



South Dakota Department of the Military
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs



CHANGES MADE TO VETERANS CHOICE PROGRAM

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has announced a number of changes to make participation in the Veterans Choice Program easier and more convenient for veterans who need to use it. The move, which streamlines eligibility requirements, follows feedback from veterans along with organizations working on their behalf.

To date, more than 400,000 medical appointments have been scheduled since the Veterans Choice Program went into effect on November 5, 2014. Under the updated eligibility requirements, a veteran is eligible for the Veterans Choice Program if the veteran is enrolled in the VA health care system and meets at least one of the following criteria:

- Told by his or her local VA medical facility that they will not be able to schedule an appointment for care within 30 days of the date the veteran's physician determines he/she needs to be seen or within 30 days of the date the veteran wishes to be seen if there is no specific date from his or her physician;
- Lives more than 40 miles driving distance from the closest VA medical facility with a full-time primary care physician;
- Needs to travel by air, boat or ferry to the VA medical facility closest to his/her home;
- Faces an unusual or excessive burden in traveling to the closest VA medical facility based on geographic challenges, environmental factors, a medical condition, the nature or simplicity or frequency of the care needed and whether an attendant is needed.

Staff at the veteran's local VA medical facility will work with him or her to determine if the veteran is eligible for any of these reasons. For more details about the Veterans Choice Program and VA's progress, visit: www.va.gov/opa/choiceact.

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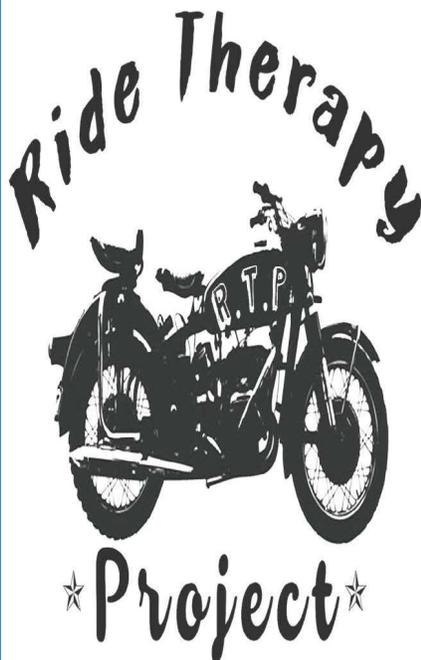


REPUBLIC OF SOUTH KOREA TO HONOR SOUTH DAKOTA VETERANS

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs has been working with the Korean Consulate in an effort to recognize South Dakota's Korean War Veterans.

Starting in late 2014, the Republic of South Korea began dedicating Ambassador of Peace medals to all U.S. Veterans who sacrificed for Korea's democracy and freedom. The eligibility for this medal was for those who served in Korea's land, air and sea from June 25, 1950 through October 25, 1954. Recognizing Korean War veterans is part of a four-year, ongoing effort by the Republic of Korea to honor as many former U.S. Service Members as possible that began on the 60th anniversary of the breakout of the war.

The Department of Veterans Affairs, the Governor, and the Korean Government will conduct a ceremony honoring our respective heroes at 2:30 pm on Tuesday, January 12, 2016. The program will be held in the rotunda of the Capitol and will be broadcast on Public TV, thus allowing those that can't make the trip to see the ceremony. At the same time that the medals are presented in Pierre, veteran leaders around the state will place medals on their local heroes that aren't able to make the trip to Pierre.



Sometimes a person just needs an outlet to gain control of their thoughts. That is what this project was designed for. There is something to be said about sitting on the seat of a motorcycle, pointing it down the road and twisting the throttle. Those who know the feeling know the therapeutic nature of the open road with the wind blowing in your face.

That is our goal!

To give people the opportunity to find something that can help them heal. Give them an alternative to heading down a darker path.

Through donations from generous supporters we will purchase a motorcycle or ATV for veterans in need of Ride Therapy.

www.facebook.com/veteranRTP

www.ridetherapyproject.org

www.ridetherapyproject.org

How does the project work?

1.) A veteran is nominated and their names are placed in a pool of candidates. As we raise funds we will begin to purchase either a motorcycle or ATV to give to these candidates. If the veteran or his/her battle buddy does not already own a motorcycle or ATV. However, if the veteran already has a motorcycle or ATV, but a physical limitation limits them from riding his/her motorcycle or ATV, then they would be considered for a custom modification so they will be able to ride again.

2.) A network of Ride Therapists will be established across the nation. These volunteers will be there to talk to veterans who may be having trouble with PTSD or Depression.

3.) Through donations and volunteers we would like to provide a veteran with riders safety courses to give them the tools they will need to hit the open road.

**Your story isn't
over yet
You're worth
another chapter**

*Ride Therapists are not licensed Therapists or Mental Health Professionals. They are volunteer only.

COMMENT PERIOD EXTENDED FOR EIS FOR VABHHCS

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced an extension of the public comment period through February 5, 2016. The extension will allow more time for veterans, stakeholders, government agencies, and members of the public to review and make comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) regarding the reconfiguration of the Black Hills Health Care System.

Written comments can be submitted on the Draft EIS through February 5, 2016, online at www.blackhillseis.com, by email to vablackhillsfuture@va.gov, or by regular mail to Staff Assistant to the Director, VABHHCS, 113 Comanche Road, Fort Meade, SD 57741. Interested parties are invited to attend and make verbal or written comments at any of the scheduled six public meetings.

Previously released public meeting schedule:

- ⇒ Monday, November 30—Rapid City (Doors open 5:00 p.m.) Meeting 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.—Best Western Ramkota Hotel and Conference Center—Lincoln Room (2111 N. LaCrosse Street)
- ⇒ Tuesday, December 1—Hot Springs (Doors open 5:00 p.m.) Meeting 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.—Red Rock River Resort (603 N River St.)
- ⇒ Wednesday, December 2—Pine Ridge (Doors open 1:00 p.m.) Meeting 1:30 – 3:30 p.m.—Pine Ridge School cafeteria (101 Thorpe Circle)
- ⇒ Wednesday, December 2—Chadron, NE (Doors open 6:00 p.m.) Meeting 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.—Chadron State College Ballroom
- ⇒ Thursday, December 3—Alliance, NE (Doors open 12:30 p.m.) Meeting 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.—Newberry's (502 Box Butte Ave.)
- ⇒ Thursday, December 3—Scottsbluff, NE (Doors open 6:00 p.m.) Meeting 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.—Gering Civic Center—Oregon Trail Room (050 M St, Gering, NE)

ELF ADEN DELIVERS GIFTS TO VETERANS

Recently Autumn Simunek, Miss South Dakota, visited Clay County VSO Cynthia Aden. One of Simunek's platforms was to be an advocate for South Dakota's veterans. Going into her fourth year on Veterans Holiday Relief project, Simunek and her partners have been able to raise over \$45,500 for veterans and their families.

Miss South Dakota presented Aden with eight gift cards of \$25 each to distribute to veterans. Aden was honored to be a part of this program and welcomed the opportunity to give her veterans a surprise holiday gift.



SD GUARD REINFORCES PARTNERSHIP AT NATIONAL DAY IN SURINAME

Senior leaders from the South Dakota National Guard visited the Republic of Suriname, South Dakota's State Partnership Program nation, Nov. 25, to reinforce the partnership between the SDNG and Suriname military while supporting their 40th year of independence at their National Day celebration.

South Dakota and Suriname, in coordination with U.S. Southern Command, established a successful security cooperation relationship in 2006 under the National Guard Bureau's State Partnership Program. Since then, numerous exchanges have taken place between the SDNG and Suriname's Defense Forces to share experiences and best practices in a variety of military training and topics.

Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, the adjutant general of the SDNG, along with State Command Chief Master Sgt. James Welch and State Command Chief Warrant Officer 5 Lonny Hofer began the day at the Ministry of Defense in Paramaribo.

Meeting with Suriname's Minister of Defense Ronni Benschop, Col. Adolf Jardim, the acting commander of the Suriname Defense Forces and Lt. Col. John Antonius, Suriname's head of MoD Strategic Planning and Education, Reisch discussed the success of the nearly ten-year partnership and exchanges and projects moving forward.

"In addition to the exchanges, a priority for me is to bring Soldiers and Airmen serving as carpenters, plumbers and electricians to work side by side with the Suriname Defense Forces on community projects that are beneficial to both South Dakota and Suriname," Reisch said during the meeting. "Projects like repairing schools and clinics provide good training for our Soldiers and Airmen, while improving conditions and morale."



A total of 26 SDNG members went to Suriname on exchanges in 2015, while six members from the Suriname Defense Forces visited South Dakota.

"The partnership between South Dakota and Suriname has been a wonderful one," Jardim said. "We've had many successful exchanges and are looking forward to expanding this relationship even further."

Fourteen exchanges are scheduled in 2016 that will focus on disaster preparedness, improving security, and fostering the promotion of human rights as they relate to a military force.

SDNG senior leaders had an additional opportunity to collaborate on ideas when they next met with personnel from the U.S. Embassy that included Deputy Chief of Mission Valerie Belon and Political/Economic Chief John Gorkowski.

A National Day celebration followed where SDNG leaders had the opportunity to greet Suriname President Desiré Delano Bouterse.

SD WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA

The South Dakota Funeral Directors Association will again participate in *Wreaths Across America*, a national program which pays tribute to fallen veterans of all wars during the Christmas season. A formal wreath presentation will be held at the Flaming Fountain Veterans Memorial on Capitol Lake in Pierre at 11:00 AM on Monday, December 7, 2015.

The *Wreaths Across America* story began in 1992 when Worcester Wreath Company (a non-profit organization from Harrington, Maine) began a tradition of placing wreaths on the headstones of our Nation's fallen heroes at Arlington National Cemetery during the holidays. The national wreath laying ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery in Alexandria, Virginia will be held on Saturday, December 12, 2015 at 12:00 Noon EST. This will be the *Wreaths Across America* organization's 24th year of laying wreaths at our Nation's cemetery (www.WreathsAcrossAmerica.org). This year also marks the 151st anniversary of Arlington National Cemetery (www.arlingtoncemetery.mil). In 2014, *Wreaths Across America* and their national network of volunteers laid over 700,000 memorial wreaths at 1,000 locations in the United States and beyond. They were able to include ceremonies at the Pearl Harbor Memorial, as well as Bunker Hill, Valley Forge and the sites of the September 11 tragedies. *Wreaths Across America* accomplished this with help from 2,047 fundraising groups, corporate contributions, and donations of trucking, shipping, and thousands of helping hands.

Their goal of covering Arlington National Cemetery was accomplished in 2014 with the placement of 226,525 wreaths.



The *Wreaths Across America's* mission is to Remember, Honor, and Teach. *Remember* the fallen, *Honor* those who serve including their families who sacrifice, and *Teach* our children the cost of the freedoms we enjoy each day. It is their shared belief that '*The nation which forgets its defenders will soon be forgotten.*' - Calvin Coolidge.

This year will be their 9th annual wreath laying ceremony. Participants in the South Dakota ceremony are the Board of Directors and members of the South Dakota Funeral Directors Association (SDFDA), Pierre Post 8 American Legion, Pierre VFW Post 2038, Oahe Marine Corps League, Vietnam Era Veterans Association and the Disabled American Veterans. Featured speakers confirmed at this time will be Governor Dennis Daugaard; Major General Tim Reisch, Adjutant General of the South Dakota National Guard; and Doug Nohava, President of the South Dakota Funeral Directors Association. The T.F. Riggs High School Chamber Choir under the direction of Rodd Bauck will perform our national anthem. The public is encouraged to attend to help pay tribute to fallen soldiers during the Christmas season.

The South Dakota Funeral Directors Association is a professional association that represents the funeral service professionals and the funeral home establishments in the state. The Association provides education, legislative representation and public relations statewide.

Called to Serve

Luncheon

Our greatest resource is the knowledge and spirit of Women working to strengthen themselves, their families and their communities.

Called to Serve Luncheon is an opportunity to discuss wellness with military members and support team. This luncheon is designed for Women Veterans, service members and dependents who have a passion for service to others.

*This series is funded by the
Women & Giving Program at the SDSU Foundation.*

Date:

December 7th, 2015

Time:

*Lunch served at 12:00 with
panel to start at 12:15*

Location:

*McCory Gardens Conference
Room*

Questions/RSVP :

*Michelle Ruesink, Director of
Veterans Affairs*

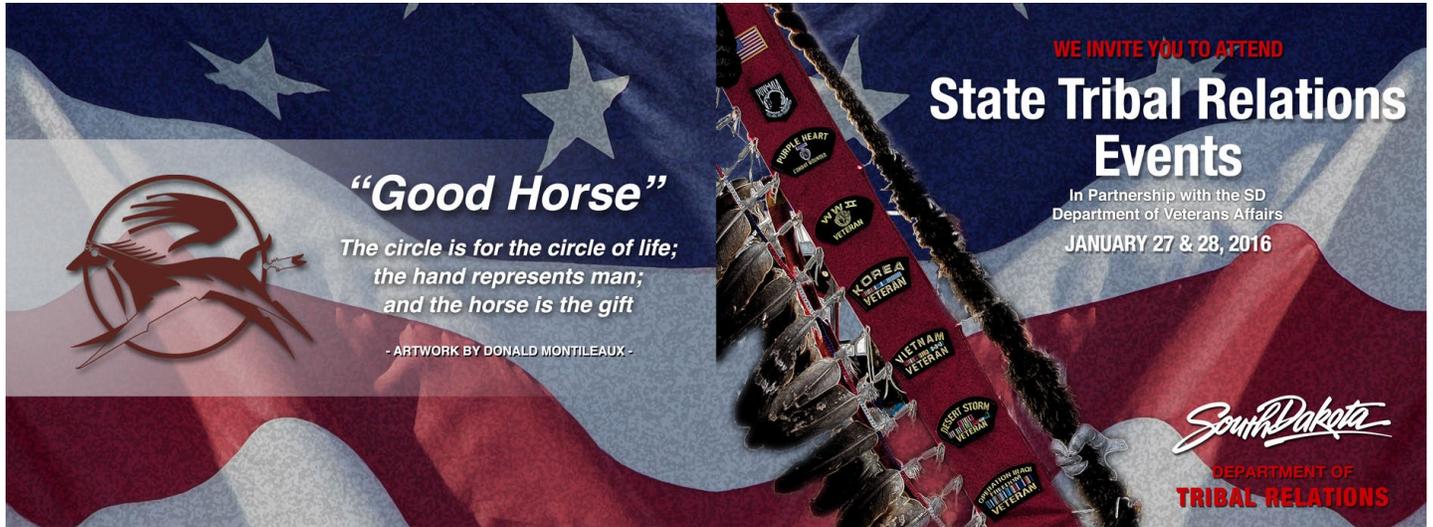
michelle.ruesink@sdsu.edu

*or call the SDSU Veterans Affairs
Office at 688-5319*



Sponsored by: SDSU Extension Office and the SDSU Veterans Affairs Office

SDDVA TO PARTNER WITH TRIBAL RELATIONS IN HONORING VETERANS



The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs and our partners will be part of the presentation at the State Tribal Relations Day January 27-28, 2016, in Pierre. The Listening Session on Jan. 27, will be held at the Red Rossa Italian Grille from 8:00 am—4:30 pm. Topics for the day include: veterans courts, targeting younger veterans, home loans, veteran owned small businesses, education, on-the-job training and apprenticeship, vocational rehab, code talker memorial, South Dakota’s Veterans Home, and processing veterans claims. Secretary Zimmerman will also be providing opening and closing remarks.

That evening veteran and tribal leaders will meet with legislators.

On Thursday a Tribal Relations Ceremony and luncheon will be held in the Capitol Rotunda. Informational booths will be provided for attendees to learn more about programs and services available.



Honoring Our Veterans

Join the South Dakota Department of Tribal Relations and the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs



<p>WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27TH</p> <p>8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. - Tribal Veteran’s Listening Session</p> <p>11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. - Luncheon</p> <p>5:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m. - Legislative Reception with Lt. Governor Matt Michels</p>	<p>THURSDAY, JANUARY 28TH</p> <p>8:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. - Tribal, Federal, & State Veteran Booths</p> <p>11:45 a.m. - State Tribal Relations Ceremony</p> <p>1:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m. - Traditional Meal</p>
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VISIT OUR SPONSOR BOOTHS ON JANUARY 27TH AT RED ROSSA AND OUR TRIBAL, STATE, & FEDERAL BOOTHS IN THE ROTUNDA ON JANUARY 28TH

Upcoming Events

Dec. 7 Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony—Capitol Lake—Pierre—11:00 am (CT)
Dec. 8— Governor's Budget Address—Pierre

2016

Jan. 4—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am (MT)
Jan. 12—SD Legislative Session Opens—Pierre—1:00 pm
Jan. 12—Awarding of the Korean Ambassador Peace Medals—Capitol Rotunda—Pierre—2:30 pm (CT)
Jan. 14—Veterans Legislative Breakfast—Pierre
Jan. 27-28—State Tribal Relations Days—Pierre
Feb. 12-14—American Legion Mid Winter Conference—Huron Crossroads
Apr. 4—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am (MT)
April 15-17—DAV Convention—Rapid City—Adoba
Jun. 16-19—American Legion State Convention—Ramkota—Watertown
Jul. 11—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am (MT)
Oct. 3—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am (MT)

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