



The Alabama Veteran

Robert Bentley
Governor

W. Clyde Marsh
Commissioner

S U M M E R 2 0 1 6

DATES TO REMEMBER

- MyVA Operation Entrust Board Meeting — August 26, 2016
- Labor Day — September 5, 2016
- State Board of Veterans Affairs Meeting — October 7, 2016
- Veterans Day — November 11, 2016

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Commissioner's Corner



Fellow Americans, veterans, colleagues and state employees, first let me start by saying thank you to all our hard working state employees and veteran advocates. I appreciate you, our state employees who work out of the County Veterans Offices, Regional Claims Office, Cemetery, State Veterans Homes and Headquarters Support. It takes a committed team effort to achieve success and sustain access to veteran benefits and services.

2016 has focused heavily on the sustainment of signature state and federal VA programs and the roll out of new initiatives such as Veterans Choice Card and VA Regional Office Claims Que. ADVA moved squarely into the electronic environment with electronic charts and records in the veterans homes and the computer

database claims management system (Vectra Spec) utilized by the county offices allowing our state to connect or interact with the national Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS). Also, the Bill Nichols State Veterans Home was recently upgraded with the expansion of the dayroom. I want to express my thanks and congratulations to all involved with the project, a job well done. The front of the facility was extended which expanded the common and work areas by 9000 sq. ft. and the floors and wall coverings were replaced and upgraded. After being renovated and upgraded the facility looks like a new veterans home.

The 2016 Legislative Session was convened and adjourned on time with the traditional pomp and circumstance. While the focus has been on what did not pass during the session, the General Fund budget passed relatively early. ADVA received a 5% reduction in the FY16 General Fund budget. The impact of this is a reduction in both employee training opportunities and our ability to fill some vacant county veteran service officer positions around the state.

The Columbarium Expansion Project at the Alabama State Veterans Memorial Cemetery is complete! The expansion increased the overall capacity to 768 niches. The project experienced significant delays due to unacceptable work as well as material/manufacturing delays and long lead delivery dates. The Memorial Wall, Scatter Garden and the In-Ground burial plots for cremains were available options during this expansion work project. This project was funded by federal VA dollars which required multiple state agencies and the US Department of Veterans Affairs to be part of the design, work and acceptance process. Schedule delays caused frustration for us and for some family members. However, we are proud to announce that columbarium interments have resumed.

Additional priorities for the department are as follows:

- Continue training initiatives to maintain and enhance the qualifications and professionalism of state employee veteran advocates.
- Identify and connect homeless veterans with services and benefits and assist in the reduction of the overall homeless veterans population in the state and nation.
- Assist veterans via cross cutting state initiatives to obtain certifications, qualifications and jobs to enable proper transition from the military, reintegration into communities or relief from unemployment.

Keep up the great work and do a good deed for a veteran today!

National VA Update

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Unclaimed VA Life Insurance

The VA Life Insurance program has announced an update to their Unclaimed Insurance Funds web page. The web page can be found on the Insurance website at <https://insurance.va.gov/UnclaimedFunds>. This update is part of a wider initiative to enhance the VA's ability to connect with veterans and their families.

The unclaimed funds have accumulated from the policies established under the following life insurance programs:

United States Government Life Insurance (USGLI, 1919-1951)
National Service Life Insurance (NSLI, 1940-1951)
Veterans Special Life Insurance (VSLI, 1951-1956)
Veterans' Reopened Insurance (VRI, 1965-1966), and
Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance (S-DVI, 1951-Present),

The unclaimed funds **do not** cover life insurance policies issued under Servicemembers Group Life Insurance (SGLI) nor Veterans Group Life Insurance (VGLI).

Since 1917, life insurance programs have generated a number of cases in which monies have gone unclaimed for a wide variety of reasons. The major reason these funds remain unclaimed is because we are unable to locate the original beneficiary or an entitled family member.

The new web page is intended to make searching for these funds easier for veterans and their families. A veteran or family member can now search for unclaimed funds by entering the veteran's last and first name to determine if monies may be owed.

If a user finds a match under a veterans name, the web page will prompt the user to complete VA Form 29-541 Certificate Showing Residence and Heirs of Deceased Veteran or Beneficiary and fax or mail it to the VA Insurance Center, along with proof of identity and proof of entitlement. If the user is acting as a guardian, executor, administrator, or in some other representative capacity, the user must enclose appropriate documentation demonstrating their entitlement to make a claim.

Once VA Life Insurance receives the user's information, VA representatives will begin the process of verification to establish that the correct payee has been identified. This process can include the user supplying personally identifiable information, completing a form or in some cases providing a photocopy of a death certificate. Each case is unique and different requirements may apply before release of funds.

This web page is designed to give veterans and their families a place to check and see if there is money due them and also allow the Insurance Center to locate individuals who are entitled to money. Making final financial settlement with our veterans and their families is a win-win for all of us.

Remember, two easy steps --,

Step 1 access the web page at <https://insurance.va.gov/UnclaimedFunds>. if you get a match, take **Step 2** and supply the required information. Representatives will take you through the necessary steps to claim the money.

National VA Update

Relief for Veterans with Traumatic Brain Injuries

WASHINGTON – Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert McDonald has granted equitable relief to more than 24,000 Veterans following a national review of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) medical examinations conducted in connection with disability compensation claims processed between 2007 and 2015.

This action by the Secretary allows the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to offer new TBI examinations to veterans whose initial examination for TBI was not conducted by one of four designated medical specialists and provides them with the opportunity to have their claims reprocessed. Equitable relief is a unique legal remedy that allows the Secretary to correct an injustice to a claimant where VA is not otherwise authorized to do so within the scope of the law.

“Traumatic Brain Injury is a signature injury in veterans returning from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and VA is proud to be an organization that sets the bar high for supporting these, and all, veterans,” said Secretary McDonald. “Providing support for veterans suffering from a TBI is a priority and a privilege, and we must make certain they receive a just and fair rating for their disabilities.”

To ensure that TBI is properly evaluated for disability compensation purposes, VA developed a policy in 2007 requiring that one of four specialists – a psychiatrist, physiatrist, neurosurgeon or neurologist – complete TBI exams when VA does not have a prior diagnosis.

Since 2007, medicine around TBI has been a rapidly evolving science. VA designated particular specialists to conduct initial TBI exams because they have the most experience with the symptoms and effects of TBI. As more research became available, VA issued a number of guidance documents that may have created confusion regarding the policy. VA has confirmed that its TBI policy guidance is now clear and being followed.

“We let these veterans down,” Secretary McDonald said. “That is why we are taking every step necessary to grant equitable relief to those affected to ensure they receive the full benefits to which they are entitled.” VA understands the importance of an accurate exam to support veterans’ disability claims. The Secretary’s decision to grant relief will enable VA to take action on any new examinations without requiring veterans to submit new claims. If additional benefits are due, VA will award an effective date as early as the date of the initial TBI claim.

VA will contact veterans identified as part of this national TBI review to offer them an opportunity to receive a new examination and have their claims reprocessed. More than 13,000 of these affected veterans are already receiving service-connected compensation benefits for TBI at a 10-percent disability evaluation or higher, which means that the diagnosis has already been established.

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Spotlight**American Legion Steps In**

Since its establishment in 1925, The American Legion Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) program has awarded cash grants to dependent children of veterans who are eligible for American Legion membership. These grants help families in need meet the cost of shelter, food, utilities and health expenses, thereby keeping the child or children in a more stable environment.

When other resources cannot provide the required assistance, the American Legion steps in to provide for our veterans' children. The veteran need not be a member of the American Legion, but must be or have been eligible for membership including having wartime military service. Additionally, the TFA application must originate and be completed by someone at the local post level.

For more information or to apply, contact your local American Legion post or the Department of Alabama Headquarters at 1-334-262-6638.

Find Help Using Your Phone or Computer

One of the hardest things for someone in need is figuring out where help can be found. In Alabama, those answers are just a call away. 2-1-1 Connects Alabama is a statewide network of regional call centers whose mission is to provide easy access to health and human services available throughout Alabama. By making services easier to find, the 2-1-1 network strives to empower individuals with the information they need to "Get Help or Give Help" in their local communities. They offer services to us all including the vulnerable populations such as the indigent or elderly, who often slip through the cracks. Hundreds of services are offered across a broad spectrum of needs. Alabamians may find assistance with basic human needs, physical and mental health, employment, and tax preparation, just to name a few.

In an effort to better serve veterans, military members, and their families, 2-1-1 Connects Alabama has created an entire search category on their website, Military/Veteran Personnel and Families Services. Under this category, well over 100 veteran specific resources can be found in areas such as Education and Training, Employment, Family Services, Financial Services/Assistance, Health/Medical Services, Homeless/Housing Services, and Legal Services.

To seek help or to offer help, you may visit them at <http://211connectsalabama.org> or simply call 2-1-1.



Commissioner Clyde Marsh led the way in establishing Alabama's new veterans community engagement board in response to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert McDonald's vision of establishing MyVA Community Boards in each state. The goal is for the boards to be staffed and operated at the community level. Alabama's MyVA Operation Entrust Board hopes to inspire individual communities to form their own boards enabling them to find solutions to their specific issues. Ideally, these boards consist of diverse community leaders, veterans and non-veterans bringing vast experience in a cross section of professional disciplines together. The first priority of the boards is to identify and resolve veterans' issues or concerns at the local and community level. Secondly, the boards will engage with elected leaders and state and federal veterans affairs professionals to obtain information, expertise and resources to address problems or issues that are identified. Finally, the MyVA Community Boards are designed to establish relationships and enhance trust between the community, VA service providers and veterans. Alabama's MyVA Operation Entrust Board held its first meeting and community forum on February 10, 2016 in Birmingham and its second on May 5, 2016 in Opelika. Both events were well attended by both veterans and community leaders. The MyVA Operation Entrust Board has 24 members and is Co-Chaired by Toby Warren and Commissioner Marsh. The next MyVA Operation Entrust Board meeting and community forum are scheduled to convene on August 26, 2016 in Tuscaloosa. The community forum which is open to the public will convene at the Tuscaloosa River Market at 4:30 PM.

Around the State

Supermarket of Veterans Benefits

The Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA), together with the Birmingham VA Medical Center, successfully hosted a Supermarket of Veterans Benefits February 19, 2016 in the auditorium of the Birmingham VA Medical Center. This effort reached over 150 veterans and their families.

The Supermarket was a part of a statewide outreach campaign to help veterans, family members, and survivors receive valuable information about state, federal, and non-governmental services and benefits that are designed specifically for them. Twenty-eight agencies and private groups were on-hand during the event. Services offered included one-on-one assistance with federal VA and Social Security claims; education benefits for veterans and their dependents; employment opportunities; medical assistance including long-term care options and Medicaid support; senior services; and services for the homeless and others in need.

“The ADVA was proud to partner with the Birmingham VA Medical Center for this year’s event,” said Clyde Marsh, Commissioner of the ADVA. “The Supermarket of Veterans Benefits is a tremendous opportunity for veterans to come to one central location to gain important information about their entitlements and receive services they have rightly earned.”

The ADVA is looking forward to hosting another Supermarket of Veterans Benefits later this year.

Alabama State Veterans Homes

Anyone who may know of interested eligible veterans are asked to encourage them to make application for admittance to the home in their geographic area. For more information and/or an application, contact your local Veterans Service Office or Home Representative:

Bill Nichols State Veterans Home

1784 Elkahatchee Road
Alexander City, Alabama 35010
Kathryn Fuller—(256) 329-3350

Floyd E. “Tut” Fann State Veterans Home

2701 Meridian Street
Huntsville, Alabama 35811
Charlotte Eason—(256) 851-2807

William F. Green State Veterans Home

300 Faulkner Drive
Bay Minette, Alabama 36507
Kathleen Voll—(251) 937-8049

Col. Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home

7054 Veterans Parkway
Pell City, AL 35125
Hiliary Hardwick — (205) 338-6487

Federal VA Benefits

The following are benefits provided through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs:

- Disability
- Education
- Vocational Rehabilitation
- Home Loan Guaranty
- Burial
- Dependent and Survivor
- Life Insurance
- Health Care

If you have any questions regarding the above or any benefit listed in this publication, feel free to contact your nearest County Veterans Service Officer. Our Service Officers are located throughout Alabama and are available to counsel and assist in filing VA claims for veterans and their family members.

To find the nearest county Veterans Service Office, you can contact 334-242-5077 or visit us on the web at www.va.alabama.gov.