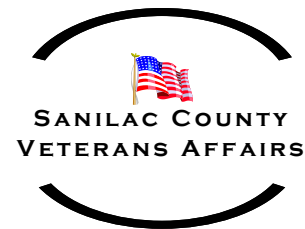


Veterans Voice



PAPERLESS NEWSLETTERS

If you would like our newsletter sent to your email address please call our office & we will add you to our new email list.

3.2% Cost of Living Increase for VA Payments

↑ Veterans, their families and survivors receiving disability compensation and pension benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs will receive a 3.2 percent cost-of-living increase in their monthly payments beginning Jan. 1, 2024.

For Veterans without dependents, the new compensation rates will range from \$171.23 monthly for a disability rated at 10 percent to \$3,737.85 monthly for 100 percent.

The COLA increase also applies to disability and death pension recipients, survivors receiving dependency and indemnity compensation, disabled Veterans receiving automobile and clothing allowances, and other benefits.

Under federal law, cost-of-living adjustments for VA's compensation and pension must match those for Social Security benefits.



Sanilac County Veteran Mentor

We are looking for Sanilac County veterans that are interested in volunteering their time to help other Sanilac County veterans that may need someone to talk to. Sometimes just a telephone call to another veteran that understands what you're going through is a big help! Please call the office if you are willing to talk to other county veterans that need a little extra support so that we can compile a list of county veterans willing to lend an ear. If your interested please call the office at (810) 648-0212 and we will provide you with the details.

2024 Donation Drive



Sanilac County Department of Veterans Affairs has resumed their donation drive for veterans who are hospitalized in VA Medical Centers and homeless veterans. The drive will be the first week of February. Items **MUST** be new and may be dropped off during regular business hours at Sanilac County Department of Veterans Affairs, 171 Dawson Street, Sandusky. For a list of suggested items or questions please call the office at (810) 648-0212.

January, 2024

Volume 24 Issue 1
Page 1 of 4

THE OFFICE

Hours:

Monday thru Friday

8:00am to 4:30pm

Closed Noon to 1pm for lunch

Director

Shannon Kreger

Secretary

Katie L. Creguer

Contact us!

(810) 648-0212

171 Dawson St.

Suite 227

Sandusky, MI 48471

director@SanilacCountyVA.org
www.SanilacCountyVA.org

Department of Veterans Affairs Committee

John Nezworski, Chairman

Michael Hare

Frederick Buchner

Donald Rudy

Charles Cunningham

Donald Maury

Justin Faber

VA expands burial benefits for Veterans and their families

VA announced that Veterans, and their families, caregivers, and survivors now have access to expanded burial benefits to help with end-of-life expenses related to a Veteran's gravesite, burial, funeral and transportation of remains to their final resting place. Burial benefits are available to individuals who pay for a Veteran's burial and funeral costs that are not reimbursed by any other organization. The updated burial benefits are:

- Expanded reimbursement of transportation expenses, to include costs for transporting remains, to state or Tribal Veterans' cemeteries in addition to previously eligible national cemeteries.
- Instituted a more generous single payment rate for non-service-connected burial benefits.
- Extended the VA plot or interment allowance to Tribal organizations.

VA provides burial benefits for all legal burial types, including cremation, burial at sea, and donation of remains to a medical school. Eligible individuals include

a surviving spouse or legal partner, surviving child, parent or executor of the Veteran's estate. Additionally, VA may pay burial benefits to a funeral home or third party who handled burial arrangements for a Veteran whose remains are unclaimed.

Veterans are encouraged to plan with end-of-life benefits provided by VA. These benefits include VA life insurance, care preferences, survivor benefits, and burial benefits that can be applied for in advance of a Veteran's passing.

There is no time limit to file for a service-connected burial, plot or interment allowance, or the transportation benefit. However, claims for non-service-connected burial benefits must be filed within two years of the Veteran's burial or cremation. A non-service-connected burial benefit is one where the cause of death was not related to military service.

Please call our office at (810) 648-0212 for more information.

Avoiding VA Benefits Overpayments

There are a number of life events that can result in an overpayment to the VA, and these can result in changes in the amount of benefits you are entitled to receive.

It is important to let VA know whenever there is a change that could impact your benefits. Not keeping these records current can result in an overpayment. When discovered, those funds will be owed to VA, and those can often result in a deduction of the monthly benefit amount until the debt is repaid.

Some common overpayment situations are:

- A Veteran receives care at a VA medical facility and fails to pay a required co-pay
- A Veteran fails to report that a school-age child has married
- A Veteran receiving education benefits drops out of school
- A Veteran or beneficiary is incarcerated and benefits are reduced or terminated for the period of incarceration
- The Vocational Rehabilitation program purchased a service or tools for a Veteran, who then dropped out of the program without a good reason
- A Veteran or beneficiary receiving an income-based pension doesn't report a change in income

- A Veteran's change in marital status without notifying VA
- Death of a dependent without notifying VA

In some situations, VA receives information from other federal agencies about changes that could impact your benefit. When this happens, a notice will be sent to the beneficiary explaining that a potential discrepancy was found, with a proposed reduction or discontinuance of benefits. Funds owed to VA are based on the date the event occurred, such as a change in dependents, which would have caused a reduction or discontinuation of benefits.

Beneficiaries who receive an indebtedness notice from VA stating that an overpayment has taken place have 60 days to submit a Notice of Disagreement with evidence stating why the overpayment information is incorrect. It is important to work with VA in this initial notification period before the debt moves to the next level.

After 60 days, if no response is received, the debt is turned over to the VA Debt Management Center for recovery. The center will notify the beneficiaries of the planned recovery method – either through a reduction in benefits, or a payment program. If the debt cannot be resolved, it will be turned over to the Department of the Treasury for forced collection.

In some cases, overpayments can be waived. Please contact our office at (810) 648-0212 and we will assist with a waiver request.

VA covers cost of Parkinson's care for family members of Veterans who served at Camp Lejeune

VA announced that family members of Veterans exposed to contaminated drinking water at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune from Aug. 1, 1953 to Dec. 31, 1987 are now eligible for reimbursement of health care costs associated with Parkinson's disease under the Camp Lejeune Family Member Program.

These family members are also eligible for health care reimbursement for esophageal cancer, lung cancer, breast cancer, bladder cancer, kidney cancer, leukemia, multiple myeloma, renal toxicity, miscarriage, hepatic steatosis, female infertility, myelodysplastic syndromes, scleroderma, neurobehavioral effects, and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

Veterans who served at Camp Lejeune are also eligible for no-cost Parkinson's health care and other VA benefits. Recent studies have also shown that the risk of Parkinson's disease is 70% higher for Veterans stationed at Camp Lejeune.

Thanks to the PACT Act, the biggest expansion of Veteran health care and benefits in generations, Veterans and their families can also now file lawsuits for harm caused by exposure to contaminated water at Camp Lejeune. To apply for health care reimbursement under the Camp Lejeune Family Member Program or Veteran benefits related to Camp Lejeune make an appointment with us by calling (810) 648-0212.

Thank you for the millage!

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Lynda Strelitz
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