

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL

March 2008



The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete.

RECENT ENHANCEMENTS IN VETERANS' ELIGIBILITY FOR HEALTH CARE BENEFITS

VA has implemented certain provisions of The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 (Public Law 110-181) that extended health benefits for recently discharged veterans who served in the theater of combat operations and extended the timeframe certain veterans have for applying for the provision of a one-time course of dental benefits. In addition, effective February 1, 2008 the amount paid for beneficiary mileage reimbursement for travel to VA medical facilities has increased from 11 cents per mile to 28.5 cents per mile.

While increasing the payment, VA, as mandated by law, also equally increased the deductible amounts applied to certain mileage reimbursements. The new deductibles are \$7.77 for a one way trip, \$15.54 for a round trip, with a maximum of \$46.62 per calendar month. However, these deductibles can be waived if they cause a financial hardship to the veteran.

Combat Veteran Benefit Changes: On January 28, 2008, VA extended the period of enhanced health care eligibility provided a veteran who served in a theater of combat operations after November 11, 1998, commonly referred to as "combat veterans" or "OEF/OIF veterans."

Currently enrolled veterans and new enrollees who were discharged from active duty on or after January 28, 2003 are now eligible for the enhanced benefits, for five years post discharge. Veterans discharged from active duty before January 28, 2003, who apply for enrollment on or after January 28, 2008, are now eligible for the enhanced benefit until January 27, 2011.

Benefits for combat veterans included in this authority are enrollment in Priority Group 6, if not eligible for a higher Priority Group placement; and charged copays only for medication and/or treatment of conditions that are clearly unrelated to their combat service (e.g. common cold, broken bone). VA will automatically reassess currently enrolled veterans and veterans who applied for VA health care but were denied enrollment to determine if they are eligible for the new benefit. If the veteran is found eligible for the new benefit, VA will automatically update their enrollment information.

Dental Benefit Changes: VA extended the timeframe for veterans to make application for the one-time dental benefit from 90 days to 180 days post-separation. To be eligible for this benefit, the veteran must have served on active duty 90 days or more, applied for VA dental care within 180 days of separation from active duty, and their certificate of discharge can not indicate that they received necessary dental care within the 90-day period prior to discharge.

Veterans who were denied this one-time dental benefit between August 1, 2007 and January 27, 2008, will be contacted and offered this benefit; if their application was made within 180 days of discharge.

For more information on VA Health Care eligibility, go online to <http://www.va.gov/healtheligibility/>.

SPECIAL ECONOMIC STIMULUS (REBATES) The President signed into law economic stimulus payments for all taxpayers. Included in the law is a special provision for veterans who are not taxpayers. The law allows for payments for select individuals who have no tax liability, such as those who receive Social Security benefits or veterans' disability compensation, pension or survivor's benefits received from VA in 2007. These taxpayers will be eligible to receive a payment of \$300 (\$600 on a joint return) if they had at least \$3,000 of qualifying income. In order to be eligible to receive the special stimulus payment, a 2007 tax return must be filed.

Recipients of Social Security, certain Railroad Retirement and certain veterans' benefits should report their 2007 benefits on Line 14A of Form 1040A or Line 20a of Form 1040. People are allowed to estimate their annual VA benefit by taking their monthly veterans' benefit, and multiplying it by the number of months they received the benefit during the year 2007. Documentation from VA is not required. Taxpayers in these groups should write the words "Stimulus Payment" at the top of the 1040A or 1040.

For now, taxpayers in this group filing a tax return can only file a paper copy of the Form 1040 or Form 1040A. The

IRS is working to update its systems to accept electronic versions of these limited-information returns for taxpayers who otherwise have no need to file a tax return. The IRS is also working with the software community to handle these returns electronically at a future date.

The IRS also reminded taxpayers with Social Security, Railroad Retirement or veterans' benefits who have already filed but did not report their qualifying benefits on either Line 14a of Form 1040A or Line 20a of Form 1040 that they may need to file an amended return in some situations to receive a larger stimulus payment. Taxpayers can file an amended return by using Form 1040X, which can only be filed with a paper form.

The IRS has informed taxpayers who don't have any other requirement to file a tax return that submitting a tax return to qualify for the economic stimulus payments does not create any additional tax or trigger a tax bill. In addition, the stimulus payments will not have any effect on eligibility for federal benefits.

For more information see the IRS website at www.irs.gov. The IRS will continue to update information on this program.

CONTACTING VETERANS As a Federal agency, VA is bound by the Privacy Act to protect the privacy of veterans' personal information. Therefore, VA cannot release personal information about a veteran in the records system without that person's permission. VA can, however, forward a letter to the veteran, providing the veteran has filed a claim with VA, and there is an address on record. Threatening or harassing material may not be forwarded.

To have a letter forwarded, the letter should be placed in an unsealed, stamped envelope, with no return address, and with a note to VA explaining who is to be reached and with as much identifying information (VA claim number, military service number, Social Security number, full name, date of birth, dates and branch of service) as possible. This is placed in another envelope addressed to the nearest U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Regional Office.

If VA has an address for the veteran, the letter will be read to ensure that it does not contain threatening or harassing material. The letter to the veteran will then be placed in the envelope, the envelope will be sealed, addressed to the address on file for the veteran, and mailed. If received, it is then up to the veteran to contact the sender. If the letter can not be forwarded, VA will notify the sender. It should be noted that the veteran may not have informed VA of a change of address, so delivery can not be guaranteed.

IMPORTANT DATES IN MARCH

March 10 last day to input change of address or establish direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 04-01-2008 payments

March 21 last day to change or cancel direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 04-01-2008 payments

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 **1-800-827-1000**

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022 **1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)**
Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications **1-877-823-2378**

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline (medical care) - **1-877-222-8387**

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) **1-877-838-2778**

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 **1-800-669-8477**

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -
CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023
CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024
Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 **1-800-733-8387**

Foreign Medical Program Office (medical treatment abroad) -
PO Box 65021, Denver, CO 80206-5021 **303-331-7590**

National Cemeteries

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL **727-398-9426**
6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 33513 **352-793-7740**
6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 33467 **561-649-6489**
Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL **850-453-4108/4846**
9810 State Hwy 72, Sarasota FL **877-861-9840**

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 5109 Russell Rd Quantico VA 22134-3903 **1-800-697-6947**

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120 **1-888-244-6711**

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit - Chicago VA Regional Office **1-800-829-4833**

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: www.va.gov

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) www.warms.vba.va.gov

Property Management (sale of VA-repossessed homes): www.ocwen.com

Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs: www.floridavets.org

St. Pete Regional Office: www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete