map](#)



# Frequently Asked Questions

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## What changed with this expansion of care?

- Under the PACT Act, all toxic exposed Veterans were supposed to become eligible for VA care – in increments – between now and 2032.
- But as President Biden directed in his 2023 Veterans Day speech, VA is eliminating the phased-in approach – meaning that millions of Veterans will become eligible for VA care more quickly.
- This means that Veterans who were exposed to toxins and other hazards while serving our country — at home or abroad — are now eligible for VA care.
- That includes:
  - Veterans who performed active service while assigned to a duty station in (including airspace above) certain locations during specific periods of time:
    - On or after August 2, 1990, in the following countries: Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, or the United Arab Emirates.
    - On or after September 11, 2001, in the following countries: Afghanistan, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Uzbekistan, or any other country determined relevant by VA (NOTE: VA has not determined any other country relevant at this time).
  - Veterans who participated in a Toxic Exposure Risk Activity (TERA), as defined by law (and described below), while serving on active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training.
  - Veterans who deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Freedom's Sentinel, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn, Operation Inherent Resolve, or Resolute Support Mission.

## Will this expansion of care expire?

- No, Veterans can apply at any time. This expansion of care is here to stay – no deadlines, no expiration dates. However, we encourage Veterans to apply today so they have access to care when they need it.

## How does this make the health care enrollment process easier for Veterans?

- Many Veterans believe they have to file a claim for disability compensation benefits – and get their claim approved – to get access to VA health care.
- But with this expansion and other authorities, that is not accurate.
  - If you served in World War II, Vietnam, the Gulf War, Iraq, or Afghanistan, you're eligible.
  - If you deployed to any combat zone after 9/11, you're eligible.
  - If you deployed in support of the Global War on Terror, you're eligible.
  - And even if you *never* deployed but were exposed to toxins or hazards here at home – by working with chemicals, pesticides, lead, asbestos, certain paints, nuclear weapons, x-rays, and more – you're eligible, too.
  - Even if none of these descriptions match your service, you may be eligible based on your income.
- Bottom line: it's now quicker and easier than ever for you to enroll.
- You don't need to be sick or file a claim to become eligible; all you have to do is show that you served in one of those locations or operations – or participated in one of the activities that could have exposed you to hazards.

- So don't worry and don't wait, apply on March 5 to get access to the best, most affordable health care in America for Veterans.

#### **Why should a Veteran apply for VA care?**

- VA provides the best and most affordable health care for Veterans in America – and *this* is your chance to apply.
- Veterans who are enrolled in VA health care are proven to have better health outcomes than those who get their care elsewhere. And this year alone, VA has beaten non-VA hospitals in quality ratings *and* patient satisfaction ratings.
- That's because our clinicians know Veterans – they often *are* Veterans – and they know exactly how to help.
- And VA health care isn't only the best option for Veterans – it's often the most affordable – with copays as low as \$0 for prescriptions, urgent care, outpatient care, and more for some Veterans at VA.
- So don't wait – get the world-class care you've earned. Apply today at [VA.gov/PACT](https://www.va.gov/PACT).

#### **What's considered a toxic exposure risk activity?**

- A TERA includes any activity that requires a corresponding entry in the Individual Longitudinal Exposure Record (ILER) or another exposure tracking record system.
- Additionally, VA has determined that Veterans who were exposed to one or more of the following hazards or conditions during active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training participated in a TERA, regardless of their geographic location:
  - Air pollutants (burn pits, sand, dust, particulates, oil well fires, sulfur fires).
  - Chemicals (pesticides, herbicides, depleted uranium with embedded shrapnel, contaminated water).
  - Occupational hazards (asbestos, industrial solvents, lead, paints including chemical agent resistant coating, firefighting foams).
  - Radiation (nuclear weapons handling, maintenance and detonation, radioactive material, calibration and measurement sources, X-rays, radiation from military occupational exposure).
  - Warfare agents (nerve agents, chemical and biological weapons).
- This is not a comprehensive list, and there's no deadline to apply. Veterans can view additional military exposure categories on VA's Public Health website at <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/>.

#### **How does this impact Veteran copayments?**

- All VA health care is low- or no-cost for Veterans, but with this expansion of care, we are dramatically expanding the amount of care that we will deliver for free.
- Specifically, Veterans who enroll under this expanded health care eligibility do not owe copayments for treatment for any condition that may be related to their qualifying service (service in a covered location and period, service in support of a contingency operation, or their participation in an activity that may have exposure them to toxins or other hazards).
- Additionally, VA is also proactively reviewing the Priority Groups of Veterans who are already enrolled in VA care to see if they qualify based on their service in a covered location or in support of a contingency operation for a higher Group, which would make them eligible for these reduced copayments.
- While we are working urgently to implement these copayment changes, it is a work in progress.
- If you believe you are wrongly charged copayments for treatment that may be related to your service, please let us know.



- We work with you, and if we verify that it was an erroneous copayment, VA will provide you a refund.

#### **Must Veterans have participated in a TERA during a specific time period?**

- No. To qualify, a Veteran could have participated in a TERA at any time while serving on active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training.

#### **How will VA determine if a Veteran participated in a TERA and is eligible for health care?**

- VA will use all available information and records to ensure every Veteran receives the health care they have earned and deserve. VA enrollment and eligibility staff will follow the outlined process below when reviewing new applications for enrollment.
  1. Review the Veteran's military records to determine if they qualify based on service dates and locations or any other existing authority.
  2. If not, VA will then determine if Veterans participated in a Toxic Exposure Risk Activity (TERA):
    - a. If a Veteran is not eligible to enroll on any other basis, VA will consider required entries in the Veteran's Individual Longitudinal Exposure Record (ILER) and other Veteran records to determine if the Veteran participated in a TERA during military service. If a Veteran disagrees with an enrollment decision, they can submit evidence of participation in a TERA to appeal the decision.

#### **What is ILER?**

- The Individual Longitudinal Exposure Record (ILER) is an individual, electronic record of exposures designed in collaboration between the Department of Defense (DoD) and VA for each Service Member and Veteran.

#### **What happens to my current health care if I sign up for VA?**

- Many Veterans who get their care from VA also have other forms of health insurance. Unless you lose assistance under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), signing up for VA will not impact your ability to continue seeing your current providers using your current insurance if you'd like.
- Enrolling in VA health care could impact your eligibility for premium tax credits under the ACA. To learn more, visit <https://www.va.gov/health-care/about-va-health-benefits/va-health-care-and-other-insurance/>.

#### **What do I get when I enroll in VA health care?**

- VA offers world-class, comprehensive health care – including yearly physicals, health assessments, free screenings (including a toxic exposure screening), specialized care for issues related to military service, and more. This is true regardless of whether or not you have a service-connected condition.
- VA health care can serve as your sole source of healthcare, or as a complement to other plans, and the care is portable, so the coverage follows you if they travel or relocate.

#### **What is VA doing to spread the word to these Veterans?**

- VA will stop at nothing to ensure that as many Veterans as possible enroll.
- To date, VA's PACT Act outreach campaign has included more than 2,500 events nationwide, \$13 million in paid media, 88,000 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, and we won't rest until every Veteran – and every survivor – gets the health care and benefits they deserve under the PACT Act.

#### **Can Veterans still apply for benefits under the PACT Act?**

- Yes. The PACT Act is the largest expansion of VA benefits in generations, and Veterans and survivors can apply *anytime* for the PACT Act benefits they deserve.
- Since the PACT Act was signed into law, VA has delivered billions in PACT Act benefits to Veterans and their survivors nationwide – and that's just the beginning.
- Visit [VA.gov/PACT](https://VA.gov/PACT) to learn more and apply today.

#### **How the PACT Act is helping Veterans:**

- The PACT Act has expanded VA health care and benefits for *millions* of Veterans and their survivors.
- Since President Biden signed the PACT Act into law on August 10, 2022, VA has delivered billions in PACT Act-related benefits to Veterans. Additionally:
  - More than 1 million Veterans have applied for PACT Act-related benefits;
  - More than 5 million enrolled Veterans have received the new toxic exposure screenings; and
  - More than 500,000 Veterans have enrolled in VA health care.
- We at VA want all eligible Veterans and survivors to get the care and benefits they've earned. So don't wait, visit [VA.gov/PACT](https://VA.gov/PACT) to learn more and apply today.