

SERVICE OFFICER REPORT

MARCH 14, 2019

VA TO RECEIVE THREE NEW FISHER HOUSES:

VA announced 1 March 2019, that it is scheduled to receive three new buildings from the Fisher House Foundation. The new facilities will be in Ann Arbor, Mich., Aurora, Colo., and Omaha, Neb. The Fisher House Foundation donates housing facilities to VA and the military to act as a “home away from home” for active duty military, veterans, and their families when receiving treatment at a VA medical facility or major military installation. These facilities are located within walking distance from treatment facilities and provide cost-free housing. Currently, there are 80 Fisher Houses around the world, 38 are located next to VA facilities. An expansion from 38 to 64 is planned over the next few years.

[Read more about VA Fisher Houses at Fisher House Foundation.](#)

VA APPEALS ACT

With the implementation of the VA Appeals Modernization Act on February 19th, you have more choices in how you resolve a disagreement with a VA decision. You can also expect a more efficient, timely and transparent process. This new process is the result of years of collaboration between VA Veterans and Veterans Service Organizations.

Under the new law, Veterans can choose one of three options to have a disagreement reviewed:

Option 1: Higher-Level review Lane. Select this option if there is no additional evidence to submit, but you believe there may have been an error in the initial decision. A more experienced reviewer will take a fresh look at the previous decision and may overturn it.

Option 2: Supplemental Claim Lane. Choose this option if you have new and relevant evidence to support a claim. VA will also assist in gathering evidence.

Option 3: Appeal Lane. You can appeal directly to the Board of Veterans' Appeals.

Visit VA.gov for more on the new appeals process or contact a VSO at your local VA Hospital or Clinic.

EXPEDITED CLAIMS FOR PURPLE HEART VETERANS AT OVERSIGHT HEARING:

On Tuesday, Feb 26th, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert Wilkie and Veterans Health Administration Executive in Charge Dr. Richard Stone testified before the House Appropriations Subcommittee. Secretary Wilkie announced that effective in April, VA will provide priority disability benefits claims processing for the initial claims from discharged combat veterans who

have been awarded the Purple Heart Medal. Wilkie also said that the state of VA is getting stronger, but there is still an enormous amount of work that need to be done with veterans' homelessness, opioid safety and reduction efforts, and women's health.

TRUMP RAMPS UP EFFORT TO PREVENT VETEREAN SUICIDE

Veterans are 1.5% times more likely than non-veterans to take their lives, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs, and 20 die by suicide on average each day.

The order creates a Cabinet-level task force led by VA Secretary Robert Wilkie that will coordinate and align efforts across the federal government to help stem the crisis among former service members.

The panel will be tasked with creating a national plan to more effectively lower the numbers of veteran suicides after numerous programs and billions of dollars allocated to address the problem in recent years have had minimal impact.

To see more information on this, see the Service Officer Report folder.

There is a copy of the Executive Order that was signed by President enclosed in the Service Officer Report Folder.

THE VA IS TRYING TO REACH FEMALE VETERANS ABOUT THEIR HEALTH CARE

The Department of Veterans Affairs has called more than 1.2 million female veterans nationwide to explain their benefits and provide information on health services available at the department—part of an effort to close the gap between male and female veterans who go to the VA for medical care.

The little-know Women Veterans Call Center was established in 2013 to provide information to callers on services available to female veterans at the VA. In the past seven months, it has received 79,700 calls for information.

But it also provides outreach, personally speaking to or leaving voicemail messages for 632,000 female veterans, helping drive an increase in enrollment from roughly 256,000 female vets in 2005 to nearly 500,000 in 2018.

Still, the VA must do more to bring female veterans through the door, said Dr. Patricia Hayes, the VA's chief consultant for women's health services, during a House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies hearing Thursday.

The Women Veterans Call Center is available:

Mon – Fri 8am-10pm ET

Sat 8am-6:30pm ET

Phone number 800-829-6636

AMONG VETERANS ORGANIZATIONS, HEALTH CARE, SUICIDE AND EDUCATION ARE TOP PRIORITIES

Implementation of the Mission Act, suicide prevention and mental health care –along with education, women veterans and environmental exposures—top the list of concerns veterans’ advocates have as they look toward the legislative year ahead.

For the last two weeks, in hearings before joint meetings of the Senate and Veterans Affairs Committees and meetings with lawmakers, veterans service organizations have discussed what is important to veterans from all eras this year.

The goal, as Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America CEO Jeremy Butler said during testimony Thursday, is to work with Congress to “deliver results, not just for Iraq/Afghanistan veterans but the veterans of all organizations.”

Topping the priorities for nearly all the veterans service organizations is implementation of the Veterans Affairs Mission Act, the legislation that will provide health care services to veterans outside of Department of Veterans Affairs medical facilities. The legislation replaced several outsourced care programs at the VA, including Choice, which allowed veterans who live more than 40 miles from a VA facility or faced wait times of more than 30 days for an appointment to seek private care.

THERE IS MORE INFORMATION ON THIS LOCATED IN THE SERVICE OFFICERS FOLDER.