



# Federal Health Matters

## VA Committee on Women Veterans Announces the Appointment of New Members

Six new members (Sherri Brown, Alexandria, Virginia; Latoya Lucas, Rocky Mount, North Carolina; Sara J. McVicker, Washington, DC; Delphine Metcalf-Foster, Vallejo, California; Robin Patrick, Virginia Beach, Virginia; and Felipe Torres, Helotes, Texas) have been appointed to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Advisory Committee on Women Veterans. This advisory committee, established in 1983, makes recommendations to the secretary for administrative and legal changes. "Women serving in the military are essential components of our Nation's success," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. He added that the VA is "committed to providing women veterans with quality care and preparing for their evolving needs." Women veterans comprise nearly 8% of the total veteran population, and the VA estimates that by 2020 they will comprise 10% of the veteran population. To address the health and benefit needs of one of the fastest growing segments of the veteran population, there are women veterans program managers at VA medical centers and women veterans coordinators at VA regional offices.

## Final Regulation on Clothing Allowance Published

A final regulation in the *Federal Register* on clothing allowance was announced, expanding the eligibility criteria for veterans with multiple prosthetic and orthopedic devices or

who use prescription medications for service-related skin conditions, said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "Veterans whose service-connected disabilities require prosthetic appliances and skin medications deserve financial assistance for the extra clothing they have to purchase." He added, "A federal appeals court has ruled that veterans may be entitled to more than 1 clothing allowance, and we are adjusting our regulations to make sure veterans get the benefit of that decision."

More than 1 annual clothing allowance is provided for in the new regulation in situations where distinct garments are affected to ensure veterans are adequately compensated for any damage to clothing. If a service-connected disability requires veterans to wear or use a prosthetic or orthopedic appliance (eg, an artificial limb, rigid extremity brace, rigid spine or cervical brace, wheelchair, crutches) that has a tendency to wear out or tear clothing, then they are eligible for payment of an annual clothing allowance. Medications for a service-connected skin condition can also cause irreparable damage or stains to outer garments. Veterans who use such medications are also eligible for payment of an annual clothing allowance. August 1 is the annual clothing allowance application deadline with payments administered in September and October. Veterans can apply for an additional clothing allowance by downloading and completing these forms on the VA Web site: <http://www.va.gov/vaforms/medical/pdf/10-8678-fill%204-08.pdf> and <http://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/VBA-21-4138-ARE.pdf>. If veterans desire more information about applying for more than 1 annual clothing allowance, they

can contact their nearest VA regional office at 1-800-827-1000. Veterans can also read more about the clothing allowance and other benefits on VA's web portal <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits-portal/ebenefits.portal>.

## VA Implementing Telephone Support Program for Veteran Spouses

After a pilot telephone support program showed significant reduction in stress for spouses, the VA announced a telephone support program to help the spouses of returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans.

"Returning to civilian life after living in constant combat readiness can be a shocking transition, and it is the immediate family, the spouses and children, who bear that brunt of transition with those who served," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "The more support we can provide to the family, the better the outcome will be for our veterans."

The spouse support telephone program fortifies spouses' ability to cope with the challenges of reintegration to civilian society, helps them provide support to returning veterans, and makes the transition easier for families after deployments. It provides spouses with increased social support, and they reported a decrease in symptoms of depression and anxiety. A team of trained VA medical center staff members nationwide will lead the support groups, which focus on problem solving and communication, relationships, mental health, and resilience. Communication difficulties, the need to renegotiate family roles and responsibilities, and the added stress of combat-related injury are among

the typical issues spouses and veterans face after deployment. Spouses reported feeling overwhelmed, depressed, anxious, and frustrated.

“Providing support to family caregivers is the right thing to do,” said Dr. Robert Petzel, VA’s under secretary for health. “A simple series of phone calls can do so much good. Certainly, those who fought for our nation and the spouses who allowed them to make that sacrifice deserve this support.” Veterans and their families can reference the VA’s Web page, <http://www.caregiver.va.gov>, for more information on spouse telephone support and other caregiver support programs available through the VA and the community.

## Traumatic Injury Benefits Available for Genitourinary Injuries

Service members who have suffered severe injuries to the genitourinary organs are now eligible for Servicemembers’ Group Life Insurance Traumatic Injury Protection (TSGLI). “We recognize that these types of injuries are devastating and can have a long-lasting impact on the Servicemember’s quality of life,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “It is for this reason that it is appropriate to include genitourinary injuries in the list of payable losses specified in the TSGLI program.”

An increase in these types of injuries, frequently a result of current warfare and the use of improvised explosive devices by enemy combatants, have been reported by military doctors. Representative C.W. Bill Young (R-Florida) and Senator Barbara Boxer (D-California) raised the issue with the VA, and their actions prompted the department to make this change to TSGLI. Onetime payments have been available to service members sustaining certain severe

traumatic injuries resulting in a range of losses, including amputations, limb salvage, paralysis, burns, and loss of sight. Genitourinary injuries are now being added to the schedule of covered losses. Service members receive health care for genitourinary problems and disability compensation for cases of service-related injuries or illnesses involving genitourinary organs. Eligibility for these new losses are retroactive to injuries occurring on or after October 7, 2001, the beginning of the Global War on Terror.

## Report Outlines Need for Making Reducing Suicides a Top Priority

Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. Bryan B. Battaglia, the Defense Department’s top enlisted leader, said military leaders are committed to reducing suicides in the ranks. “Whether it be [a suicide] every 80 minutes or 1 every 80 weeks, 1 is obviously 1 too many,” said Battaglia. “I’m committed to continuing and exhausting all efforts in order to reduce suicide across the entire total force.”

The report shows that during 2005 to 2010, suicide occurred at a rate of 1 service member every 36 hours. While only 1% of Americans have served in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, 20% of the suicides in the United States are former service members. Eighteen veterans die by suicide daily, according to the VA.

“With regards to education, engagement, intervention—when a service member is feeling down or even possibly falling down, [leaders] need to engage, and they are,” Battaglia noted. “When a service member or family member is struggling, they need to intervene. And they are. Suicide is a total-force issue, and we’re going to continue to work hard in order to make it a total-force solution.”

The military has implemented several initiatives since 2000 in order to identify at-risk service members, according to Battaglia. “We enabled some ... tracking methods, to help us better understand suicide; we built some resiliency programs into our system.” He added, “Total Force Fitness, for example, is a program that provides families an enriched factor of resiliency [and] builds toughness.” The program is a series of best practices designed to help families build resilience. Battaglia stressed that help for service members is always “a fingertip away.” “All of our troops know this—we care,” Battaglia noted. “Our men and women have chosen to do what 99% of their societal peer group chose not to—and that’s to serve in uniform as valued members of our armed forces.”

## TRICARE Young Adult Prime Option Available

TRICARE announced that the TRICARE Young Adult Option (TYA) is now available. Eligibility requirements for TYA include being younger than 26, unmarried, and ineligible for their own employer-sponsored health care coverage. This managed health care option offers low out-of-pocket costs. Service members’ dependents may qualify to purchase TYA Prime if they live in a designated Prime Service Area and their sponsor’s status makes them eligible for Prime coverage. Young adult dependents may also be eligible for TYA Standard, which has a monthly premium of \$186, in addition to TYA Prime. TYA Standard, whose monthly premium dropped to \$176, offers eligible dependents the flexibility to access the services of TRICARE-authorized network and non-network providers of their choice. Information and forms are available on the TRICARE Web site at <http://www.tricare.mil/tya>. ●