



VET NEWS



MERCER COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE COMMISSION

Volume 2
Issue 1

Phone: 419-586-3542

January-February
2024

First Annual Mercer County Veterans Brunch

Who: Veterans and family members who reside in Mercer County

What: Come enjoy a free meal with us and learn about benefits that you may be eligible for. You will have the opportunity to record your original or certified copy of your Military Discharge with the Mercer County Records Office during this time. County Veterans ID's will be available with proof of Honorable discharge recorded and another form of identification. (Meal catered by Friendly Markets of Celina, a Veteran owned Business)

When: April 27, 2024 10:00 A.M-1:00 P.M.

Where: Mercer County Fair Grounds





VA announces \$5M in grant funding for transitional supportive housing for homeless Veterans

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 1, 2024

Announcement comes just days after VA announced housing more than 46,000 homeless Veterans in 2023

WASHINGTON —Today, as a part of ongoing efforts to end Veteran homelessness, the Department of Veterans Affairs [published a Notice of Funding Opportunity](#) for approximately \$5 million in grants per year (for up to two years) to help Veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

The funds are available through VA's [Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem](#) Program, which offers financial assistance to eligible community organizations that provide Veterans with transitional housing and case management — including connecting eligible Veterans to VA benefits, community-based services, and permanent housing. These special needs grants support homeless Veterans who are women, elderly, terminally ill, chronically mentally ill, or who have care of minor dependents.

Ending Veteran homelessness is a top priority of VA and President Biden, who has made supporting Veterans a key pillar of his [Unity Agenda](#) for the nation. Earlier this week, VA announced that it permanently [housed 46,552 homeless Veterans in 2023](#) — surpassing [the calendar year goal to house 38,000 Veterans](#) by 22.5%. Thanks in part to these efforts, the number of Veterans experiencing homelessness [has fallen by 4% since early 2020](#) and by more than 52% since 2010.

“We won’t rest until every Veteran has the safe, stable home that they deserve,” said **VA Secretary Denis McDonough**. “These grants will allow VA — alongside community organizations — to help provide housing and wraparound services to more homeless and at-risk Veterans.”

VA’s efforts to combat Veteran homelessness are grounded in reaching out to homeless Veterans, understanding their unique needs, and addressing them. These efforts are built on the evidence-based “[Housing First](#)” approach, which prioritizes getting a Veteran into housing, then providing them with the wraparound support they need to stay housed, including health care, job training, legal and education assistance, and more. This initiative is part of the Biden-Harris Administration’s broader efforts to reduce homelessness.

Only the [16 existing special need grantees](#) are eligible to apply. Awards will fund two years of operations starting fiscal year 2025 on Oct. 1, 2024, and ending Sept. 30, 2026. Grant applications must be received by 4:00 p.m. Eastern Time on April 15, 2024.

[View the special need NOFO](#), and [learn more about GPD](#) or email GPDGrants@va.gov. For more information about VA's comprehensive efforts to end Veteran homelessness visit VA.gov/homeless.



More than 31,000 Veterans sign up for new VA life insurance program in first year

WASHINGTON — Today, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced that its new guaranteed-acceptance life insurance program, [VALife](#), has issued more than \$950 million in coverage to 31,400 Veterans in its first year.

When VALife [first launched](#) in January 2023, it became the first new VA life insurance program for Veterans in more than 50 years and extended life insurance access to millions of Veterans. VALife provides up to \$40,000 of whole life insurance to our nation's Veterans. For all Veterans age 80 or under with service-connected disabilities from 0-100%, acceptance in the program is guaranteed and no medical underwriting is required. Veterans can apply online through VA.gov and receive an instant decision. This program also allows self-service functions like electronic payments and beneficiary updates.

President Biden believes we have a sacred obligation to care for our nation's Veterans and their families, and he has made delivering for Veterans is a key part of his Unity Agenda for the nation. In total, VA is now providing [more insurance coverage to more policyholders than ever before in our nation's history](#) – currently serving 5.6 million Veterans, service members, and their families with \$1.5 trillion of insurance.

“All Veterans deserve to know that their families will have financial support when they pass away,” said **Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough**. “VALife helps make that happen, providing well-earned peace of mind to Veterans and their families nationwide.”

VALife increases Veteran access to life insurance in several ways:

- **There is no time limit to apply:** VA's previous life insurance program for service-disabled Veterans, [Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance](#) (S-DVI), required most Veterans to apply for insurance within two years of receiving their disability rating. VALife has no such time constraint for Veterans aged 80 and under.
- **There is no health requirement to apply:** Under S-DVI, Veterans had to be in good health except for service-connected conditions. VALife has no medical evaluation tied to it.
- **Veterans are eligible for more coverage than before:** Under S-DVI, most Veterans could only receive up to \$10,000 of coverage.

Under VALife, all Veterans are eligible for up to \$40,000 of coverage.

VALife premium rates are competitive with, or better than, rates for policies with similar coverage available in the private sector, and \$40,000 of coverage is more coverage than what other similar products offer. The policy will build cash value after the first two years of coverage when the face value goes into effect. If a Veteran passes away during this two-year waiting period, the named beneficiary will receive all premiums paid plus interest. VALife does not offer waiver of premiums.

Veterans currently enrolled in S-DVI have the option to keep their current coverage or switch to VALife. These Veterans can apply for VALife at any time; however, if they apply before Dec. 31, 2025, they can also retain coverage under S-DVI during the two-year waiting period for the VALife death benefit to go into effect.

To learn more visit va.gov/life-insurance/.



VA has screened 5 million Veterans for toxic exposures, paving the way for early detection and treatment of health conditions

A key component of the PACT Act and President Biden's Unity Agenda for the nation, these toxic exposure screenings begin an important conversation about

exposure health risks between Veterans and their medical providers

WASHINGTON — Today, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced that it has screened 5 million Veterans for toxic exposures — a critical step to detecting, understanding, and treating potentially life-threatening health conditions. Of the 5 million Veterans who have received the screening, 2.1 million (43%) reported at least one potential exposure.

The screening takes five to 10 minutes and begins with VA health providers asking Veterans if they believe they experienced any toxic exposures while serving in the armed forces. Veterans who answer yes are then asked follow-up questions and offered connections to information on benefits, registry-related medical exams, and other clinical resources, as indicated. Their responses to the screenings are then added to their VA medical record to be included as part of their future care.

This milestone comes just 13 months after the screening [launched](#) at VA medical centers and clinics nationwide as a part of the PACT Act. The PACT Act expanded VA health care and benefits to millions of Veterans, paving the way for VA to deliver [more care and more benefits to more Veterans than ever before](#) in 2023.

“By screening Veterans for toxic exposures, we can improve their health care and detect potential health challenges as early as possible,” said **VA Secretary Denis McDonough**. “This leads to better health outcomes — and better quality of life — for these heroes who were exposed to toxins while serving our country.”

“We have made significant progress toward our goal to screen all Veterans enrolled in VA health care for toxic exposures at least once every five years,” said **VA Under Secretary for Health Shereef Elnahal, M.D.** “But most importantly, this milestone means we’ve had 5 million opportunities to provide Veterans with the exposure-informed care they deserve.”

The screening covers a variety of different types of toxic exposures, but the two most reported exposures are burn pits and Agent Orange, which together make up more than 60% of Veteran responses. More than half of the Veterans screened (2.6 million) are 65 years old or older, with Veterans under 45 making up just over 900,000 of those screened. Of the nearly 650,000 Women Veterans who regularly use VA care, more than 535,000 have been screened for toxic exposures.

While the toxic exposure screening does not play a role in determining disability compensation, it does provide an opportunity to connect Veterans with the resources they need to file a claim. Each Veteran who reports a potential exposure receives a letter with information about how to apply for benefits.

To fulfill the goal of screening every Veteran enrolled in VA health care at least once every five years, VA is exploring new and innovative ways to reach out to Veterans, including those who are vulnerable or don’t routinely access VA care. The Department is also in the pilot stages of developing a self-screening tool that will make the initial question of the screening even more easily accessible to Veterans with access to web-based electronic communications.

The PACT Act has expanded and extended access to VA health care for Veterans. Thanks to the PACT Act and other new laws, many groups of Veterans are now able to enroll directly in VA health care without first applying for VA benefits – including World War II Veterans, Vietnam Veterans, Gulf War Veterans, Veterans who deployed to a combat zone and transitioned out of the service less than 10 years ago, and [more](#). As President Biden directed, all remaining toxic-exposed Veterans will be eligible to enroll directly in VA health care next year under the PACT Act – including any Veteran who served in Iraq, Afghanistan, and many other combat zones during the Persian Gulf War or after 9/11. Veterans who aren’t currently enrolled can [submit an application](#) and receive their toxic exposure screening after enrollment.

The PACT Act also expanded VA benefits for millions of Veterans, making more than 300 health conditions “presumptive” for service connection. This means that if an [eligible](#) Veteran has one of these health conditions, VA automatically assumes that the condition was caused by the Veteran’s service and provides compensation and care accordingly. VA encourages Veterans and their survivors to apply for these benefits now at [VA.gov/PACT](https://va.gov/PACT).

For more information about how the PACT Act is helping Veterans and their survivors, visit VA’s [PACT Act Dashboard](#). To apply for care or benefits today, visit [VA.gov/PACT](https://va.gov/PACT) or call 1-800-MYVA411.



Financial Assistance

If you are, or know, a Veteran or Widow of a Veteran who is struggling with monthly expenses, call the office to set up an appointment for financial assistance. We can help with mortgage/rent, utilities, and food.

There are residency and other requirements you will be screened for to verify you are eligible to receive assistance through the Mercer County Veterans Service Commission. As well as documents that you will need to bring to the appointment with you.

All financial assistance candidates are interviewed, a debt to income ratio is completed, and if warranted, the case is presented to the Veterans Service Commission Board for decision at the regular monthly meeting on the 4th Tuesday each month.

All decisions regarding financial assistance are made by the Board.

Mercer County Veterans Service Office Activity 10/01/2023-2/7/2024

In Office Appointments-188
Intent to File Submitted to VA-26
Veterans/Survivors Pensions-8
Veterans Compensation-22
Veterans' Healthcare-11

VA TRANSPORTATION October 2023- February 7, 2024

Veterans to Dayton VA -93
Veterans to Lima Area - 78
Veterans to Cincinnati Area- 5
Veterans to Ft. Wayne-7
Total Trips - 105

Mercer County Veterans Service Commission Office

Located at:
220 W. Livingston St. B270
Celina, Ohio 45822

Monday - Friday 8:00 - 4:30
APPOINTMENTS ARE HELPFUL
BUT NOT REQUIRED
Phone (419) 586-3542
Fax (419) 586-7702

MONTHLY BOARD MEETING
VSC Board meets every
4th Tuesday of the month in the
Veterans Service Commission Office
@ 9:00a.m., unless otherwise posted.

Commissioners

Terry Kremer, AL
Kevin Lange, At Large
Tom Leininger, DAV
Charles Howell, VFW
Ed Davis, VVA

Staff

Eric Pugh - Director/CVSO
[**Eric.Pugh@Veterans.mercercountyohio.gov**](mailto:Eric.Pugh@Veterans.mercercountyohio.gov)

Blair Temple- CVSO
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Van Drivers

Mark Homan
Anthony Schmitz
James Swartz
Don Rammel