



NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS.

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TRICARE Prime Coverage Update

As of October 1, 2013, multiple TRICARE Prime Service Areas around the country will be eliminated and TRICARE Prime will no longer be offered to military retirees who live more than 100 miles from a military treatment facility (MTF) or Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) site. The approximately 171,000 affected beneficiaries will automatically be switched to TRICARE Standard, the often more expensive fee-for-service plan. Those who live in a Prime Service Area that is being eliminated, but within the 100 mile radius, will have the option of reenrolling in Prime by waiving their drive time standards. Active duty personnel and dependents will be able to remain on Prime. Letters explaining the change were sent out to all impacted TRICARE beneficiaries last February and March and another round of letters is supposed to go out beginning this month through September. The House-passed version of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) would allow all retirees currently receiving Prime to remain eligible indefinitely as long as they continue to live in the same zip codes, and only enforce the changes to the Prime Service Areas for new enrollees going forward. The VFW supports this fix to the plan and will continue fighting to get it into the Senate version of the NDAA. For TRICARE Prime and other updates, [click here](#).

Update on Affordable Care Act and VA/TRICARE

With coverage standards under the Affordable Care Act or ACA going into effect January 2014, (IRS penalties have been delayed until 2015), VA wants veterans to know the facts. If you are enrolled in VA, you will receive a letter through the mail informing you of your coverage and that you meet the "minimum essential coverage" required under the law. The health care law does not change VA health benefits or veterans' out-of-pocket costs. Letters are being mailed in priority group order beginning with priority group 1 through 8. The mailing should be completed by the end of October. Veterans covered by VA with family members who are not enrolled in CHAMPVA should use other private insurance (via an employer) or choose coverage within the Marketplace/State Exchanges which will be open for enrollment October 2013. TRICARE beneficiaries will also be seen as having minimum essential coverage and DOD will inform the IRS of all individual beneficiaries who have TRICARE based on the information listed in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS). It's important that social security numbers for all

family members are accurate in DEERS including any children using TRICARE programs. There are some exemptions within the law. For more information about VA and the ACA, [click here](#). [Learn more](#) about TRICARE coverage and ACA.

House Bills Expand Veterans' Benefits

As reported last week, the House VA Committee cleared an array of veterans' bills including Advance Appropriations which will provide funding one year in advance for all VA discretionary programs. The committee also moved the following bills to the full House for debate. They include:

H.R. 1443, the *Tinnitus Research and Treatment Act*, requiring VA to recognize tinnitus as a condition for research and treatment by Auditory Centers of Excellence. It also requires allocation of resources for more research within VA and in cooperation with DOD Hearing Centers.

H.R. 2011 extends the Veterans Advisory Committee on Education through December 31, 2015 and adds chapter 31 (Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment) to subjects for review by the committee.

H.R. 2072, the *Demanding Accountability for Veterans Act*, would authorize VA to provide contracted medical foster care for certain veterans eligible for VA-paid nursing home care. It also requires those veterans to receive VA home health services and requires recipients of VA homeless grant and per diem programs to certify that they are compliant with state building and safety codes.

H.R. 2189 establishes a commission to evaluate the disability claims backlog and to recommend ways to reduce the number of pending claims – the VFW has some concerns with the bill as we believe that six months is too short a time period for commission members to adequately learn and understand the disability benefit programs administered by VA, let alone propose substantive recommendations that would improve claims processing without harming veterans.

It also includes provisions from several VFW-supported bills including directing VA to make interim payments of claims involving multiple conditions; expediting records from SSA, DOD and National Guard duty station for claims purposes; establishing a two-year training program for claims processors; expanding the pilot project allowing private physicians to provide C&P exams to 15 regional offices (currently 10 are under way); creating a Blue Water Analogous list; and requiring numerous reports to Congress on the disability claims processing system.

H.R. 2481, the *Veterans Economic Opportunity Act of 2013*, establishes a Veterans Economic Opportunity Administration within the VA which would oversee all education, home loan and vocational rehabilitation programs. The VFW supports the concept of this bill, which would elevate the responsibility for veteran economic success in VA. However, the VFW also has concerns about interoperability between a new administration and the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) for certain benefits that rely on VBA eligibility decisions; how a new administration would affect the adoption of eBenefits among all new VA enrollees; and how the confirmation process would affect the ability of the administration to carry out its programs. Other provisions amended into the bill include a five-year extension of homeless veterans reintegration programs, centralized reporting for GI Bill enrollment purposes, allowing children of deceased veterans to use Post-9/11 education benefits, and expansion of eligibility for Fry scholarships for those children of veterans who received the Purple Heart and died within 31 days of discharge. It also amends SCRA with regards to mortgage protections for service members and surviving spouses and provides child custody protections for deployed service members. For more on any of the bills, type the bill number (i.e., H.R. 2481) in the box [here](#).

For VFW testimony on many of the cleared bills, visit our [testimony page](#).

Afghan Vet to Receive MoH

President Obama will present the nation's highest valor award to Army Staff Sgt. Ty Michael Carter in a White House ceremony Aug. 26. Carter, who will become the fifth living Medal of Honor recipient for actions in Iraq or Afghanistan, will be recognized for his actions in the Kamdesh district of Afghanistan's Nuristan province on Oct. 3, 2009, while serving as a cavalry scout with the 4th Infantry Division's Bravo Troop, 3rd Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team. During a six-hour battle with enemy fighters attempting to overrun Combat Outpost Keating, Carter resupplied ammunition to fighting positions throughout the battle, provided first aid to a battle buddy, killed enemy troops, and risked his life to save a fellow soldier who was injured and pinned down by overwhelming enemy fire. Carter enlisted in the Army in January 2008 as a cavalry scout. He completed a second Afghanistan deployment in October and now is assigned to the 7th Infantry Division. [Read more](#).

Three MIAs Identified

The Defense POW/MIA Office recently announced the identification of remains belonging to three Army personnel who had been missing since World War II and the Korean War. Identified are:

- Army Air Force Sgt. Dominick J. Licari, 31, of Frankfort, N.Y., and 2nd Lt. Valorie L. Pollard, of Monterey, Calif. On March 13, 1944, Licari and Pollard were crewing an A-20G Havoc bomber that failed to return to base after attacking enemy targets on what is now known as Papua New Guinea.
- Army Sgt. 1st Class William Robinson, 26, of Denison, Texas. In late November 1950, Robinson and elements of the 31st Regimental Combat Team were deployed along the east of the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea when they were forced into a fighting withdrawal to a more defensible position south of the reservoir. During the withdrawal of what is now known as Task Force Faith is when Robinson was reported missing. [Read more](#).

Thanks to Fred See, Department of Tennessee, and Tami Elliot, Department of Washington, for sending in a large amount of new advocates to join our team! Great job and keep up the good work!

As always, we want to share your advocacy stories on the VFW Capitol Hill blog. To share your stories, [fill out our online form](#) or simply email photos and stories directly to vfwac@vfw.org.

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