



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



MESSAGE FROM SDDVA SECRETARY WHITLOCK

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.

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VA ANNOUNCES STEPS TO INCREASE LIFE-SAVING SCREENINGS, ACCESS TO BENEFITS FOR VETERANS WITH CANCER

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs has announced several critical new steps to expand preventive services, health care, and benefits for veterans with cancer:

In the next 90 days, the VA is making urethral cancers presumptive for service connection for eligible Gulf War and post-9/11 Veterans. This means that Gulf War and post-9/11 Veterans who deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Uzbekistan, and the entire Southwest Asia theater of operations will not need to prove that their service caused their urethral cancer to receive benefits for it; instead, the VA will automatically assume service connection for the disease and provide benefits accordingly to veterans who have submitted claims. In the next 90 days, urethral cancers will be added to the list of 300+ conditions considered presumptive under the PACT Act, along with many other cancers.

The VA is beginning the process to formally evaluate urinary bladder and ureteral cancers for presumptions of service connection for eligible Gulf War and post-9/11 Veterans. Over the coming months, the VA will evaluate whether there is a relationship between urinary bladder and ureteral cancers and toxic exposures for Gulf War and post-9/11 Veterans who deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Uzbekistan, and the entire Southwest Asia theater of operations. The VA will then determine whether these conditions become presumptive conditions for veterans who served in those locations and time periods.

The VA is expanding access to genetic, lung, and colorectal cancer screening for veterans. By the end of this year, the VA will offer genetic testing to every veteran who may need it, which will help the VA understand, treat, and ultimately cure some patients with cancer by reading the code locked in their DNA. The VA will also bring a lung cancer screening program to every VA medical facility, which will help save the lives of the nearly 5,000 Veterans who die from lung cancer every year, and the VA will expand screening for colorectal cancer – the second leading cause of cancer death in America – by providing more than one million veterans nationwide with convenient, safe, and effective tests that can be completed in the comfort of their homes.

(continued)

VA LIFE SCREENINGS (CONTINUED)

The VA continues to expand the reach of smoking cessation services to veterans across the nation. As the 1-855-QUIT-VET tobacco quitline and the SmokefreeVET text message program pass their 10-year anniversaries of service, the VA will add at least six additional sites to the Quit VET eReferral program by the end of 2024. This will expand capacity to offer veteran-specific, tailored tobacco-use treatment to veterans. Additionally, the VA recently launched a new pilot program to integrate smoking cessation services into lung cancer screening in recognition of the inherent connection between smoking and lung cancer risk – and the VA plans to add at least five additional sites between 2024-2025. These programs have supported tens of thousands of veterans with high-quality tobacco cessation resources in English and Spanish. Quit VET has provided over 62,000 calls to veterans, and more than 48,000 veterans have made a quit attempt with the SmokefreeVET text program. In 2023, more than 5,100 veterans enrolled in the SmokefreeVET text program and Quit VET recorded its highest volume of incoming calls yet, with counselors answering 23% more calls than the prior year. Direct referrals from the VA facilities grew 34% over the same time period and by the end of 2023, 40 VA programs were implementing a patient referral program.

“Cancer impacts far too many veterans every year, and under the Cancer Moonshot, we are fighting to end cancer as we know it,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “These steps will help us save lives and provide the world-class care and benefits that Veterans with cancer so rightly deserve.”

“The VA is planting the seeds for the future of cancer care,” said VA Under Secretary for Health Shereef Elnahal, M.D. “By investing in screenings, expanding access, and embracing cutting-edge technologies, the VA is revolutionizing cancer care delivery, providing the best care possible to our nation’s heroes.”

This effort builds on the VA’s comprehensive efforts to care for veterans with cancer. Last July, the VA expanded cancer risk assessments and mammograms (as clinically appropriate) to veterans under 40, regardless of age, symptoms, family history, or whether they are enrolled in VA health care. Last September, the VA and the National Cancer Institute announced a historic data-sharing collaboration to better understand and treat cancer among veterans. The VA has also prioritized claims processing for veterans with cancer — delivering nearly \$516 million in PACT Act benefits to veterans with cancer between August 10, 2022 and March 3, 2024. And the VA has screened more than five million veterans for toxic exposures under the PACT Act — a critical step to detecting, understanding, and treating potentially life-threatening health conditions like cancer.

Moving forward, through advancements in cancer care and forward-thinking research endeavors, VA aims to save even more lives and significantly improve the long-term health outcomes in Veterans for generations to come.

SDDVA TO HOST SPRING MINI CONFERENCES

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs will be hosting spring mini conferences April 23-25. These conferences are a great educational opportunity for SDDVA staff to update county and tribal veterans service officers on recent benefit changes as well as provide training on new processes used to file various claims.

This year's conferences will be held from 10:00 am—2:00 pm at the following locations:

April 23—Rapid City—Pennington County Conference Room (321 Kansas City Street).

Please utilize parking lot behind the building, parking on Kansas City Street is limited to two hours.

April 24—Pierre—Post 8 American Legion cabin (520 S. Pierre Street).

April 25—Sioux Falls—South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance (1600 W. Russell Street).

WE NEED TO TALK

2024 Suicide Prevention Conference



THURS, AUGUST 1ST-
FRI, AUGUST 2ND



SIOUX FALLS
CONVENTION CENTER

SAVE THE DATE

SDDVA TO HOST VETERANS WHAT'S BREWING EVENTS

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs will be hosting a “Coffee and Conversation” program in Yankton and Chamberlain. These programs are in partnership with Yankton County Veterans Service Officer Rob Stickney and Brule County Veterans Service Officer Tim Thomas. The department welcomes the opportunity to visit one-on-one with veterans and see what’s brewing!

The Yankton “What’s Brewing” program will be held Tuesday, March 26, at the VFW Post 791 (209 Cedar Street) at 10:00 am (CT).

The Chamberlain “What’s Brewing” program will be held Thursday, April 4, at the Chamberlain Community Center (112 N. Main Street) at 1:00 pm (CT).

“‘What’s Brewing’ is a great opportunity for us to visit with veterans and hear about the challenges they might be experiencing first-hand. These programs also allow us the opportunity to speak with them about new benefits and services,” said SDDVA Secretary Greg Whitlock. “As the advocates for South Dakota veterans, we need to hear about the things our veterans are facing. We walk among veterans every day, and yet we may not even realize the magnitude of their sacrifices to serve our country.”

The SDDVA team and CVSO’s Stickney and Thomas will address questions about veteran’s benefits including compensation, education, pension, healthcare, burial, state veterans cemetery, and state veterans home.

We encourage veterans to join us if they can. As always, they can reach our SDDVA staff at 605.333.6869, or they can locate their county or tribal veterans service officer by visiting <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/veteransserviceofficers/locatevso.aspx>.



WHAT'S IN FY 2025 VA BUDGET

The total fiscal year 2025 request for the VA is \$369.3 billion, a \$33 billion (+10%) increase above the fiscal year 2024 Budget estimate level. This includes a discretionary request of \$134.0 billion. The fiscal year 2025 mandatory funding request is \$235.3 billion, which includes \$24.5 billion from the Cost of War Toxic Exposures Fund (TEF), for a total increase of \$41.8 billion (21.6%) above fiscal year 2024.

The VA believes this proposed budget will:

- **Expand health care and benefits for veterans who were exposed to toxins and other hazards while serving our country.** As part of the PACT Act, Congress authorized the TEF to invest in the delivery of health care associated with exposure to environmental hazards and any expenses incident to the delivery of health care and benefits associated with exposure to environmental hazards in the military. The Budget continues this commitment and includes \$24.5 billion for the TEF in fiscal year 2025.
- **Support the delivery of health care for veterans across America:** This Budget invests \$112.6 billion in discretionary medical care funding in fiscal year 2025. In addition to fully funding inpatient, outpatient, mental health, and long-term care services, the Budget supports programs that enhance VA healthcare quality and delivery, including a \$2 billion investment for non-recurring maintenance to improve medical facility infrastructure, and continued efforts to address the opioid and drug overdose epidemic.
- **Prioritize mental health care and suicide prevention for veterans.** The Budget invests \$135 million in VA research programs – along with \$17 billion within the VA Medical Care program – to increase access to quality mental health care and lower the cost of mental health services for veterans, with the goal of helping veterans take charge of their treatment and live full, meaningful lives. In addition, the Budget provides \$583 million to further advance the Administration's Veteran suicide prevention initiatives, including continued support of the 988 Veterans Crisis Line (Dial 988, press 1) and additional support for the VA's National Suicide Prevention Strategy.
- **Support health care for women veterans.** The Budget invests \$13.7 billion for women veterans' healthcare, including \$1.1 billion towards women's gender-specific care.
- **Bolster efforts to end veteran homelessness.** The Budget invests \$3.2 billion to help the VA's efforts to end veteran homelessness and prevent veterans from becoming homeless in the future. The Budget also includes funding for the Department of Housing and Urban Development to expand housing vouchers to more veterans in need.
- **Invest in claims processing and benefits delivery for veterans.** The Budget provides \$4 billion to the Veterans Benefits Administration to support the processing of claims and delivery of benefits to Veterans.

For more information on the VA budget, please visit the VA's budget [website](#).

GOVERNOR NOEM PROCLAIMS WELCOME HOME VIETNAM VETERANS DAY

Governor Kristi Noem, in coordination with the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, is proclaiming Friday, March 29, 2024, as "Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day."

The Governor and the Department are calling on all South Dakotans to recognize the courage, service, and sacrifice of the men and women who served during the Vietnam War.

More than 27,000 South Dakotans were called upon to stand up and fight. Of those, 210 South Dakotans made the ultimate sacrifice. Through the establishment of an annual Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day, South Dakotans can express their appreciation and honor the men and women who served during the Vietnam War by thanking them for their selflessness, devotion, and bravery.

"This day is a well-deserved recognition for our soldiers who selflessly served during the Vietnam War," said Greg Whitlock, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. "We honor their courage and commitment to our country, and we thank them for their unwavering dedication to defending our freedom."

"Let us recognize the immense sacrifices made by our service members, their families, and the entire nation during the Vietnam War," said Whitlock."



MJFSVH UPDATE



Residents at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home had a great opportunity this week to show off their art talents in a “canvas to paint” program.

It’s been said “the world always seems brighter when you’ve just made something that wasn’t there before.”

Thankful that the residents are brightening up the Home with their art!





★ 12 April 2024 ★

*PURPLE UP! for Military Kids Day

★ MONTH OF THE MILITARY CHILD ★

"National Guard Kids
are Out of this World!"

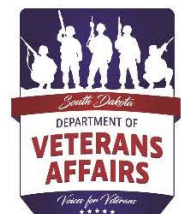
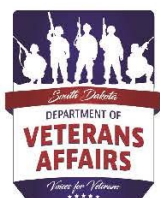


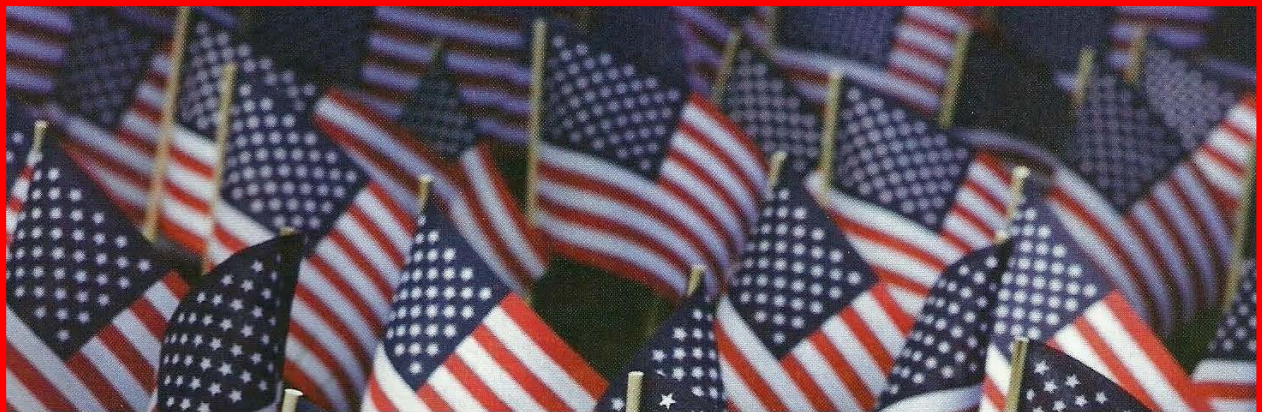
**Veterans,
See
What's
Brewing!**



**We invite all veterans to join us for a
“Veterans Coffee and Networking.”
Free coffee and treats while you chat with new and old friends
alike and learn more about veterans benefits from the South
Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs.**

**Tuesday—March 26, 2024
10:00 am (CT)
VFW Post 791
(209 Cedar Street—Yankton)**





**Veterans,
See
What's
Brewing!**



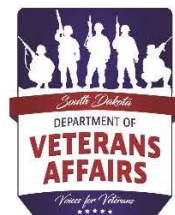
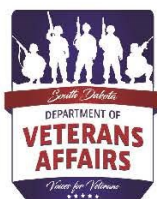
**We invite all veterans to join us for a
“Veterans Coffee and Networking.”**

**Free coffee and treats while you chat with new and old
friends alike and learn more about veterans benefits from
the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs.**

Thursday—April 4, 2024

1:00 pm (CT)

**Chamberlain Community Center
(112 N. Main Street—Chamberlain)**



UPCOMING EVENTS

Mar 22—USD Veteran Legal Clinic—South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell St)—Sioux Falls—9:00 am—4:00 pm (CT)

Mar 23—Stand Up for Women Veterans—Our Savior's Lutheran Church—(909 W. 33rd St)—Sioux Falls—8:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)

Mar 23—USD Veteran Legal Clinic—VFW Post #2118—(520 Main Ave)—Brookings—9:00 am—4:00 pm (CT)

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

Mar 26—Yankton County What's Brewing—VFW Post 791—(209 Cedar St)—Yankton—10:00 am (CT)

Mar 29—April 1—State Offices Closed

Apr 4—Brule County What's Brewing—Community Center—(112 N. Main St)—Chamberlain—1:00 pm (CT)

Apr 5—Melissa Stockwell Program—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell St)—Sioux Falls

Apr 12—Day County What's Brewing—VFW Post—(521 First St West)—Webster—6:00 pm (CT)

Apr 16—McPherson County What's Brewing—School Multi Purpose Room—(805 10th St)—Eureka—1:00 pm (CT)

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

Apr 19—Mogen's Heroes Dance—El Riad Shrine—(510 S. Phillips)—Sioux Falls—6:00 pm (CT)

Apr 23—SDDVA Mini Conference—Pennington County Conference Room—(312 Kansas City St)—Rapid City—10:00 am—2:00 pm (MT)

Apr 24—SDDVA Mini Conference—Post 8 AL Cabin—(520 S. Pierre St)—Pierre—10:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)

Apr 24—Operation Chow Line—Vermillion Eagles Club—(114 W. Main St)—Vermillion—4:00—7:00 pm (CT)

Apr 25—SDDVA Mini Conference—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell St)—Sioux Falls—10:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)

Apr 26-27—DAV State Convention—Deadwood Lodge

Apr 27—Operation Chow Line—Vern Eide Marine—(4501 E. Arrowhead Pkwy)—Sioux Falls—11:00 am—1:00 pm (CT)

May 6-18—Fareway Round Up Campaign at participating stores

May 7—Corson County What's Brewing—Pavilion—(Main and First Ave)—McIntosh—10:00 am (MT)

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

May 9—Operation Chow Line—4-H Grounds—(3200 W. Havens)—Mitchell—4:00—7:00 pm (CT)

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

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

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

Jun 20—23—American Legion State Conference—Pierre

Jun 30—Midwest Honor Flight Honor Ride—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell St)—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

(Continued)

UPCOMING EVENTS

Aug 1—2—South Dakota Suicide Prevention Conference—Convention Center—(1201 N. West Ave)—Sioux Falls

Aug 21—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Yankton

Aug 26—Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser—The Barrel House—(4701 E. 54th St)—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 St)—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 St)—Sioux Falls

Oct 16—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Brookings

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 St)—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 3—Governor's Budget Address—1:00 pm

Dec 14—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)

2025 Events

Jan 14—Governor's State of the State Address—1:00 pm

Jan 14—Legislative Session starts

Jan 15—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)

Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer

South Dakota Department of the Military <https://military.sd.gov/>

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