

Did You Know?

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That this year our Legion Service Officers from all of our State Departments meet in Washington, D.C. for training? This year there were over 75 of us. For three days we are furnished with a wealth of information from our National VA&R staff and also the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Keynote speakers from the Veterans Benefits Administration, Veterans Health Administration and the National Cemetery Administration update us on changes and proposed laws. Prior to this we also attended the annual DC conference. Here are some of the highlights of those two events:

The Legion will be pushing to extend the “Caregivers Act” to cover severely disabled vets who served prior to 9/11. This law gives a stipend to the spouse or other family member who cares for the vet in his or her home.

The Veterans Administration’s National Call Center (1-800-827-1000) added staff. Wait times have been reduced from 45 minutes to under 2 minutes. It also is now open from 7:00 am to 8:00 pm Monday-Friday.

VA has 1000 CBOC’s, 300 Vet Centers and 130 Medical School affiliates. All medical facilities now have same day service, either by face to face, call or e-mail response.

There were 9 million episodes of TeleHealth and they now cross state lines e.g. Indiana vet deals with Illinois VA doctor via this program. This is a fantastic idea where specialty doctors in different areas can consult with patients via TV. For instance skin problems.

The veteran’s crisis center (previously named the suicide line) has also added staff and call wait times average 8 seconds. Twenty vets commit suicide daily and of those 14 have never used a Veterans Administration hospital. Put the Crisis Line in your portable phone: 800-273-8255. You never know when you may run into a situation and need to use it.

Hepatitis C is a silent killer and sometimes takes 20+ years for symptoms to develop. A new oral medicine taken over an eight week period has a 95% cure rate. Talk about a miracle drug! Any vet not already screened should request a blood test at their Veterans Administration hospital. The target group is those born between 1945 and 1965.

The claims backlog is getting better but still too long a process. On the average the Veterans Administration conducts a C&P exam every 3 seconds nationwide.

The new “Forever” GI Bill for school has no delimiting date. Those of us from the Vietnam Era remember that we had only ten years to use it or lose it.

The number one service-connected condition that is filed for and granted is Tinnitus.

Almost 133,000 vets and family members were buried in Nat’l Cemeteries in 2017. An App is coming to read the name on a government headstone and listen to their story if of record. Over three quarter of a million Presidential Memorial Certificates were processed.

A new appeals program will start in February of 2019 to help make a dent in that backlog. Currently there are over 500,000 appeals nationwide. Two hundred new attorneys and 8 judges have been hired.

That’s it from Washington. On the local level our Chicago office has hired a full-time female Service Officer who is fluent in Spanish. Carolina Contreras can also help female veterans with their special claims like Military Sexual Trauma. To make an appointment to see her or just to talk call 312-980-4266.

Please remember that anyone who set foot in Vietnam, even for one day is eligible for use of the Veterans Health Administration. Unless they qualify for a higher category they will be placed in category six. That group only pays a small copayment for medicine, usually under \$9 for a thirty-day supply. Until next month.....

**FIND SOMETHING THAT YOU LIKE TO DO AND YOU WILL NEVER WORK A DAY
IN YOUR LIFE.**