

# VETERANS ADVISORY NEWS

FEBRUARY 20, 2015

**INSIDE THIS EDITION:**

<b>PTSD MONTHLY UPDATES</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>FREE TAX PREPARATION FOR VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>COOK RECORDER SATELLITE SERVICES: MVDP DISCOUNT</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>SINGLE REGIONAL FRAMEWORK UNDER MYVA INITIATIVE</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>PRESIDENT OBAMA: STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESSES VETERANS</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>VA REFORMS: REDUCE CORRUPT EXECUTIVES' PENSION</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>NEW STUDY: HIDDEN BRAIN DAMAGE FROM BLAST INJURIES</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>SOCIAL SECURITY INCREASED BENEFITS FOR VETERANS</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>HB159 DISABLED VETERANS PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>DISABLED VETERANS SPECIALLY ADAPTED HOUSING GRANTS</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>SILVER STAR SERVICE BANNER PROGRAM EVENT</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>UPCOMING VETERANS EVENTS</b>	<b>10</b>



THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS WAS CREATED BY COOK COUNTY BOARD PRESIDENT TONI PRECKWINKLE IN DECEMBER 2012 TO SERVE THE COUNTY'S EMPLOYEE VETERANS AND VETERANS WHO LIVE IN COOK COUNTY THROUGH OUTREACH AND SUPPORT SERVICES.

## Online Tools Provide Hope, Help for Veterans

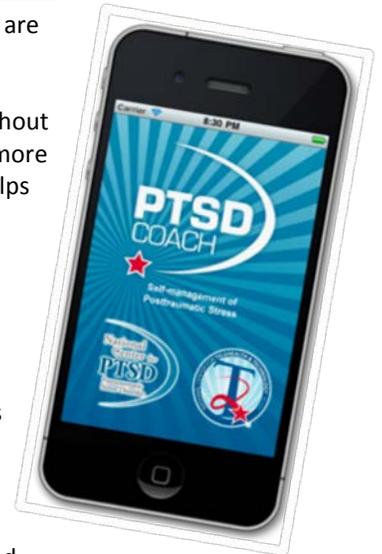
[www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/16598/online-tools-provide-hope-help-for-veterans/](http://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/16598/online-tools-provide-hope-help-for-veterans/)

For some veterans, managing posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) seems overwhelming. The VA's National Center for PTSD offers online tools to help manage symptoms. Rebecca Stoeckle of Education Development Center (EDC) says, "Online tools are increasingly important in delivering mental health services. There's a need for digital tools to track behaviors and manage symptoms."

EDC already released the [PTSD Coach Online](#). This web-based platform offers 17 different evidence-informed tools ranging from deep breathing exercises to interactive tutorials that help develop healthy sleep habit patterns. "It's important for anyone with mental health issues to have choices in treatment," says Cybele Merrick, associate director for education at EDC. "PTSD Coach Online is used during

treatment because they are in line with current therapies." The online version for Veterans without smart-phones includes more writing exercises and helps manage immediate symptoms and develop behaviors leading to a healthy life. Merrick describes PTSD Coach Online as a "booster" reminding of techniques learned in cognitive behavioral therapy.

EDC plans to release another online tool called VetChange for co-occurring PTSD and problem drinking, based on an intervention piloted by Boston University School of Public Health and the VA. The primary goal of VetChange is to help control or reduce drinking. It includes a daily log to track drinking, set goals, and includes tools to develop action plans to meet goals, all while providing continuity. This complete



online resource presented opportunities for innovation. An example is the amount of information users can enter allowing users to log their behavior online at any time. It's the final true note of progress "seeing every veteran get the mental health care they need, when they need it," Stoeckle says. "We are honored to help make that possible."

## **SAVE-A-DATE:** Cook County Veterans Affairs to Host PTSD Workshop

Cook County Veterans Affairs will be hosting its Quarterly Veterans Workshop on **PTSD: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder** in **May 2015**. Workshop discussions will highlight the signs, symptoms, and medical advances in the diagnosis and treatment of PTSD. Be on the Look Out for more information and event details, including date and time, in upcoming Cook County Veterans Advisory newsletters.



## Resolve to Get Help: PTSD Monthly Update

<http://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USVHA/bulletins/ec6ae0>



If you struggle with recent or past trauma, *get help!* [PTSD treatment](#) can help make 2015 a better year:

- Take a [brief screen and learn why you shouldn't wait](#) for help.
- Learn about overcoming barriers to care.
- Learn how to talk to your doctor about trauma and PTSD.

If you know someone struggling with PTSD, resolve to get them the care they need.

- What you can do to [help a family member](#) who has PTSD.

*Are you not sure what to say or do to get help?* [Get tips and learn about VA's Coaching into Care program](#)



### **Resources for Veterans and Their Families:**

- It's never too late for a Veteran you care about to [Make the Connection](#) and get help for PTSD.
- Learn how to [enroll in VA health care](#) and [find VA treatment programs specializing in PTSD](#).
- The new [Choice Program](#) covers non-VA care for eligible Veterans enrolled in VA healthcare.
- [Watch and share AboutFace](#) to hear directly from other Veterans and their families.

**Providers:** The Program offers free PTSD consultation to any provider treating Veterans. If you have any questions about PTSD, call 866-948-7880 or Email: [PTSDconsult@va.gov](mailto:PTSDconsult@va.gov).

Continue with the New PTSD 101 Courses, and learn the relationship between:

- [Addressing Traumatic Guilt in PTSD Treatment:](#) and
- [Prescribing for Older Veterans with PTSD:](#)
- Courses provide information on trauma and guilt, assessing traumatic guilt, and treatment considerations.

**VA Providers:** 2015 PTSD Consultation Lecture Series: VA staff please [sign up for VA Staff PTSD Updates](#) for instructions to join live lectures. Mark your calendar for the 3rd Wednesday of each month at 2 pm ET.

**Research at the Center:** The Center is collaborating with Charleston VA on a new study to examine whether Veterans asked to watch [AboutFace](#) are more likely to engage in PTSD treatment. The study will see if Veterans report changes in stigma and attitudes about seeking help.



**MILITARY VETERANS DISCOUNT PROGRAM**

**ACTIVE-DUTY PERSONNEL, VETERANS, GUARD MEMBERS AND RESERVISTS MAY VISIT:**

**COOK COUNTY RECORDER  
118 N. CLARK ST.  
ROOM 120  
CHICAGO, IL 60602**

**ONCE PROOF OF SERVICE IS PROVIDED A MILITARY AND VETERANS DISCOUNT ID CARD WILL BE ISSUED.**

**Free Tax Return Preparation for Veterans and Their Families**

<http://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/author/richard-keeling/>

The Internal Revenue Service is accepting electronically filed (e file) and paper tax returns. The IRS reminds us e filing is the most accurate and safe way to file and get a refund. The following links connect veterans and their families with free tax e filing services:

**[Volunteer Income Tax Assistance/Tax Counseling for the Elderly](#)** - eligible incomes less than \$53,000 and prepared by IRS certified volunteers. Over 12,000 service locations, find one at [VITA/TCE Locator](#).

**[MyFreeTaxes](#)** - FREE Federal and State tax return filing assistance for qualified veterans and their families with incomes less than \$60,000. For more information, visit: [www.myfreetaxes.com](http://www.myfreetaxes.com).

**[IRS.gov/FreeFile](#)** – FREE Federal tax return preparation and e file for eligible incomes less than \$60,000. Also available, the IRS **[Free File Fillable Forms](#)**.



**[TurboTax Freedom Edition](#)** – eligible incomes less than \$31,000 or taxpayers covered under the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

**[Second Story TaxAct](#)** – FREE IRS tax preparation and e filing option eligible to incomes less than \$52,000 and between the ages of 18-58.

**[H&R Block's Free File](#)** – free tax return assistance for eligible incomes less than \$58,000 and age 53 or younger as of December 31, 2014.

**[Online Taxes \(OLT\)](#)** - free tax return preparation for incomes between \$13,000-60,000.

**[TurboTax Military Edition](#)** - Free Junior and discounted Senior Enlisted and Officers tax return preparation services.

**[Military OneSource](#)** - if eligible, free Federal and up-to three State tax e file services that can be saved for later completion.

**[TaxSlayer Military](#)** – FREE Federal and State tax return preparation for all active duty military.

**Cook County Recorder Expands Satellite Office Services: Certified Copies and Military Veterans Discount Card**

Starting Tuesday, February 17, Cook County Recorder of Deed's (CCRD) Satellite Offices (Markham, Rolling Meadows, Bridgeview and Skokie) will be able to register veterans for Cook County's new Military and Veterans Discount Program. Staff will be able to verify eligibility and take the veterans photo for their free card. Those who utilize this service will receive their card, along with a directory of participating merchants, in the mail within 7-10 business days. Those who wish to obtain the Military and Veterans Discount Card should bring a government-issued photo ID along with their proof of service, which can be either DD-214, VA Benefits Card, or an active-duty or Guard/Reserve ID.



## VA Announces Single Regional Framework under *MyVA* Initiative: Internal Organizations to Realign Their Existing Structures



The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that it's taking the first steps under the *MyVA* initiative to realign its many organizational maps into one, with five regions to better serve Veterans. The *MyVA* alignment will allow VA to begin the process of integrating disparate organizational boundaries into a single regional framework enhancing internal coordination. "We want every Veteran to have a seamless, integrated, and responsive VA customer service experience every time. This regional alignment is the first step in empowering Veterans to interact with one VA – *MyVA*," said Secretary Robert McDonald. "Ultimately, this reform will improve the Veteran experience by enabling Veterans to more easily navigate VA and access their earned care and benefits."

### Background on *MyVA*:

Program was launched on September 2, 2014. *MyVA* is an initiative which will re-orient VA around Veteran needs and empower employees to assist them in delivering excellent customer service to improve the Veteran experience. It is the largest department-wide transformation in VA's history and will be a product of ideas and insights shared by Veterans, employees, members of Congress, VSOs, and other stakeholders. The first phase of *MyVA* has included creating the task force and building the team to support the mission and an organizational change of this breadth.

*MyVA* is focused on the following areas of improvement:

1. *Improving the Veteran experience;*
2. *Improving the employee experience so they can better serve Veterans;*
3. *Improving internal support services;*
4. *Establishing a culture of continuous improvement;*
5. *Enhancing strategic partnership*

Veterans are already seeing the impacts of changes made through the *MyVA* initiative. For example, the Department has made improvements to VA call center operations allowing agents to suspend or resume certain benefit payments at the request of the Veteran, which eliminates additional steps typically required of Veterans. Also, VA is working towards piloting improved signage in certain facilities to make sure Veterans know where they are going and that directions are easy to follow.

Additional VA efforts are currently underway and defining the next steps to transform the Department into one that is more centered on the Veteran. VA's new regional design utilizes state boundaries to divide the country into five regions, which can be viewed at the following website: [www.va.gov/opa/publications/docs/myva-5-regions-map.pdf](http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/docs/myva-5-regions-map.pdf).

Each organization within VA will ensure their structures are aligned within this framework by the end of June 2015.

---



## PRESIDENT OBAMA’S STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

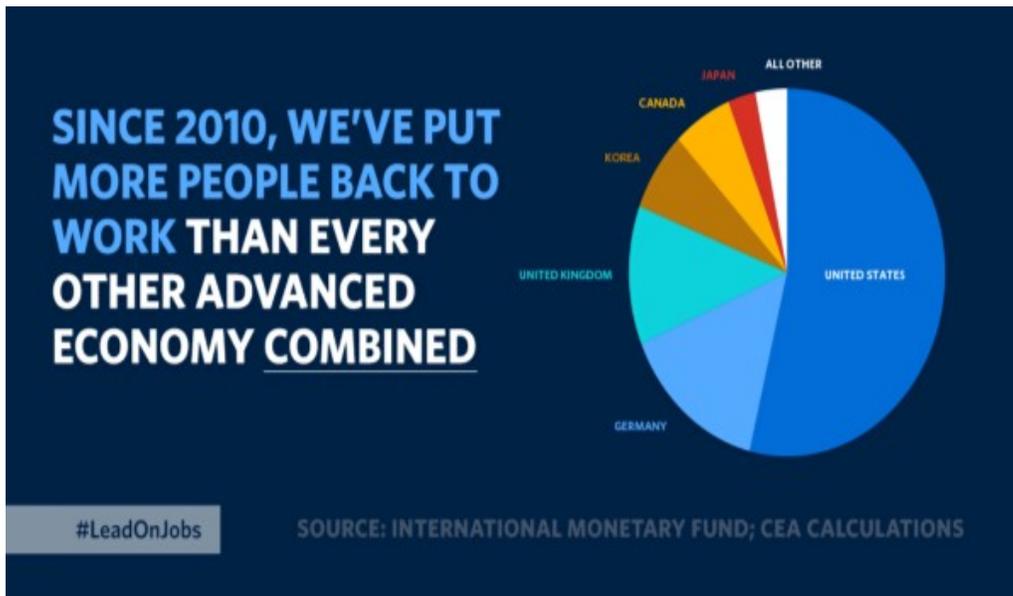
<https://medium.com/@WhiteHouse/president-obamas-state-of-the-union-address-remarks-as-prepared-for-delivery>

Thanks to our job training system, we’re connecting community colleges with local employers to train workers to fill high-paying jobs like coding, and nursing, and robotics. Tonight, I’m also asking more businesses to follow the lead of companies like CVS and UPS, and offer more educational benefits and paid apprenticeship opportunities that give workers the chance to earn higher-paying jobs even if they don’t have a higher education.

Since 2010, America has put more people back to work than Europe, Japan, and all advanced economies combined. Our manufacturers have added almost 800,000 new jobs. Some bedrock sectors, like our auto industry, are booming. But there are millions of Americans who work in jobs that didn’t exist 10-20 years ago, jobs at companies like Google, and eBay, and Tesla.

Finally, as we better train our workers, we need the new economy to keep churning out high-wage jobs for our workers to fill. So no one knows for certain which industries will generate the jobs of the future. But we do know we want them here in America. That’s why part of middle-class economics is about building the most competitive economy anywhere, the place where businesses want to locate and hire.

And as a new generation of veterans comes home, we owe them every opportunity to live the American Dream they helped defend. Already, we’ve made strides towards ensuring that every veteran has access to the highest quality care. We’re slashing the backlog that had too many veterans waiting years to get the benefits they need, and we’re making it easier for vets to translate their training and experience into civilian jobs. Joining Forces, the national campaign, has helped nearly 700,000 veterans and military spouses get new jobs. So to every CEO in America, let me repeat: *If you want somebody who’s going to get the job done, hire a veteran.*





**IF YOU ARE A HOMELESS VETERAN IN NEED OF IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE OR RISK HOMELESSNESS, VA IS HERE FOR YOU. CALL THE NATIONAL CALL CENTER FOR HOMELESS VETERANS AT 1-877-424-3838 (1-877-4AID-VET). THE HOTLINE/ONLINE CHAT ARE FREE AND REGISTRATION NOR VA HEALTHCARE ENROLLMENT ARE NECESSARY. TRAINED RESPONDERS, MANY VETERANS, ARE AVAILABLE 24 HOURS A DAY/7 DAYS A WEEK.**

**WHEN YOU CALL/JOIN THE ONLINE CHAT:**

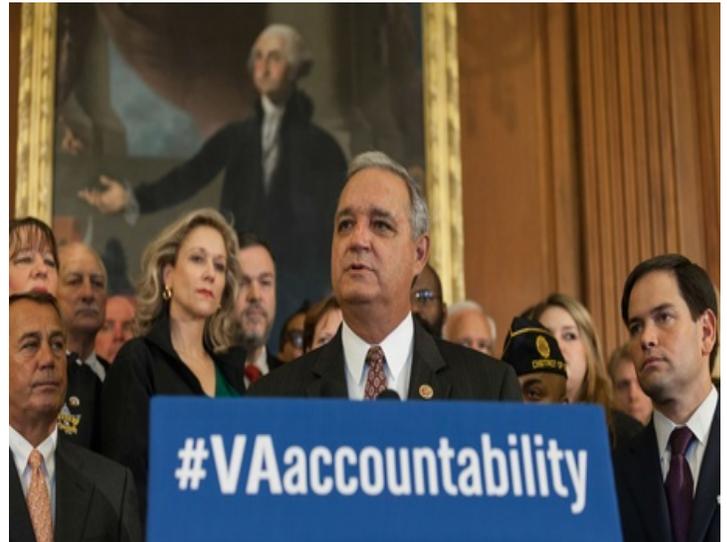
- **YOU WILL CONNECT TO A TRAINED VA RESPONDER.**
- **THE RESPONDER WILL ASSESS NEEDS.**
- **IF A VETERAN, CONNECT WITH THE NEAREST VA MEDICAL CENTER, HOMELESS-PROGRAM COORDINATOR.**
- **CONTACT INFORMATION REQUESTED FOR FOLLOW UP.**

## MAJOR VA ACCOUNTABILITY REFORMS: BILL WOULD GIVE VA SECRETARY AUTHORITY TO REDUCE CORRUPT EXECUTIVES' PENSIONS

[HTTPS://VETERANS.HOUSE.GOV/PRESS-RELEASE/MILLER-PROPOSES-MAJOR-VA-ACCOUNTABILITY-REFORMS](https://veterans.house.gov/press-release/miller-proposes-major-va-accountability-reforms)

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Chairman Miller introduced "Increasing VA Accountability to Veterans Act of 2015." The bill would give the Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary more authority to hold corrupt executives accountable. Specifically, the bill would:

- Increase accountability by allowing the VA secretary to reduce an SES employee's retirement pension upon conviction of a crime that influenced their work performance by reducing the years of service creditable to the employee's pension
- Reduce waste by limiting the amount of time VA senior executives could spend on paid administrative leave to 14 days unless the secretary can show good cause for an extension
- Help end VA's sordid bonus culture by reforming VA's SES performance appraisal system so 30% of senior executives could receive top performance ratings and qualify for bonuses
- Require additional transparency regarding SES performance outcomes and require that all SES employees change jobs within the department at least once every five years



The Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act, which was signed into law Aug. 7, 2014, contained significant civil service reforms that gave the VA secretary complete authority to fire corrupt or incompetent senior executives. In remarks before signing the act, [President Obama said](#), "If you engage in an unethical practice, you should be fired. Period. It shouldn't be that difficult." Despite this fact, accountability remains extremely scarce at the department. In fact, in the wake of the biggest scandal in VA history, which centered on appointment wait time manipulation, not a single VA senior executive was fired. VA employees at the heart of the scandal have been placed on paid administrative leave for months on end.

After introducing the bill, Chairman Miller released this statement: "More than nine months after the VA scandal, Americans are asking 'where is the accountability?' Unfortunately, VA doesn't have a good answer to this question. That's why our focus remains on giving the VA secretary more tools to ensure corrupt and incompetent executives face serious consequences for mismanagement and malfeasance that harms veterans. Right now, the task at hand for VA leaders is replacing the department's culture of complacency with a climate of accountability, and we are going to give them everything they need to do get the job done." – **Rep. Jeff Miller, Chairman, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs**

## New Study: Hidden Brain Damage Seen in Veterans with Blast Injuries

By Amy Norton

A study on the brain tissue of some Iraq and Afghanistan [veterans](#) injured by homemade bombs show an unusual pattern of damage -- called a "honeycomb" pattern of broken and swollen nerve fibers -- might help explain the phenomenon of "shell shock." This term coined during WWI trench warfare exposing troops to constant bombardment of exploding shells. Now referred to as *blast neurotrauma*, the injuries have become an important issue again. Many soldiers developed problems with vision and hearing, headaches, tremors, confusion, anxiety and nightmares.

"Vets coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan have been exposed to a variety of situations, including blasts from improvised explosive devices [IEDs]," said senior researcher Dr. Vassilis Koliatsos and professor of pathology, neurology and psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

The researchers for the new study compared autopsied brain tissue from five combat vets and 24 people who died of various causes from accidents to overdoses. The soldiers all survived IED bomb blasts, but later died of other causes. According to Koliatsos, all five of the [soldiers' brains](#) showed a distinct pattern of damage to



nerve fibers in key regions -- including the frontal lobes, which govern memory, reasoning and decision-making. He said the "honeycomb" pattern of small lesions was unlike the damage seen in people who died from head trauma in a car accident, or those who suffered "punch-drunk syndrome" -- brain degeneration caused by repeated concussions. Executive director of the National Center for Veterans Studies at the University of Utah, Craig Bryan said it "provides preliminary evidence to support structural and physical changes associated with blast [brain] injuries". "My hope is that research will eventually lead to better diagnostic tests

that can detect and identify [otherwise hidden injuries](#) much sooner," Bryan said. For example, if damage to the frontal lobes is causing some blast-injured veterans' symptoms, then treatment might include medications that stimulate the frontal lobes and leading to more refined treatment. "The most important thing is for blast-exposed vets to seek treatment for any lingering symptoms. If you're having problems, talk to your family and your doctor," Koliatsos said. Both agree further studies are needed to confirm findings and understand what this brain damage "signature" means.



## HB 159: PROPERTY TAX DISABLED VETS

VETERANS – CHECK OUT HB 159 - “PROPERTY TAX DISABLED VETS”. ANY VETERAN WHO IS AT LEAST 30 % OR MORE DISABLED SHOULD TAKE NOTE OF THE PROPOSED BILL IN SPRINGFIELD. THIS BILL IS BEING DISCUSSED FOR CONSIDERATION. ALL VETERANS SHOULD CONTACT THEIR LEGISLATOR TO SUPPORT THIS BILL.

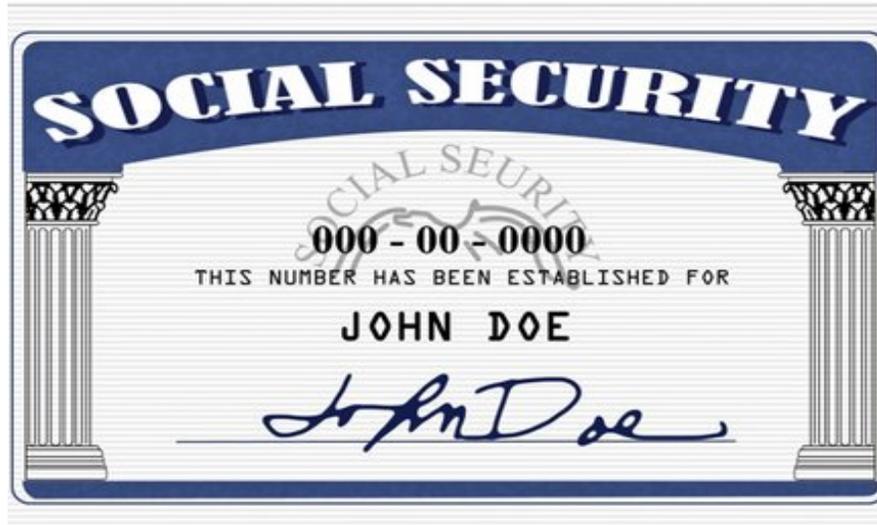
THIS BILL WOULD AMEND THE PROPERTY TAX CODE. VETERANS WHO ARE AT LEAST 30% OR MORE DISABLED BY THE VA WOULD BE GIVEN AN ANNUAL EXEMPTION ON THEIR TAXES.

IN A SECTION CONCERNING THE DISABLED VETERANS STANDARD HOMESTEAD EXEMPTION, PROVIDES THAT, FOR TAXABLE YEARS 2015 AND THEREAFTER: (I) IF THE VETERAN HAS A SERVICE CONNECTED DISABILITY OF 30% - ANNUAL EXEMPTION IS \$2,500; (II) IF THE VETERAN HAS A SERVICE CONNECTED DISABILITY OF 50% OR MORE BUT LESS THAN 70% - THE ANNUAL EXEMPTION IS \$5,000; AND (III) IF THE VETERAN HAS A SERVICE CONNECTED DISABILITY OF 70% OR MORE - THEN THE PROPERTY IS EXEMPT FROM TAXATION.

THIS IS ONE OF MANY BILLS BEING CONSIDERED TO HELP OUR VETERANS.

## Retirement Planner: Special Earnings for Military Service

<http://www.ssa.gov/retire2/military.htm>



Since 1957, if you had active duty military service earnings (including active duty training), you paid Social Security taxes on those earnings. Since 1988, inactive duty service in Armed Forces reserves (i.e. weekend drills) are covered by Social Security.

Under certain circumstances, special extra earnings for your military service from 1957 through 2001 can be credited to your record for Social Security purposes. These extra earnings credits may help you qualify for Social Security or increase the amount of your Social Security benefit.

Special extra earnings credits are granted for periods of active duty or active duty for training. Special extra earnings credits are **not** granted for inactive duty training.

If your active military service occurred:

- **From 1957 through 1967**, we will add the extra credits to your record when you apply for Social Security benefits.
- **From 1968 through 2001**, you do not need to do anything to receive these extra credits. The credits were automatically added to your record.
- **After 2001**, there are no special extra earnings credits for military service.

**Note:** January 2002, Public Law 107-117, Defense Appropriations Act, stopped special extra earnings credited to military service personnel. Military service in calendar year 2002 and future years no longer qualifies for these special extra earnings credits.

### How You Get Credit for Special Extra Earnings:

The information applies **only** to active duty military service earnings from [1957 through 2001](#). Special **extra** earnings are credited on your record:

**Service in 1957 through 1977:** You are credited with \$300 in additional earnings for each calendar quarter you received active duty basic pay.

**Service in 1978 through 2001:** For every \$300 in active duty basic pay, you are credited with an additional \$100 in earnings up to a maximum of \$1,200 a year. If you enlisted after September 7, 1980, and didn't complete at least 24 months of active duty or your full tour, you may not be able to receive the additional earnings. Check with Social Security for details.



## VA Specially Adapted Housing Grants for Disabled Veterans

<http://www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans/adaptedhousing.asp>

VA provides grants to Veterans with certain permanent and total service-connected disabilities to help purchase or construct an adapted home to accommodate a disability. Two grant programs exist to address the special needs of veterans with certain disabilities: Specially Adapted Housing and Special Housing Adaptation.

### **Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) Grant:**

SAH helps Veterans live independently in a barrier-free environment, and can be used in one of the following ways:

- Construct a specially adapted home on land to be acquired
- Build a home on owned land suitable for adapted housing
- Remodel existing home if suitable for specially adapted housing

- Apply against principal mortgage of adapted home already acquired

### **Special Housing Adaptation (SHA)**

**Grant:** SHA helps Veterans adapt a home accommodating the disability, and can be used in one of the following ways:

- Adapt existing home the Veteran already owns
- Adapt a home the Veteran intends to purchase
- Help purchase a home already adapted which he will live

**Benefit:** The SAH/SHA benefit amount is set by law, but adjust upward annually based on cost-of-construction index. No individual may use the grant more than three times up to the maximum dollar amount allowable.

A temporary grant may be available to SAH/SHA eligible Veterans who temporarily reside in a home owned by a family member; maximum amount to adapt a family member's home for SAH grant is \$30,934/SHA is \$5,523.

**How to Apply:** Fill out and submit [VA Form 26-4555](#), *Application in Acquiring Specially Adapted Housing or Special Home Adaptation Grant*, and mailing it to your nearest [Regional Loan Center](#). Call VA at 1-800-827-1000 to have claim form mailed to you or visit a [VA Regional Office Locations](#).

For more information contact SAH via email: [sahinfo.vbaco@va.gov](mailto:sahinfo.vbaco@va.gov) or phone: (877) 827-3702. Visit our [SAH Agent page](#) to find an agent near you.

<b>Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) Grant Eligibility:</b> Maximum dollar amount allowable for SAH grant in fiscal year 2014 is \$70,465.	<b>Living Situation</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Allowed Number of Grants</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of or loss of use of both legs, <b>OR</b></li> <li>• Loss of or loss of use of both arms, <b>OR</b></li> <li>• Blindness in both eyes having only light perception, plus loss of or loss of use of one leg, <b>OR</b></li> <li>• The loss of or loss of use of one lower leg together with residuals of organic disease or injury, <b>OR</b></li> <li>• The loss of or loss of use of one leg together with the loss of or loss of use of one arm, <b>OR</b></li> <li>• Certain severe burns, <b>OR</b></li> <li>• The loss, or loss of use of one or more lower extremities due to service on or after 9/11/2001, affecting the functions of balance or propulsion to preclude ambulating without the aid of braces, crutches, canes, or a wheelchair</li> </ul>	<b>Permanent</b>	Home is owned by an eligible individual	Maximum of 3 grants, up to the maximum dollar amount allowable
<b>Special Housing Adaptation (SHA) Grant Eligibility:</b> Maximum dollar amount allowable for SHA grant in fiscal year 2015 is \$14,093.	<b>Living Situation</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Allowed Number of Grants</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blindness in both eyes with 20/200 visual acuity or less, <b>OR</b></li> <li>• Loss of or loss of use of both hands, <b>OR</b></li> <li>• Certain severe burn injuries, <b>OR</b></li> <li>• Certain severe respiratory injuries</li> </ul>	<b>Permanent</b>	Home is owned by eligible individual or family member	Maximum of 3 grants, up to the maximum dollar amount allowable



Vietnam Veteran Nate McClure receives his Silver Star Service Banner from Commissioner Joan Patricia Murphy (far left) and County Board President Toni Preckwinkle (far right) during ceremonies last year. McClure's wife, Patricia, joined her husband for the presentation.

### SILVER STAR SERVICE BANNER PROGRAM-2015

It is that time of the year, where the Cook County Board will recognize the Silver Star Banner recipients. This event will take place on Wednesday, June 10, 2015 at the Cook County Board meeting. The qualifications for the Silver Star recognition are as follows:

**To be a Silver Star veteran, the injury or illness must have originated in a war zone. Other qualifications are that the veteran must have contracted a serious illness or became disabled while serving in the war.**

The Silver Star is a symbol for sacrifice. It honors those who were active-duty members of our Armed Forces, and recognizes the cost they have paid for our freedoms. It is one small measure of remembering their devotion to country and duty that is so deserving of our thanks. To all the veterans, and to their families, we thank you for your service to our country.

Veterans must reside with Cook County. The deadline for all applications will be End of Day May 22, 2015. Please see following inserts for the attached Silver Star Banner Application.



**COOK COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**  
 118 NORTH CLARK STREET  
 ROOM 801  
 CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60602

**QUESTIONS/COMMENTS:**  
**BILL BROWNE:** 312-603-6423  
**AUDREY MOLLO:** 312-603-2221  
**EMAIL:**  
 VETERANS.AFFAIRS@COOKCOUNTYIL.GOV

### UPCOMING VETERANS BENEFIT AND RESOURCE EVENTS

*PLEASE SEE FOLLOWING INSERTS FOR MORE INFORMATION ON UPCOMING VETERANS BENEFIT AND RESOURCE EVENTS DETAILS*

#### **COOK COUNTY VETERANS AFFAIRS - SILVER STAR SERVICE BANNER APPLICATION**

- ❖ **MUST BE RECEIVED BY END OF DAY FRIDAY, MAY 22, 2015**

#### **JBVAMC (CRRC) COMMUNITY RESOURCE AND REFERRAL CENTER**

1141 S. CALIFORNIA AVENUE, CHICAGO, IL MONDAY-FRIDAY: 7:30AM TO 5:30PM

- ❖ **VA SERVICE CENTER WHICH OFFERS A ONE-STOP SHOP APPROACH TO HOMELESS VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES AS WELL AS THOSE AT-RISK OF HOMELESSNESS**

#### **VETERANS CHOICE CARD: QUICK FACTS SHEET**

- ❖ **VISIT [HTTP://WWW.VA.GOV/OPA/CHOICEACT](http://www.va.gov/opa/choiceact) FOR MORE INFORMATION**

#### **COOK COUNTY ELDER JUSTICE - SENIOR ENRICHMENT SEMINAR SERIES**

RICHARD J. DALEY CENTER, 50 WEST WASHINGTON STREET CL-115, CHICAGO, IL 60602

- ❖ **CARING FOR GRANDCHILDREN: GUARDIANSHIP AND VISITATION**
  - **THURSDAY, MARCH 5, 2015 - 11:30AM TO 1:00PM**
- ❖ **FINANCIAL LITERACY: TAKING CONTROL AND PROTECTING YOUR ASSETS**
  - **THURSDAY, MARCH 19, 2015 - 11:30AM TO 1:30PM**
  - **YOU MUST REGISTER BY CONTACTING THE ELDER JUSTICE CENTER AT (312) 603-9233**

SILVER STAR BANNER



**REQUEST A SERVICE BANNER\* PLEASE READ OVER QUALIFICATIONS FIRST\***

To request a Silver Star Service Banner for a wounded or ill service member or Veteran, please print legibly or type and completely fill out the form. ONE (1) FREE 8.5" X 14" Service Banner per recipient.

Veterans **MUST** reside within Cook County to participate in the June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015 Silver Star Banner Ceremony, with this application completed and received by the office of Cook County Veterans Affairs no later than May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2015.

**\*Qualifications for the Silver Star Service Banner Program**

Silver Star Families of America define wounded as "Definition of war zone determined by the Department of Defense"

\*Any Armed Forces personnel either currently serving honorably or those who have served honorably from ANY war, who having served in a war zone has been wounded by enemy action or who have been injured or contracted a serious illness that could be rated at least 10% disabled by the Department of Veterans Affairs. All wounds, injuries or illness must have originated in a war zone. Purple Heart recipients, victims of friendly fire, injured in a war zone, those who suffer from PTS, TBI, Agent Orange effects and Gulf War syndrome.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Cook County Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

Rank: \_\_\_\_\_ Branch: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Combat Injury/Illness: \_\_\_\_\_

Location of war zone/country of war where injury(s) and/or illness occurred: \_\_\_\_\_

Nature of injury(s) and/or illness encountered from war zone: \_\_\_\_\_

"I hereby authorize the photographer and *The Silver Star Families of America* (SSFOA) to use the images without regard for reimbursement or acknowledgement. Photographs will become the property of *The Silver Star Families of America* to use at their discretion." **Cook County Veterans Affairs will return all pictures to recipients.**

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**Email Request and Short Bio to:**

veterans.affairs@cookcountyil.gov

Or

**Mail Request, Short Bio, and Pictures (write recipients name on back for safe return) to:**

Cook County Department of Veterans Affairs  
118 N. Clark Street, Room 801, Chicago, IL 60602

[www.silverstarfamilies.org](http://www.silverstarfamilies.org)      *The Silver Star Families of America*  
Honoring our combat wounded, injured, and ill troops and Veterans. 2004-2015

To confirm your attendance or for more information regarding the 2015 Silver Star Banner Program, please contact Cook County Veterans Affairs: Bill Browne at (312) 603-6423 or Audrey Mollo at (312) 603-2221.

## VA COMMUNITY RESOURCE AND REFERRAL CENTER (CRRC)

**Location:** 1141 S. California Avenue, Chicago, IL 60608  
312-569-5750

**Business Hours:** Monday through Friday 7:30am - 5:30pm

The Jesse Brown VA Medical Center's Community Resource and Referral Center (CRRC) exemplifies the facility's commitment to providing excellent care and services in an environment of compassion that respects homeless Veterans and those at-risk of homelessness.

**CRRC:** A service center, located in the community that offers a one-stop shop approach for homeless Veterans and their families as well as those at-risk of homelessness.

**ELIGIBILITY:** Veterans (and their families) who are homeless or at-risk for homelessness. Veterans who are not eligible for VA healthcare may still be eligible for the Grant & Per Diem program or community services.

The CRRC will help access services to subsequently prevent or end homelessness. The noted center centralizes Federal, state and local partners to provide services for homeless and at-risk Veterans.

### CRRC provides the following:

- Short-term case management
- HCHV outreach services
- Contract Transitional Housing
- Access to VA medical, mental health and substance abuse programs
- Access to VA housing programs (HUD VASH, Grant & Per Diem)
- Assistance with locating market rate or subsidized housing or linkage to community housing programs
- Veterans Benefits Administration
- Public Benefits and SNAP services
- Illinois Division of Child Support
- Supportive Services for Veteran Families program/providers
- Employment Assistance (Supportive Employment, Veterans Reintegration Programs)
- Educational and Legal Resources and Linkages
- Clothing and Hygiene Kits

### Important Telephone Numbers

- Crisis Hotline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- Homeless Call Center: 1-877-424-3838 (1-877-4AID-VET)
- Homeless Veterans Chat: Text to: 838255
- CRRC: 312-569-5750
- Jesse Brown VAMC: 312-569-8387 or 888-569-5282



# QUICK FACTS ABOUT YOUR VETERANS *CHOICE CARD*

VISIT [WWW.VA.GOV/OPA/CHOICEACT/](http://WWW.VA.GOV/OPA/CHOICEACT/) FOR MORE INFORMATION.

**Before your Veterans Choice Card can be used, you must first meet the following test of eligibility for Choice Card benefits. If, after following Step 1 of the test you are not eligible for benefits, just hold on to your Card - you do not need to call us.**

## TO FIND OUT IF YOU'RE ELIGIBLE:

### STEP 1

#### PERSONALLY ASSESS YOUR ELIGIBILITY FOR *CHOICE CARD* BENEFITS.

Before you call us, ask yourself these four simple questions:

- 1) Have you been told by your local VA medical facility that you will need to wait more than 30 days from your preferred date or the date medically determined by your physician? **OR**
- 2) Is your current residence more than 40 miles from the closest VA health care facility? **OR**
- 3) Do you need to travel by plane or boat to the VA medical facility closest to your home? **OR**
- 4) Does a geographic challenge, such as extensive distances around water or other geologic formations, such as mountains, present a significant travel hardship?

### STEP 2

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may be eligible to use your *Choice Card*. **VERIFY YOUR ELIGIBILITY by calling 866-606-8198.**

When you call us, please be prepared to provide us with any other health insurance coverage you have, such as employer or union-provided health plans, so we can assess coverage responsibilities.

**IMPORTANT: If you do not receive approval, you may be responsible for some or all of the costs of the non-VA treatment you receive.**

## NOT ELIGIBLE RIGHT NOW? NO NEED TO DO ANYTHING! JUST KEEP YOUR CARD!

If you are not eligible to use the *Choice Card* right now, **keep your card in a safe and convenient location.** There is no need to call us.

**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

**THANK YOU FOR  
YOUR SERVICE TO  
OUR COUNTRY!**

