



The Veteran's Voice

Newsletter

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Edition

THE VETERANS VOICE

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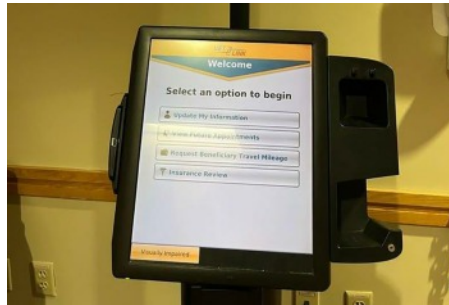
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VA Brings Back Travel Claims Kiosks After Pushback from Veterans, Caregivers



An online travel reimbursement system implemented by the Veterans Health Administration in 2020 has caused headaches for veterans used to filing claims through kiosks at VA medical facilities. The VA Inspector General's Office says the new system is not meeting any of its expectations.

A popular kiosk-based system for veterans to file reimbursement claims for travel is returning to Veterans Health Administration facilities.

The VA has paused plans to decommission the kiosks, which let veterans file for reimbursement of travel expenses to VA appointments, with the kiosks set up at most VA hospitals and clinics. The VA began removing them in November 2020 as it rolled out an online- and application-based program, the Beneficiary Travel Self Service System, or BTSSS.

Nearly immediately after BTSSS's introduction, however, veterans had trouble with it, including the online interface and app. VA staff also had difficulties with the system, developing workarounds or using the old system to approve claims.

According to the [VA Office of Inspector General](#), veterans used the BTSSS for just 49% of all claims through mid-2022. The OIG also found that while the BTSSS was meant to solve claims without human intervention at least 90% of the time, just 17% were automatically decided from February 2021 through July 2022.

In response to a query from Military.com, VA officials said Thursday the kiosks will remain in place, including [those reintroduced as a new pilot program](#) after they were removed.

Veterans also will have the option to submit a paper reimbursement form to their local VA medical center or by mail, according to VA Press Secretary Terrence Hayes.

"We have solicited for and heard feedback from many veterans who prefer the kiosks, and we are exploring ways that we can meet these specific veteran needs," Hayes said in a statement. "VA is committed to delivering timely, high-quality services to Veterans and VA beneficiaries in ways that meet their needs and are accessible to them. This includes VA travel reimbursement to eligible veterans and caregivers to and from VA authorized appointments."

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the VA suspended what was a 30-day deadline for filing travel reimbursement claims and later, as it transitioned to BTSSS, began removing the kiosks from Veterans Health Administration facilities. It's not clear how many kiosks remain available to veterans and their families.

The VA reinstated the 30-day limit in May 2023, but many veterans did not get the news. With that change and the switch to a largely digital process, many veterans and their caregivers struggled to submit travel claims.

During a conference of military and veterans' caregivers hosted by the Elizabeth Dole Foundation on Sept. 24, Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks, R-Iowa, said she appreciated that the VA wanted to make the system "better and more efficient," but actually made it much worse for veterans.

"Sometimes people in their exuberance who try to make things better sometimes make things worse," Miller-Meeks said. "Why the hell didn't they talk to veterans?"

Hayes said the latest versions of the travel reimbursement systems have been crafted with feedback from veterans, and the VA will continue to update and streamline the processes to "enhance veterans experiences when interacting with VA health care and services." The BTSSS has cost the VA \$36 million as of July.



VA IS NOW PROVIDING MORE CARE AND BENEFITS TO WOMEN VETERANS THAN EVER BEFORE IN OUR NATION'S HISTORY

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced that more than 53,000 women Veterans enrolled in VA health care between May 2023 and May 2024, marking a 20% increase over the previous year and the largest enrollment year for women Veterans on record.

Health care enrollment of women Veterans increased across all 50 states, with the greatest number of enrollments in: Texas (6,507), Florida (4,666), California (4,318), Virginia (3,806), Georgia (2,937) and North Carolina (2,776). Women Veterans are currently VA's fastest growing patient population. This historic enrollment of women Veterans into VA health care and benefits is driven in large part by the PACT Act, which President Biden signed into law in August 2022, empowering VA to deliver record health care and benefits to millions of Veterans exposed to toxins while serving in the military.

Expanding access to benefits and services for women Veterans is a key priority for VA and the entire Biden-Harris administration. This is critical because Veterans who come to VA are proven to do better. VA health care has consistently outperformed non-VA care in Veteran trust, patient satisfaction scores, overall quality ratings, and affordability.

"On this day in 1948, women were granted a formal place in our country's military. Today, the more than 2 million women Veterans living in the U.S. make up our fastest growing Veteran population," said VA Deputy Secretary Tanya Bradsher. "It's important to all of us here at VA that every woman Veteran knows she belongs at VA."

"It's our goal for every woman Veteran to receive all the benefits she has earned, and that includes world-class health care," said VA Under Secretary for Health Shereef Elnahal, M.D. "We want women Veterans to know that VA has invested in more services for women Veterans than ever before. VA can now offer women the best and most accessible options for all their care needs, and we want them to apply for the health care they deserve today."

VA is leading the way in specialized health care for women Veterans. VHA's Office of Women's Health oversees these dedicated health care services. Today, there is a women's health program led by a Women Veterans Program Manager at every VA health care system across the nation. Additional specialized women's health staff include: Women's Health Medical Directors, Women's Health Primary Care Providers, Women's Health Patient Aligned Care Teams, Maternity Care Coordinators, Breast and Cervical Cancer Screening Coordinators, and Women's Mental Health Champions. Women's health teams are also supported by LGBTQ+ Veteran Care Coordinators, Intimate Partner Violence Coordinators, and Military Sexual Trauma Coordinators.

Over the past two years, VA has dramatically expanded health care services dedicated to women Veterans. This includes expanded breast cancer screenings and mammograms for Veterans with potential toxic exposures, increased access to reproductive health services, and expanded maternity care coordination for Veterans from pregnancy through 12 months post-partum. All of this work contributes to VA's equity action plan and broader efforts to ensure that every Veteran gets the care and benefits they deserve.

VA is also delivering disability compensation benefits to an all-time record number of women Veterans, with 717,141 women Veterans receiving disability compensation benefits today. Over the past five years, an additional 197,667 women Veterans have begun receiving benefits, representing a 28% increase. More than 89% of women Veterans who have applied have received disability benefits from VA for at least one condition, on average receiving \$27,109 in earned disability compensation benefits per year.

VA's dedicated Women Veterans Call Center is here to support women Veterans in navigating all the services they may need, including health care and benefits. Call or text 855-VA-WOMEN (855-829-6636) or use the online chat feature. For more information specifically on how the PACT Act is helping Veterans and their survivors and to apply for care or benefits today, visit VA.gov/PACT or call 1-800-MYVA411 (800-698-2411).



President's Corner

Hello Everyone

Let me begin by saying that not a day goes by that I am not proud to say that I am the president of WA Chapter 1044 and each of us shows this in his or her own way, we all have ghosts that are in the closet when it comes to Viet Nam.

I can say that I am the most comfortable when I am around other Vietnam Vets. We share a common bond, a bond that can never be broken. We can disagree, argue but we all have that bond, a bond that we will bring to our grave.

Come join us at a membership meeting where we can laugh, and share our common bond. Meetings are held on the first Sunday of each month at the American Legion Post 26 508 Elm Street Biddeford. Meetings start at 1:30 (1300)

Recently we have started a "FREE COFFEE FOR VETERANS WEDNESDAYS". Each Wednesday from 09:00 - 11:00 we offer free coffee and donuts or pastry to ALL veterans no matter where or when you served. For more information there is a flyer on page 10 of this newsletter. Help us out by spreading the word to other veterans.

Take time to visit our website at <http://www.vva1044maine.org> where you will be kept updated on all the exciting things that we have planned for then upcoming year.

I look forward to working with you all and hope to see you at our meetings.

Respectfully;

Joseph Armstrong
Chapter President

From the Desk
Of
Conrad Letellier
1st Vice-President

Respectfully
Conrad Letellier
1st vice-president

Membership Corner

By

Conrad Letellier Membership Chairman

Conrad Letellier
Membership Chairman

VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER

Conrad Letellier

Recently I was contact by a veteran and asked “Will my VA benefits be reduced if I receive SS benefits?) The answer is YES and NO. Let me explain.

The Department of Veterans Affairs offers two major disability benefits programs: (1) service-connected disability compensation and (2) non-service connected disability pension. Both benefits are based on the disability of the veteran and the disability’s effect on employability. VA pension is a needs based program. To be eligible for pension, a veteran must have wartime service, low income, and be totally and permanent disabled., VA will reduce VA pension dollar-for-dollar for “countable” income. Compensation IS NOT based on need or income. Compensation is based on a disability being caused by or otherwise related to the period of military service.

Social Security Administration offers two major benefit programs: (1) Social Security Disability (SSDI) and (2) Social Security Income (SSI).

Generally, veterans can receive both SSDI and VA Compensation concurrently. For pension purposes, however, VA will count income from almost all sources, including SSDI income (but not SSI) to determine income for pension purposes.

This means that if a veteran is receiving VA pension benefits and he/she begins receiving SSDI benefits, VA will offset the amount received from Social Security from the pension payment.

Conrad Letellier
Service Officer

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 1044 Maine

Launches FREE COFFEE FOR VETERANS WEDNESDAYS

Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 1044 is located at 508 Elm Street Biddeford, Maine (basement of the American Legion Post 26). Our founding principle is "Never Again Will One Generation of Veterans Abandon Another".

Meetings are held on the first Sunday of each month. Meetings start at 1:30 pm (13:30).

To honor and appreciate our veterans, we're offering **FREE COFFEE EVERY WEDNESDAY** to all veterans!

Whether you served in the past or are currently serving, this is our small way of saying thank you for your service and dedication.

WHEN: Every Wednesday from 09:00 – 11:00 hrs.

WHERE: Vietnam Veterans of America
508 Elm Street Biddeford, Maine (Downstairs American Legion Post 26)

WHO: All veterans are welcome

Simply show your military ID or wear something that identifies your service, and your coffee is on us!

Help us spread the word and bring a fellow veteran along for a cup of gratitude. We look forward to serving you!

We offer to the veterans a place to sit and enjoy a cup of fresh coffee and a pastry or donut, read a book or magazine or just talk with fellow veterans. We also have several tables set up with board games such as chess, checkers.

A veteran's service officer will be available to answer any questions on veterans' benefits or to help file a claim for disability thru the VA system. This service is available to spouses of veterans as well.

Also available will be a veterans assistance officer to help those veterans and or families in need of assistance with heating fuel or other issues.

We will add additional days that we will be open as the demand increases

For more information contact our chapter president Joseph Armstrong at (207) 494 – 9287 or visit us at <http://www.vva1044maine.org>

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POW MIA INFORMATION

Conrad Letellier

Conrad Lettelier

**From The Desk of the Events Coordinator
Jim Davis**



**NEXT CHAPTER MEETING WILL BE SUNDAY 02 February
2025. MEETING WILL START AT 1:30 PM 13:30 HRS.
THERE WILL BE NO BOARD DIRECTORS MEETING PRIOR
TO OUR REGULAR MEETING. BOD MEETING WILL START
AT 12:00 NOON.**

Membership in VVA is the Right Choice

First I want to say "WELCOME HOME "

The goals of Vietnam Veterans of America are to promote and support the full range of issues important to Vietnam veterans. To create a new identity for this generation of veterans and to change public perception of Vietnam veterans.

VVA is a "home of our own" - a community of fellowship with people who share our experiences, needs, and hopes for the future.

Be as active as your time, talents, and interests allow. Or, simply be a proud member of VVA, knowing that your membership helps VVA work for you and your fellow Vietnam veterans.

Membership includes a subscription to our award-winning newspaper, The VVA Veteran, bringing you updates on issues and legislation affecting veterans, as well as unique articles on the people, places, and history of the Vietnam experience.

Membership is open to U.S. armed force veterans who served on active duty (for other than training purposes) in the Republic of Vietnam between February 28, 1961 and May 7, 1975, OR in any duty location between August 5, 1964 and May 7, 1975.

Our chapter is working very hard to help our brothers and sisters, their families and veterans of today.

We meet once a month at the American Legion Post 26 located at 508 Elm Street Biddeford. Meetings start at 1:30 (13:30)

If you would like further information on joining our chapter please email me your mailing address at **cwomaine@metrocast.net** I will send the information to you.