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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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SDDVA Secretary Whitlock's March Column – Largest Expansion for Veterans Healthcare

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs recently announced that all veterans who were exposed to toxins and other hazards while serving in the military, at home or abroad, will be eligible to enroll directly in VA healthcare beginning March 5, 2024.

This expansion of VA healthcare eliminates the phased-in approach called for by the PACT Act. This means that veterans can become eligible for VA healthcare up to eight years earlier than written into law.

A major part of the expansion is that veterans who never deployed but were exposed to toxins or hazards while training or on active duty in the United States are eligible to enroll in VA healthcare.

Many veterans believe they must receive VA disability benefits to be eligible for VA healthcare, but with this expansion millions of eligible veterans can enroll directly in VA care without the need to first apply for other VA benefits.

We encourage all veterans to contact a state, county, or tribal veterans service officer to discuss these changes to get assistance.

Can veterans file directly online? Yes.

Do we recommend they take that path? No – why go it alone when there are experts that can assist you? State, county, and tribal veterans service officers are trained to navigate a bureaucracy that is complex and ever-changing. They are here to help with all your earned benefits!

I encourage all veterans and their families to work with a state, county, or tribal veterans service officer. Please visit our website to assist in locating the VSO nearest you: <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/veteransserviceofficers/locatevso.aspx> or call (605) 773.3269 to locate the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs location nearest you.

As a veteran, you served your country honorably, and your state, county, and tribal veterans service officers want to say thank you by ensuring you obtain all the benefits to which you and your family members are entitled.

Greg Whitlock, Secretary
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs