



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



FOUR CHAPLAINS DAY

Four Chaplains Day is celebrated on February 3 in recognition of four Army chaplains who acted in the spirit of heroic sacrifice and humanitarianism on board the sinking U.S.A.T. Dorchester in 1943.

The Dorchester was sailing across the Atlantic Ocean, packed to capacity when a German submarine fired a torpedo at the ship and sank it.

The four chaplains aboard the ship were: Reverend George Fox, Rabbi Alexander Goode, Father John Washington, and Reverend Clark Poling.

Witnesses remembered their courage, support, and prayers for the many distressed people on board. They offered their life jackets to four people in need and as a consequence had to remain on the sinking ship.

The United States Government awarded them the Purple Heart, Distinguished Service Cross, and a Special Medal for Heroism in 1943.

Table of Contents

VA Life Insurance	2
VA Suicide Care.....	3
Midwest Honor Flight.....	4
SDDVA Update.....	5
Combat Veterans Legislation.....	6
MWHF Fundraiser.....	7
Upcoming Events.....	8-9



MORE THAN 31,000 VETERANS SIGN UP FOR NEW VA LIFE INSURANCE

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs reports that its new guaranteed-acceptance life insurance program, VALife, has issued more than \$950 million in coverage to 31,400 veterans in its first year.

When VALife first launched in January 2023, it became the first new VA life insurance program for veterans in more than 50 years and extended life insurance access to millions of veterans. VALife provides up to \$40,000 of whole life insurance to our nation's veterans. For all veterans age 80 or under with service-connected disabilities from 0-100%, acceptance in the program is guaranteed and no medical underwriting is required. Veterans can apply online through VA.gov and receive an instant decision. This program also allows self-service functions like electronic payments and beneficiary updates.

"All Veterans deserve to know that their families will have financial support when they pass away," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough. "VALife helps make that happen, providing well-earned peace of mind to veterans and their families nationwide."

VALife increases veteran access to life insurance in several ways:

- There is no time limit to apply: VA's previous life insurance program for service-disabled veterans, [Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance](#) (S-DVI), required most veterans to apply for insurance within two years of receiving their disability rating. VALife has no such time constraint for veterans aged 80 and under.
- There is no health requirement to apply: Under S-DVI, veterans had to be in good health except for service-connected conditions. VALife has no medical evaluation tied to it.
- Veterans are eligible for more coverage than before: Under S-DVI, most veterans could only receive up to \$10,000 of coverage. Under VALife, all veterans are eligible for up to \$40,000 of coverage.

VALife premium rates are competitive with, or better than, rates for policies with similar coverage available in the private sector, and \$40,000 of coverage is more coverage than what other similar products offer. The policy will build cash value after the first two years of coverage when the face value goes into effect. If a veteran passes away during this two-year waiting period, the named beneficiary will receive all premiums paid plus interest. VALife does not offer waiver of premiums.

Veterans currently enrolled in S-DVI have the option to keep their current coverage or switch to VALife. These veterans can apply for VALife at any time; however, if they apply before Dec. 31, 2025, they can also retain coverage under S-DVI during the two-year waiting period for the VALife death benefit to go into effect.

To learn more visit va.gov/life-insurance/.

VA EMERGENCY SUICIDE PREVENTION CARE

In the first year of VA's new policy allowing eligible veterans and certain former service members in acute suicidal crisis to go to any VA or non-VA health care facility for no-cost emergency health care, 49,714 veterans and former service members have used this benefit — providing them with lifesaving care and saving more than \$64 million in health care costs.

The VA reports that this policy has helped prevent veteran suicide by guaranteeing no cost, world-class care to eligible individuals in times of crisis — including emergency room care, in-patient or crisis residential care for up to 30 days, outpatient care for up to 90 days, and transportation costs. The policy has also increased access to no-cost emergent suicide care for up to nine million veterans, because eligible veterans do not need to be enrolled in the VA system or go to a department facility to use this benefit.

Since 2021, the VA has worked aggressively to expand support for veterans in crisis, including launching the 988 service (then press 1) to help veterans connect more quickly with caring, qualified responders through the Veterans Crisis Line; partnering with community-based suicide prevention organizations to provide veterans with on-the-ground support; expanding firearm suicide prevention efforts; and encouraging veterans to reach out for help through a national veteran suicide prevention awareness campaign. Moving forward, the VA pledges to continue to work urgently to end veteran suicide through a [public health approach](#) that combines both community-based and clinically based strategies to save lives.

To use this benefit, any eligible individual who is experiencing an emergency suicidal crisis should go to the nearest ER as soon as possible — transportation costs are covered by the VA — and tell the ER staff that they are covered by this policy. The ER staff or someone acting on the individual's behalf should notify the VA right away by calling 844-724-7842 (TTY: 711) or using [VA's Emergency Care Reporting \(ECR\) portal](#).

If an eligible individual receives a bill for community care after receiving emergency care during or after a suicidal crisis that they believe should be covered by the VA, they should contact VA's customer service center as soon as possible at 877-881-7618.

If someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, they should contact the Veterans Crisis Line to receive free, confidential support and crisis intervention which is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Dial 988 then Press 1, chat online at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](#), or text 838255.



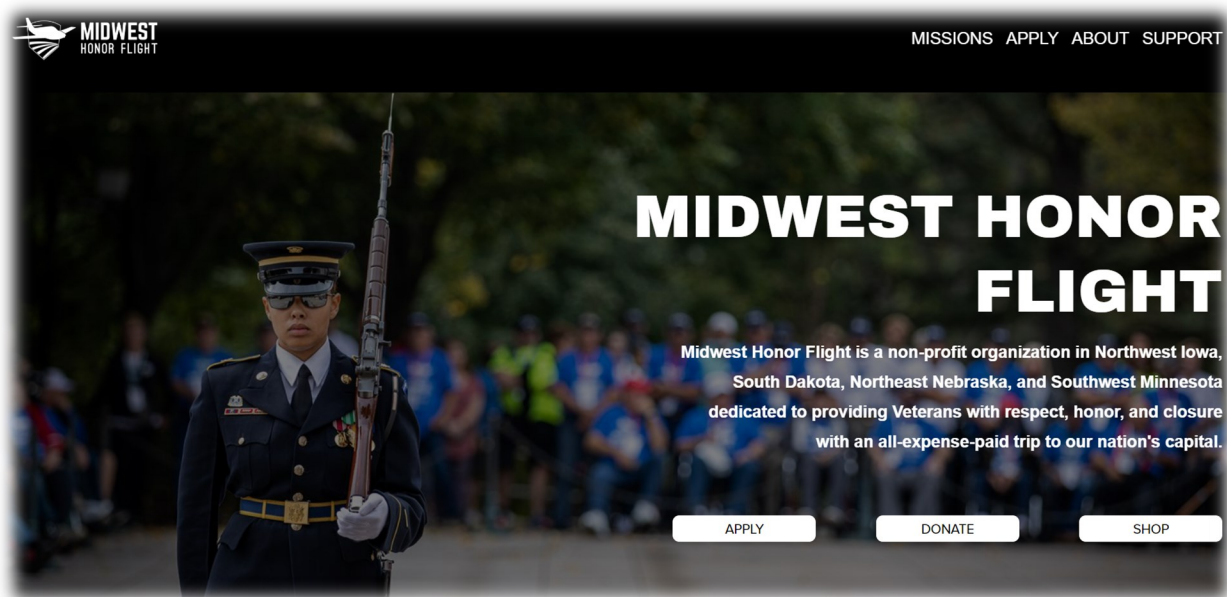
MIDWEST HONOR FLIGHT SPORTS NEW WEBSITE

Midwest Honor Flight has unveiled a new website—www.midwesthonorflight.org. Check it out!

Their goal was to make the website easier to navigate for veterans and guardians to apply, more efficient for donors to support their mission, and provides a better mobile experience.

Information on 2024 mission dates have been posted.

In addition, Midwest Honor Flight has a great Facebook page that captures their stories. Check that out at: <https://www.facebook.com/midwesthonorflight/>. This is a great place to find out about all of the upcoming fundraiser events.



Since 2017, Midwest Honor Flight has flown over 400 veterans on their all-expense-paid trip to our nation's capital. Dates for upcoming missions are:

May 7—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 18

May 21—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 19

Jun 5—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 20

Oct 15—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 23

SDDVA UPDATE

It might be bitterly cold outside but look what we've got growing at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home. Yes, those are tomato plants in the wintertime.

I'm wondering if we showed up with the bacon, lettuce, and bread, they might share some tomatoes with us!!!!



South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs Field Service Officer Will Huffmon represented the Department at the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program for the 109th RSG in Rapid City January 6-7.

This outreach program affords soldiers with tips to reintegrate back into work, family, etc.



LEGISLATION TO FAST- TRACK COMBAT VETERANS ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

U.S. Senator Mike Rounds has introduced bipartisan legislation to allow combat veterans to enroll in their health care benefits program before officially transitioning out of active duty in order to make certain that service members don't experience a lag in coverage.

The [Combat Veterans Pre-Enrollment Act](#) would create an opt-in program allowing transitioning service members to access VA health care services on their first day as a civilian. Currently, transitioning service members must wait until they have left the military and received their official separation paperwork, which can take months, to apply for Veterans Health Administration health care and other services, creating a period where veterans do not have access to the health care benefits they have earned.

"Veterans represent the best of our country. Our men and women in uniform have made incredible sacrifices so that we can be free, and we have a responsibility to fulfill our commitment to them once their service is complete," said Rounds. "This Act would eliminate the lapse in care that many service members face when transitioning from the military to civilian life, and make certain that service members have timely access to the health care services they need upon separation from the military."

"S. 3560, is essential to the type of service and support our service members immediately need when they transition from the military," said Marty Pennock, Disabled American Veterans Department of South Dakota Adjutant. "It clearly focuses in on one of the most important areas that arise upon discharge from their service, and that is in their health. This legislation clearly is founded by those that understand the needs of our military and the importance of getting to the resources and linking our service members to VA as early as possible."

"As service members make the transition to civilian life it can be a very stressful time," said Rick Williamson, Department of South Dakota Veterans of Foreign Wars Legislative Chairman. "Making sure that they have healthcare, medications, and benefits is a great start to assuring them the stability they deserve as they enter the next chapter of their life. The Department of South Dakota, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States proudly supports this legislation and congratulates Senators Rounds for doing the right thing."

"Transitioning service members face challenges post separation. Making sure these veterans enroll in the healthcare and benefits they have earned will help ease that transition," said Pat Murray, Legislative Director for Veterans of Foreign Wars. "VFW supports this legislation in order to make transition easier for the men and women who served our country."



REGISTER NOW

\$75 Per Person or \$420 Per Team of 6: Until Jan 31
\$100 Per Person or \$570 Per Team of 6: Feb 1 – Mar 10

midwesthonorflight.org/golf

Sponsorships Available

 **Great Shots**
2505 W Benson Rd
Sioux Falls, SD 57107



PROCEEDS TO BENEFIT



**MIDWEST
HONOR FLIGHT**

midwesthonorflight.org
605.215.1319



All sponsorships, registrations, donations, and funds raised will benefit Midwest Honor Flight

Our Mission: to transport America's Veterans to Washington, D.C. to visit those memorials dedicated to honor the service and sacrifices of themselves and to fellow Veterans.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Jan 13—Rapid City RUSH Chuck-a-Puck for Tee it up for the Troops Midwest Honor Flight Fund-raiser—Rapid City

Feb 3—4—Yellow Ribbon Post Mob for 1/112th Aviation—Rapid City

Feb 16—18—American Legion Mid-Winter Conference—Deadwood

Mar 25—Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser—Drive to Fly @ Great Shots—(2505 W. Benson Road)—Sioux Falls—2:00—5:00 pm (CT)

Apr 5—Melissa Stockwell Program—South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls

Apr 17—SD Veterans Council Meeting—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—9:00 am (MT)

Apr 26-27—DAV State Convention—Deadwood Lodge

May 7—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 18—Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center—(1201 N. West Avenue)—Sioux Falls—9:30 pm (CT)

May 21—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 19—Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center—(1201 N. West Avenue)—Sioux Falls—9:30 pm (CT)

May 27—SDDVA Memorial Day Program—SD Veterans Cemetery—12:00 noon (CT)

Jun 5—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 20—Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center—(1201 N. West Avenue)—Sioux Falls—9:30 pm (CT)

Jun 7—8—VFW State Conference—Holiday Inn—Spearfish

Jun 14—Midwest Honor Flight Day of Sweetness—Sioux Falls Chick-fil-A—(4005 W. 41st Street)—Sioux Falls—7:00 am—10:00 pm.

Jun 20—23—American Legion State Conference—Pierre

Jun 30—Midwest Honor Flight Honor Ride—South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—Registration—1:00 pm/Ride Begins at 2:30 pm (CT)

Jul 15—6th Annual Tee it up for the Troops Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser—Arrowhead Country Club—(3675 Sheridan Lake Road)—Rapid City—7:15 am (MT)

Jul 17—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Aberdeen

Aug 1—2—South Dakota Suicide Prevention Conference—Sioux Falls Convention Center

Aug 21—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Yankton

Aug 26—Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser—The Barrel House—(4701 E. 54th Street)—Sioux Falls—11:00 am—8:00 pm (CT)

Aug 29—Veterans Day at the SD State Fair—Northwest Energy Freedom Stage—Huron

Aug 29—Sep 2—SD State Fair—Huron

Sep 3—5—SDDVA Annual CTVSO Benefit School—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls

Sep 18—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Rapid City

Oct 12—Midwest Honor Flight Third Annual Elvis Night—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls

Oct 15—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 23—Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center—(1201 N. West Avenue)—Sioux Falls—9:30 pm (CT)

Oct 16—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Brookings

UPCOMING EVENTS

Nov 9—Fifth Annual Northern Hills Veterans Appreciation Fair We've Got Your Six—Sturgis
Nov 18—Wreaths Across America Fundraiser—The Barrel House—(4701 E. 54th Street)—Sioux Falls—11:00 am—8:00 pm (CT)
Nov 20—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Sioux Falls
Nov 20—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—Sioux Falls
Nov 21—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—Watertown
Nov 22—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—Rapid City
Nov 23—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—Pierre
Dec 14—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)

2025 Events

Jan 8 SD Veterans Council Meeting—Pierre
Feb 14—16—American Legion Mid-Winter Conference—Oacoma
Jun 12—15—VFW State Convention—Ramkota—Pierre
Jun 19—22—American Legion State Conference—Huron
Dec 13—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)

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