



The Guardian

The monthly newsletter of the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services

March, 2021

The New Mexico Department of Veterans Services (DVS) continues to provide benefits assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

DVS Veterans Service Officers (VSOs) based throughout New Mexico are working remotely to help veterans with filing VA claims or applying for state veterans benefits.

Veterans anywhere in the state can contact any DVSVSO for help.

For phone assistance:
(505) 383-2400

For Email assistance:
nmdvs.info@state.nm.us

DVS website for
more information:
www.nmdvs.org

Veterans Urged to Register for Both the NMVAHCS and DOH COVID Vaccine Programs

The New Mexico Department of Veterans Services (DVS) is asking veterans to register for both COVID-19 vaccine program options available to them.

The first option is through the New Mexico VA Health Care System—which is now offering vaccines for any veteran enrolled in VA health care—regardless of their age or health-risk status.

A second option—which is available for veterans who do not receive VA health care—is through the New Mexico Department of Health (DOH), which offers the vaccine to all New Mexico residents.

But pre-registration is required for both options. “Walk-ins” are not allowed. No veteran or New Mexican will get a vaccine without registering in advance for a vaccine appointment.

Registration for the NMVAHCS vaccine

VA-enrolled veterans must register with the NMVAHCS to schedule their vaccine by calling (505) 265-1711, and then using either of the following four extensions: 3915, 3916, 2910, or 2912. The NMVAHCS will contact the registered veteran when their vaccine is ready.

For VA-enrolled veterans in the Albuquerque metro area, the vaccine will be given at a special drive-through clinic set up in the parking lot of the Albuquerque Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center’s main building.

VA-enrolled veterans who want their vaccine through the NMVAHCS—but live outside the Albuquerque metro area—can call the same phone number to register for a vaccine at the following 13 Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) managed by the NMVAHCS: Alamogordo, Artesia, Española, Farmington, Gallup, Las Vegas, Raton, Rio Rancho, Santa Fe, Silver City, Taos, Truth or Consequences, and Durango (Colorado).



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The following three CBOC's are not managed by the NMVAHCS: Clovis (under the jurisdiction of the Amarillo, TX VA Medical Center), Hobbs (Big Spring, TX), and Las Cruces (El Paso VA Medical Center). Veterans who call the main NMVAHCS number will be referred to those VA health care systems.

Veterans who are not enrolled in VA health care can enroll ahead of registering for a vaccine by also calling the above phone number. For more information about VA health care eligibility:

<https://www.va.gov/health-care/eligibility/>.

Registration for the DOH vaccine

Registration can be done online at <https://cvvaccine.nmhealth.org/>. DOH vaccines are being given to New Mexicans in a phased-in approach according to specific groups of citizens. Currently, the following groups are eligible: Health care workers, first responders, educators/staff and anyone with a chronic health condition—with expansion expected soon to include the rest of the state's population.

Q: Which program should I register with? A: REGISTER WITH BOTH PROGRAMS!

DVS is urging veterans to register with both programs—and to go with the first program that contacts you. But then veterans are asked to contact the other program to remove your name from its list...to free up a slot for another person.

The COVID-19 Pandemic: One Year Later

On March 12, 2020, the New Mexico Department of Health issued a public health order mandating the wearing of masks, restricting public mass gatherings, and social distancing in response to the detection of the first cases of COVID-19 in New Mexico. Three days later, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham directed state agencies to implement telework/remote work policies to further limit public contact. Federal and local agencies also issued similar directives.

DVS Secretary Sonya L. Smith and NMVAHCS Director Andrew Welch reflect on the past year of serving New Mexico's veterans while also keeping employees safe.



Andrew Welch
NMVAHCS Director

NMVAHCS Director Andrew Welch

As I reflect on the last year since the beginning of the pandemic, I am moved by the flexibility and adaptability of the staff, patients and families of the New Mexico VA Health Care System.

Our clinical team took on new and additional assignments to support efforts to combat COVID-19 and treat those most desperately affected by it.

Our community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs) screened Veterans over the phone and continued to serve and treat our Veterans in our rural communities.

We deployed staff and resources to assist our fellow VA Health Care Systems in the most hard-hit communities around the country. We enacted our fourth mission by assisting our neighbors with humanitarian treatment for \non-Veterans in emergency situations.

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Support staff took on new roles as screeners at our entrances and our housekeeping staff took extra precautions ensuring sanitization measures were amped up throughout the facility. Our staff eagerly signed up to be vaccinated as resources became available, making it possible to more safely and effectively treat our veteran population. We vaccinated our patients in drive-thru clinics to minimize risk of exposure to those who could be infected, and we deployed the vaccine to our clinics throughout our catchment area. Our veteran patients showed resilience, accepting and adjusting to telehealth and telemental health appointments in efforts to minimize risk of exposure and infection.

We truly appreciate our patients enduring these difficult times and their willingness to support us during the difficulties of this pandemic year. With all this being said, we look forward to welcoming our veteran patients back to an open campus and the opportunity to provide them healthcare and services in a face-to-face setting.

As some of these restrictions continue to be lifted, we continue to ask that those who walk through our doors do so with a face covering and continue to physical distance. This will further help us keep the environment and our staff and patients safe. Soon we will allow one visitor per day for one hour per patient to come in to visit their loved one. The visitor hours are limited between 1:00-2:00 pm or 5:00-6:00 pm. As a reminder, no one under the age of 18 is allowed in the facility.

DVS Secretary Sonya L. Smith

I too am extremely proud of the staff here at the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services (DVS). Despite the pandemic and working remotely, we have continued to live up to our agency's motto: *Serving Those Who Served*. Clear lines of communication have been established between staff to ensure that we continue to operate normally—without missing a beat.

DVS is also proud to collaborate with the New Mexico VA Health Care System during the pandemic. Our joint mission is ensuring the veteran community is receiving the highest quality care for the state's veterans and their families. To that end, our entire staff of veterans service officers (VSOs) continues to telework and can assist any veteran from anywhere in the state. Please call 505) 383-2400 or email us at nmdvs.info@state.nm.us to get assistance from one of our VSOs.



Sonya L. Smith
DVS Secretary

Just last month, we implemented our Rural Veterans Transportation Program to help veterans get to their medical appointments free of charge. We're launching it in phases. The first phase began service for veterans in Cibola, Colfax, Guadalupe, and Socorro counties. We will soon expand to other rural counties, and will let the veteran community know as soon as this happens. We are also continue to support the veterans living in the state veteran's home by working closely with the Department of Health to ensure that these veterans are not neglecting their VA claims or state veterans benefits.

DVS is also focusing on encouraging all veterans to get the COVID-19 vaccine. Veterans that are enrolled with the VA can receive the vaccine regardless of age or chronic health condition, but must register with the VA. Other veterans can register with the Department of Health. As mentioned earlier—we want veterans to register with both programs—to improve your chance of getting a vaccine as quickly as possible.

In conclusion, I'm asking veterans to take a few moments to complete our COVID-19 and customer service surveys found on our homepage, www.nmdvs.org. Your responses will help us fine-tune our planning. On behalf of NMVACHS Director Welch, I thank you for your service to our country...and your patience as we both strive to provide the very best possible service for you and your families.

DVS, Women Veterans of New Mexico Host Live Women Veterans “Listening Session”



DVS Secretary Sonya L. Smith and the group Women Veterans of New Mexico hosted a live online Zoom meeting on March 16 to provide women veterans the chance to meet the secretary and voice their suggestions for improving service to women veterans.

One of the key concerns raised by several women was the need for DVS and all service agencies to aggressively reach out to the state’s 16,000 women veterans—whom many in the discussion say are not aware of their VA or state veterans benefits.

“Many older-generation veterans didn’t think they were veterans, so they weren’t entitled to any veterans benefits,” said Women Veterans of New Mexico President and retiree U.S. Army Lt. Col. Patricia “Pat” Gaston of Albuquerque. “They think that, because they didn’t deploy overseas, they weren’t veterans. We need to change that thinking.”

“I’d like to see more outreach in the rural areas of New Mexico,” said Cassandra Morgan of Gallup—a former U.S. Marine Corps heavy equipment mechanic and a member of the Navajo Veterans Advisory Council. “We need to give them more recognition—let them know they are veterans and get the same benefits as male veterans.”

Other suggestions were the need for the various women veterans groups to communicate with each other, a push for women veterans to utilize their G.I. Bill® to pursue a post-high school education to increase their career earnings capability, and the desire for state women veterans conferences or conventions. All of this was duly noted by DVS Secretary Smith, who said the meeting was critical for her as she prepares for a national meeting with the VA’s Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and other women state veterans service agency cabinet secretaries later this year.

“The VBA approached us about wanting to have a meeting to gauge our needs,” she said. “But I wanted to have a conversation with local women veterans first before I engage with the other national directors, to let them know of our concerns here in New Mexico.”

Secretary Smith assured the participants that DVS will act on their concerns, and called for regular meetings to continue monitoring the needs of women veterans.

“We have but one job...and one job only...here at DVS,” she said. “And that is, to make the lives better for all of our veterans and their families.”

DVS Fills VSO, Women Veterans Program Manager Vacancies

DVS has filled two vacancies for positions critical in allowing the agency to expand its service to key segments of New Mexico's veteran population.



George Garcia
DVS Grants VSO

George A. Garcia is the new Veterans Service Officer (VSO) in the DVS Grants field office. Mr. Garcia's primary coverage area will be mostly-rural Cibola County, which also has a large population of Native American veterans.

Mr. Garcia is proud to have been born and raised in Grants, and who at the age of 17, enlisted with the U.S. Marine Corps. After completion of boot camp at Camp Pendleton in San Diego, CA, he went on to serve 21 years before retiring as a gunnery sergeant. He had previously served as a drill instructor at MCRD Parris Island, a naval aviation formal schools instructor in Pensacola, FL, and as an aviation ordnance/special weapons technician.

After retiring from service, in 2001 Mr. Garcia began teaching at Grants High School as a USMC JROTC marine instructor—where he coached the school's drill team to 2 national championships and 9 New Mexico Athletics Association state drill championship titles. He earned an associate science degree from NMSU-Grants in 2009 before retiring from the Grants/Cibola County School District last June.

Like all DVS VSOs, Mr. Garcia is working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. He can be reached for claims, benefits, and any other issues facing a veteran or his family at George.garcia2@state.nm.us or (505) 288-7605.

Robin Wilson is the DVS women veterans program manager. Based in the DVS northeast heights office, her primary responsibility is to provide assistance to New Mexico's women veterans—the fastest-growing segment of our nation's population. There are nearly 17,000 women veterans in New Mexico—about 11% of the state's veteran population.

The western New York native enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in 1991 as a security specialist. As an airman, Ms. Wilson was stationed at multiple bases including Offutt AFB in Omaha, NE, and Nebraska and Ramstein Air Base in southwestern Germany.

Ms. Wilson joined the Air Force reserves while attending the University of South Carolina, where she graduated with a bachelor's degree in nursing. She was then commissioned as a 1st Lieutenant in the Air Force as a critical care nurse and stationed at Wilford Hall Medical Center in San Antonio, TX. She was also deployed to the 332nd Expeditionary Medical Group at Balad Air Base in Iraq in support of Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom.

Prior to coming to DVS, Ms. Wilson worked at the New Mexico Veterans Integration Center (VIC) in Albuquerque, where she was a case manager serving the needs of homeless and justice-involved veterans, and those struggling with significant substance use.

Women veterans can contact Robin, who is also working remotely, by email or phone at robin.wilson@state.nm.us or (505) 372-9106.



Robin Wilson
DVS Women Veterans
Program Manager

DVS Secretary Smith Discusses Veterans Issues With Staffs of U.S. Senators Heinrich & Lujan



Sen. Martin Heinrich
D-New Mexico

DVS Secretary Sonya L. Smith met with representatives from the offices of U.S. Senators Martin Heinrich and Ben Ray Lujan on March 3 to discuss ways DVS can work with the two senators to improve the lives of New Mexico's veterans.

In a morning videoconference with Senator Heinrich's staff, Secretary Smith provided an update on the DVS Highly Rural Veterans Transportation Grant launched last month to provide free transportation for rural-area veterans to and from their home to any VA medical appointment.

In noting the first phase of the program's launch to serve veterans living in Cibola, Colfax, Guadalupe, and Socorro counties, the staff asked if the program would expand. Secretary Smith responded that it will soon expand to six more counties in the near future, and that DVS will re-apply for another VA grant to allow even further expansion.

Secretary Smith congratulated Senator Heinrich for his appointment as chairman of the Senate Appropriation Committee's Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies subcommittee—which oversees funding for new military construction, and all aspects of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs funding.

"This is great news for our agency and the veterans of New Mexico," said Secretary Smith.

In an afternoon videoconference with Senator Lujan's staff, among the topics discussed was the willingness for DVS and the senator's staff to look into the expansion and improvement of telehealth care for veterans—especially in rural areas of the state.

Secretary Smith agreed, the need to improve broadband internet infrastructure and access is even more critical.

"Telehealth care is the future, and the future is now—it's already here," she said. "But what good is it if veterans have computers, phones, and tablets—but you can't get an internet connection? So yes, we do need to work together on this."

She also explained how the COVID-19 public health restrictions has opened up possibilities to increase outreach to veterans. DVS staff have been working remotely and not offering face to face assistance for serving veterans.

"While we know that there are those who prefer in-person assistance, this virtual element has really expanded how we can now operate as an agency", she said. "Just because a veteran lives in Albuquerque doesn't mean he or she has to work with an Albuquerque VSO. Veterans can now work with any of our veterans service officers anywhere in the state."

DVS hopes to hold similar videoconference meetings with staffs of Congresswomen Yvette Herrell, Teresa Leger Fernandez, and the replacement for Congresswoman Debra Haaland, who has been confirmed as U.S. Interior Secretary.



Sen. Ben Ray Lujan
D-New Mexico

Entrepreneurial-Minded Veterans: The VBOC is Also “Open For Business”



The New Mexico Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC)—the veterans business development division of DVS—is also “open for business” during the COVID-19 pandemic. If you are an aspiring entrepreneur or small business owner seeking to start, purchase, or grow a business, the VBOC is your one-stop shop to provide remote assistance with:

Transition Assistance Programs

Boots to Business — the entrepreneurship track of the Department of Defense’s Transition Assistance Program offered on military installations worldwide for transitioning service members.

Boots to Business | Reboot — an extension of *Boots to Business*, delivering the same information and benefits to veterans, members of the National Guard and Reserves, and their spouses in more accessible off-base locations

Top Reasons to Contact the VBOC

- ✓ You are thinking about small business ownership as a post-service career
- ✓ Referrals to other partners and programs within the SBA Partner network to include the SBA New Mexico District Office, Small Business Development Centers, SCORE, Procurement Technical Assistant Center and the Department of Agriculture.
- ✓ Tailored business counseling and mentoring in-person—by phone, virtually, or online
- ✓ You could benefit from additional management expertise and access to capital and market opportunities—with access to in-depth market research tools
- ✓ You are preparing to apply for a Small Business Administration (SBA) backed loan or a federal contracting certification
- ✓ You need help creating your business plan
- ✓ Application assistance for federal contracting certification program
- ✓ Stay abreast of the ever changing COVID-19 financial assistance programs

Eligibility

Transitioning or active duty service members
 Veteran of any era
 National Guard or Reserve members
 Spouses of the Above

Go to www.nmyboc.org to learn more and register today. You may also contact VBOC Director Rich Coffel at (505) 220-9932 or VBOC Business Advisor Jim Cassidy at (505) 228-3024.

DVS Carlsbad VSO Helps Dedicate "Huey" Helicopter

DVS Carlsbad-based veterans service officer Dagmar Youngberg (right photo), who is also the chair of the Carlsbad Veterans Memorial Board, joined a handful of city officials and veterans for a final dedication of a Huey helicopter on February 19 at Veterans Memorial Park.

A bronze plaque was unveiled (photo below)—the final touch of an ongoing dedication following installation of the helicopter last year..



The unveiling of the plaque, said Ms. Youngberg, finalized the process.

“This is the final touch in welcoming this warhorse to its new and permanent resting home here in Carlsbad,” she said. “For Vietnam veterans the Huey is an iconic symbol of their war. We’re proud to have it on display here at the park as a tribute to those who answered the call of duty to bravely serve our country when they were called to serve.”

To say the helicopter saw combat action in SE Asia is an understatement. It was shot down—with both crew members surviving and being rescued. After the helicopter itself was recovered, a few years later it was involved in a mid-air collision at 1,000 feet. Again, it was repaired, and went on to con-



Medicare Enrollment Reminder from ALTSD



The following is courtesy of the New Mexico Aging and Long-Term Services Department (ALTSD)

The annual Medicare General Enrollment Period ends March 31, so if you have been thinking about getting Part B now is the time. If you miss this year's enrollment period, you can't enroll until the next General Enrollment Period, which runs January 1 – March 31 each year.

There are many good reasons to consider enrolling in Medicare, such as:

- Health insurance protects you from the full cost of covered medical treatment
- VA and IHS are not actually health insurance even though they provide medical services.
- Even if you continue to get your care through the VA or IHS the ability to charge Medicare for your care strengthens those programs.
- You may have an easier time getting in to see specialists or other doctors
- Enrolling in Part B keeps you from accruing penalties for not having health insurance
- Medicaid's Medicare Savings Programs (MSPs) are a strategy for eligible people to avoid the Part B late enrollment penalty.

If you did not enroll in Medicare when you turned 65 you may be hesitating to sign up now because of penalties. You may be able to avoid penalties if you qualify for a Medicare Savings Program (MSP). This is a partial Medicaid program, so there are income guidelines, but it is definitely worth applying since in addition to paying the monthly Part B premium and possibly your copays and coinsurance (depending on your eligibility) it will also cover any penalties you have accrued by declining Part B in the past.

A State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) counselor can help guide you through the process. Call (800) 432-2080 for information and assistance. Contact your local Social Security Administration office to apply for Medicare. The locations of SSA offices in New Mexico can be found at <https://www.ssoffice.com/new-mexico-social-security-offices-sos31>

The Income Support Division has applications for MSPs. The Aging and Disability Resource Center can also send you a MSP application, as well as answering any other questions you may have. The phone number is: (800) 432-2080

Veterans Community Bulletin Board

NOTICE: The following page(s) feature event and informational flyers provided to DVS by veterans and community service agencies. These flyers are published for the convenience of New Mexico's veteran community. Inclusion in The Guardian does not constitute an endorsement by DVS of the organization, content, products, or services contained therein.

DVS invites service agencies and non-profit service organizations to send flyers or news releases announcing an upcoming or ongoing veteran-related event. DVS will post these flyers as a public service courtesy to the veteran community. However:

- Flyers must have the name of a point-of-contact from the organization...along with the contact's phone number or email address...or a website with contact information. Flyers without this information will not be published.
- DVS is not responsible for the accuracy of the content, products, or services in these flyers.
- Views expressed in these flyers are the independent views of the authors/owners of the third-party entity that created the flyer—and does not necessarily reflect the views of DVS.
- To the maximum extent permitted by law, DVS expressly denies liability for any and all losses suffered by any persons or organizations who, in their independent discretion and reliance, either directly or indirectly rely on content, products, services or information offered by these independent third-party organizations.
- DVS reserves the right to edit or decline publishing of any flyer.

Join AARP New Mexico on March 18, 2021 for a special virtual showing of the movie *Sky Blossom*



Sky Blossom is a raw, candid look at the 24.5 million teens and twenty-somethings caring for a veteran parent or grandparent. Caring for family with tough medical conditions, they stay at home doing things often seen only in hospitals. They are cheerleaders, work part time, and go to college – but also live double lives – quietly growing up as America’s next greatest generation.

A heart touching and compelling documentary, *Sky Blossom* will resonate with military families and family caregivers.

This special AARP New Mexico virtual event will focus on one of the families in the *Sky Blossom* caregiving documentary, and feature a live discussion on caregiving with the family and veterans service representatives.

We hope you will join us for this special event and important discussion on March 18, 2021 at 8:00 PM (MT).

To register, go to: bit.ly/skyblossom-mar18



News from the VA

VA to Host Public “Listening Sessions” to Get Feedback on the Future of VA Health Care

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is hosting public virtual listening sessions to hear from veterans on how to design a health care system of the future and grow services for veterans in a way that reinforces VA’s role as a leader in the U.S. health care system.

VA is looking forward to robust engagement and to hearing the voices and insights of veterans on the following topics:

- How veterans want care to be delivered in the future
- Perception of the quality of health care at VA and VA’s community network
- Experience with the ability to get care at VA and within VA’s community network
- Satisfaction with the condition and location of VA’s facilities
- VA’s role in research, education, and emergency preparedness

These listening sessions represent an exciting opportunity for veterans to help VA reimagine how VA delivers care in an equitable, high quality, veteran-centered manner and develop a plan for investing in VA’s aging infrastructure. The feedback will be used to develop the recommendations VA submits to the Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) Commission in January 2022. The AIR Commission will also conduct public hearings as part of their review of VA’s recommendations before submitting its recommendations to the President and Congress for review and approval in 2023.

Listening sessions will run from March through June 2021 and are scheduled according to the VA’s Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISN). These sessions will be hosted on a virtual technology platform to permit participation via phone or computer.

The listening session for veterans in New Mexico is scheduled for June 1 from 2-3:30pm.

Pre-registration can be done online at: <https://www.va.gov/HEALTHPOLICYPLANNING/listening.asp>. Scroll down to VISN22: Desert Pacific Healthcare Network to find Albuquerque listed inside the June 1 block. There you’ll find the link to pre-register, and the link to use on June 1.

VA encourages veterans, veterans service organizations, community veterans engagement boards, and other interested stakeholders to participate.

If you are not able to attend the meeting but would still like to provide feedback, you may submit your thoughts on the topics outlined above to VHAMAQs@va.gov. As a reminder, please do not include personal health information in your submission. Also, please note that VA will not respond to individual emails.

VA Launches Off On-Demand Women's Health Transition Training Course

The VA has launched an online Women's Health Transition Training course, enabling all transitioning servicewomen and recently separated women veterans to have access to information about VA women's health services.



The online, self-paced instruction is available at <https://tapevents.org/courses/182>

and is designed to complement VA's Transition Assistance Program (TAP). The online program provides information and resources to help participants understand VA's gender-specific health care services, enroll in VA health care as quickly as possible after separation and be better prepared to manage their post-military health care.

"VA has presented the Women's Health Transition Training content to hundreds of women and refined it based on their feedback," said VA Office of Transition and Economic Development Acting Executive , Lawrencia Pierce. "By expanding course availability online, servicewomen and women veterans worldwide are better able to learn about VA health care designed for their needs and empowered to make informed decisions about their future."

Women are the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. veteran population, but only 40% of eligible women veterans are enrolled in VA health care. VA and the Department of Defense collaborated in 2017 to study women veterans' barriers to care and to establish a pilot training program to address these barriers.

In 2018, VA began offering the Women's Health Transition Training at select installations and has since provided the instructor-led course in person and online to hundreds of transitioning servicewomen. Feedback from pilot participants shows the course increases awareness of women's health services available through VA, and the on-demand course makes this important information readily available to all.

The 2.5-hour on-demand Women's Health Transition Training can be accessed at <https://tapevents.org/courses/182>. Learn more about future course opportunities at <https://www.va.gov/womenvet/whtt/>. Women veterans here in New Mexico can also contact DVS Women Veterans Program Manager Robin Wilson for assistance. She can be reached at robin.wilson@state.nm.us or (505) 372-9106



VETERANS GROUP LIFE INSURANCE (VGLI)

Reduction in Premiums For Veterans Enrolled in Veterans Group Life Insurance

All veterans insured under Veterans' Group Life Insurance (VGLI) will receive a reduction in premiums effective April 1, ensuring that VGLI remains a cost effective option for veterans and transitioning uniform service members who choose VA insurance products.

Premiums for VGLI will be reduced by an average of 7% across all age groups — allowing separating service members to continue their service members' group life insurance coverage level as a renewable term insurance policy after leaving service.

While any separating service member who has SGLI coverage upon separation is eligible to sign up for VGLI after separation, they must submit their application and initial premium within 240 days after leaving the military to apply without proof of good health. Those who apply after the 240-day period but before the deadline of one year and 120 days from separation will need to submit proof of good health by completing a questionnaire regarding medical conditions.

Additionally, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, VA is temporarily extending the application deadlines for VGLI by an additional 90 days beyond the initial 240-day period and the one year and 120 day-period, referenced above, to offer more flexibility to separating service members. This enrollment extension will remain in effect until June 2021. For more information about VA life insurance:

<https://www.benefits.va.gov/insurance/>

VA Receives “Compassionate Use” Authorization for 3D-Printed Hearing Device

The VA received compassionate use approval from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in February for a groundbreaking in-house developed medical device to help improve the quality of life of a Veteran with a rare hearing condition.

The compassionate use authorization allows patients access to prototype medications, biologics and medical devices for medical treatment outside of clinical trials when no comparable or satisfactory alternative therapy options exists. A 3D printed stent is inserted in the external ear canal to keep it from collapsing and allow sound to pass through. The device is not surgically implanted and can be easily removed by the patient. This unique hearing aid was designed and created by the integrated 3D printing network team at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center in Charleston, South Carolina.

In 2017, VA started integrating and developing its 3D Printing Network. Since then, the network has expanded to more than 60 VA medical centers exploring possible uses of the technology in clinical settings. For more information about VA's 3D Printing Network:

<https://www.va.gov/INNOVATIONECOSYSTEM/views/solutions/3d-printing-network.html>