

INAUGURAL NEWSLETTER

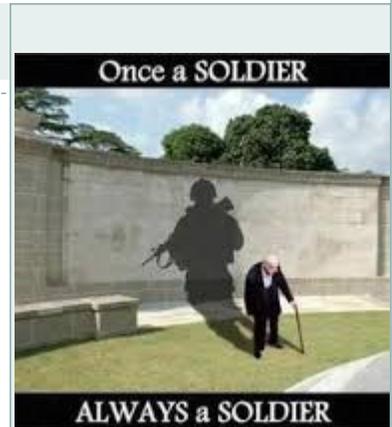
Why do a newsletter?

The purpose of this newsletter and in upcoming issues, is to assist veterans and their families in understanding all the involved issues that could effect them. That sounds easy but in reality, like everything concerning the VA, it's easier said than done.

Donna Elderkin and I regularly discuss what is important for all veterans to know and understand. First on that list is each veteran needs to contact our office to seek assistance. We cannot give guidance or support unless the issue is presented to us.

Next is to understand that legislature and the VA are constantly changing. What was true years ago, may not apply today. A good example concerns those veterans affected by Agent Orange. At one point the VA did not acknowledge the far-reaching effects of the herbicide. Today we have a listing of conditions that could apply to veterans to establish service-connection.

Lastly, to assist in publicizing updates and changes, we will use this newsletter, newspaper articles, and other media outlets to get the word out. Please access this information and stay informed.



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DATES OF INTEREST

- Veterans Day—11 Nov 2015
- Operation Recognition—11 Nov 2015
- Thanksgiving—26 Nov 2015
- Office Closed— 26 & 27 Nov
- Christmas—25 Dec 2015 (Fri)



Check Your
Disability & Survivor
Claims Status

www.ebenefits.va.gov

I changed
my password
to "incorrect"
so whenever
I forget what it is,
the computer will say
"your password is
incorrect."

EBENEFITS...POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE?

Ebenefits, what is it and what is it good for? Well, contrary to popular opinion, there are some good aspects to ebenefits. Most of the positives apply to those areas that require minimum paperwork and can be completed quickly...electronically. For instance, all of the following can be easily handled through ebenefits: Add/remove dependents, Education Benefits, Vocational Rehab and Employment, Certificates of Eligibility for VA home loans, Sharing VA Medical Records, and acquiring Hearing Aid batteries. Ebenefits is not a good option for complex cases that require research, multiple forms, strict deadlines, and acquiring written statements. Bottom line—check with us for guidance.

“A lawyer is a person who writes a 10,000-word document and calls it a "brief.” - Franz Kafka



Albany Law School is hosting a Veterans' Service Day on November 14, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m

If you are a veteran with a legal issue and you would like to meet with a volunteer attorney for a free appointment, please contact **207-841-7462** or **ihunter@albanylaw.edu** to reserve an appointment. First come, first served.

The program is open to all veterans seeking general legal help, including areas around employment, business, and more.

This event is made possible through generous community support. Visit **www.albanylaw.edu/veterans** or **www.facebook.com/alsveterans** for more information.

LOCATION: ALBANY LAW SCHOOL, 80 NEW SCOTLAND AVE, ALBANY, NY 12208



ALBANY LAW SCHOOL
PRO BONO PROGRAM

VETERANS TAX EXEMPTION DEADLINE NEARS

Veterans and their families are reminded that the deadline for applying for a veteran's real property tax exemption is approaching. **March 1, 2016** is the deadline for filing an application for tax exemption in most towns across New York State. If the application misses the deadline, the tax benefit can be lost for another year, and not provide a tax savings until the year 2017. The cut-off date may vary in some municipalities and veterans should check with their local assessor to ensure that their application is filed timely.

Veterans' real property tax exemption varies from community to community. The state allows municipalities to offer a partial property tax exemption under two laws: the original statute, the so-called "eligible funds" exemption; and the newer law, the "alternative veterans exemption." The eligible funds exemption offers a \$7,500 reduction on assessed value of property purchased with veterans funds, such as mustering out pay, disability compensation and pension, war bonus and veterans insurance dividends.

The alternative exemption was implemented in 1984 and provides an exemption of 15-percent for wartime service, and additional 10-percent for duty in a combat zone and an added exemption equal to half of the veteran's service-connected disability rating. The alternative exemption, if locally adopted, authorized communities to establish a dollar value cap on each of the three categories within the benefit.

Legislation extends veteran real property tax exemption benefits to expeditionary medal recipients. Expeditionary medals are awarded by the armed forces, navy or marine corps to persons **who did not serve during a designated "period of war" or in a combat theatre or zone, but in military operations where hostilities were present or imminent.** Veterans who have received an Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, a Navy Expeditionary Medal, a Marine Corps Expeditionary Medal, or a Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal may qualify for a 25-percent real property tax exemption on their residence under the "alternative" veterans exemption.

Also, within Delaware County, the Towns of Walton, Middletown, Kortright, Stamford and Meredith have adopted the new Cold War Exemption which means a person who served on active duty in the United States armed forces, during the time period from September 2, 1945 to December 26, 1991, and was discharged or released under honorable conditions. Qualifying residential real property shall be exempt from taxation to the extent of 15% of the assessed value of such property for active duty service, and in addition would receive 50 percent of a service-connected compensation rating.

If a Cold War veteran received an exemption under real property tax law section 458 (Eligible Funds) or 458-a (Alternative), the Cold War veteran shall not be eligible to receive the exemption under this local law.

If you are currently receiving a veterans' real property tax exemption you are not required to re-apply.

For more information and assistance in securing tax exemption or other veterans benefits, veterans and their families can call Delaware County Veterans Services at 607-832-5345.

By Donna Elderkin, Assistant Director, Veteran Services



VA Dental Insurance Plan

The Department of Veterans Affairs provides comprehensive dental care to Veterans who meet eligibility standards; however, the benefit is not available to many Veterans. VA would like all Veterans and beneficiaries to have access to good oral health. Good oral health is more than just a nice smile or ability to chew favorite foods – it impacts a person’s overall health throughout his or her life.

VA’s Dental Insurance Program (VADIP) offers enrolled Veterans and beneficiaries of VA’s Civilian Health and Medical Program (CHAMPVA) the opportunity to purchase dental insurance at a reduced cost. VA is offering this service through Delta Dental and MetLife.

VADIP was created to assess Veterans’ interest in and the effectiveness of providing a premium-based dental insurance plan to eligible individuals. The program is mandated by Public Law 111-163, Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010. The three-year, national pilot program was launched January 1, 2014.

Eligibility for VADIP

Veterans enrolled in the VA health care program and CHAMPVA beneficiaries are eligible to participate in VADIP. Participation in VADIP does not affect Veterans’ eligibility for VA dental services and treatment.

Dependents of Veterans, except those eligible under CHAMPVA, are not eligible for VADIP; however, the insurance carriers may offer dependents separate coverage options.

Continued next page



Dental Plan Information

VA has contracted with Delta Dental and MetLife, private insurers, to administer VADIP.

Individuals interested in participating in VADIP can complete an application online, over the phone or by mail. A direct link to each provider's VADIP webpage is available from www.va.gov/healthbenefits/VADIP. The following table shows contact information for each provider.

PROVIDER	TOLL-FREE NUMBER	WEBSITE	MAILING ADDRESS
Delta Dental	1-855-370-3303	www.deltadentalvadip.org	Correspondence Delta Dental of California Federal Government Programs PO Box 537013 Sacramento, CA 95853-7013
MetLife	1-888-310-1681	www.metlife.com/VADIP	MetLife Dental Claims PO Box 981282 El Paso, TX 79998-1282

Coverage will be provided throughout the United States and its territories. The initial participation period will be at least 12 calendar months. Afterward, VADIP beneficiaries can renew their participation for another 12-month period or be covered month-to-month, as long as the participant remains eligible for coverage and VA continues VADIP.

Multiple plan options allow participants to select a plan that provides benefits and premiums that meet their dental needs and budget. Offered plans vary and may include diagnostic, preventative, surgical, emergency and endodontic/restorative treatment. Each participant will pay a fixed monthly premium for coverage, in addition to any copayments required by his or her plan.

For more information on VADIP, visit www.va.gov/healthbenefits/VADIP and click the insurer's link for specific information regarding registration, rates and services, or call Delta Dental at 1-855-370-3303 or MetLife at 1-888-310-1681.



VETERANS CHOICE PROGRAM EXPANSION

VA implements the first of several Veterans Choice Program eligibility expansions

Effective immediately all enrolled Veterans may now be eligible to participate.

Public Law 114-41, the Surface Transportation and Veterans Health Care Choice Improvement Act of 2015, was signed into law on July 31, 2015, and aims to “provide resource flexibility to the Department of Veterans Affairs for health care services and other purposes.” Thanks to the new law, VA is able to enhance the Veterans Choice Program in a number of ways, including expanding eligibility to all enrolled Veterans.

The department will implement these changes in several phases, with the first phase being effective immediately. Veterans are no longer required to have been enrolled in VA health care on or before August 1, 2014, in order to meet basic eligibility requirements for the program. If a Veteran is enrolled in the VA health care system and meets one of the specific eligibility criteria, he/she may be eligible for the program. In other words, any Veteran who is enrolled in VA health care, regardless to when they enrolled, may now be eligible for the Veterans Choice Program.

Along with being enrolled in VA health care, Veterans must meet at least one of the additional wait times, distance or other criteria in order to be considered eligible for the Veterans Choice Program. This modification, and the additional changes that will follow in the upcoming months, serve a critical purpose of allowing greater numbers of Veterans access to care under this Program. We look forward to continuing our dialogue with Veterans and our partners to ensure continued improvements to Veterans’ access to care.

For more details about the Veterans Choice Program, see www.va.gov/opa/choiceact.

What is the Choice Program? If you are already enrolled in VA health care, the Choice Program allows you to get health care from non-VA doctors. Using this program does NOT impact your existing VA health care, or any other VA benefit.

Am I Eligible? If you are already enrolled in VA health care, you may be able to receive care from non-VA facilities, instead of waiting for a VA appointment or traveling to a VA facility.

You are eligible if:

You have been (or will be) waiting more than **30 days** for VA medical care.

You live more than **40 miles** away from a VA medical care facility or face one of several excessive travel burdens (see below).

Travel Burdens:

The Veteran resides in a location other than Guam, American Samoa, or the Republic of the Philippines and needs to travel by air, boat, or ferry to the VA medical facility closest to his/her home.

The Veteran faces an unusual or excessive burden traveling to a VA medical facility based on geographic challenges, environmental factors, or a medical condition. Staff at the Veteran’s local VA medical facility will work with him/her to determine if he/she is eligible for any of these reasons. **Continued....next page.**



The Veteran resides in a State or a United States Territory without a full-service VA medical facility that provides hospital care, emergency services and surgical care having a surgical complexity of standard, and resides more than 20 miles from such a VA facility.

NOTE: This criterion applies to Veterans residing in Alaska, Hawaii, New Hampshire, Guam, American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Also note that some Veterans in New Hampshire reside within 20 miles of White River Junction VAMC and are therefore not eligible for the Choice Program.

How do I Sign Up? To get started, you'll need to pick a health care provider, gather some information and give us a call in order to set up an appointment. We will work with you to ensure you are approved for care in your community and schedule you with a local care provider of your choice.

Step 1: Check if you are eligible.

Step 2: Explore which doctors are participating in your area.

Step 3: Make sure you have information on hand about any other health insurance coverage you may have.

Step 4: Call 1-866-606-8198 to make sure you qualify and to schedule an appointment.

When you call, we will:

Ask for your ZIP code.

Ask for your address.

Check to make sure you are eligible for this program.

Check which of your needs are covered by the VA.

Ask for your preferred community provider. Unfortunately, not all providers will be eligible to participate so if your preferred provider is not available, we will recommend other providers in your area.

Additional Program Information

- The Choice Program does not impact your existing VA health care or any other VA benefit.
- If you did not receive a Choice Card or if you cannot find your card, please call **1-866-606-8198** to learn more about eligibility for the Veterans Choice Program.
- If you are satisfied with your wait time at a VA facility and wish to continue waiting for VA care, there is nothing you need to do at this time.
- Care in the community is only covered by VA for medical needs which have been approved by your VA physician. We can happily schedule an appointment for other medical needs, but we can only cover the cost of care related to your VA-approved health needs.

The Veteran Choice Program is part of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (VACAA).

"Our concern is to make sure we have the resources to get our veterans the care they need, when they need it, where they need it."

Kristin Cunningham, an official with the Veterans Health Administration

TRANSPORTATION

John Tromblee

For those of you who don't know John yet. He enjoys sports, driving veterans, answering phones, and listening to various types of music.

He is a full-time driver who has a background in mechanics and general handyman stuff.

Oh yeah, he enjoys his beard!

Below is some general information from John to assist all veterans in procuring rides to Albany VA.



1. Please be on time...better yet, please be slightly early for your scheduled time.
2. When you give the office the date of your next ride up, please give the times for ALL appointments that day, not just the first one.
3. Even if you give your appointment to me (as the driver), please follow up with the office to avoid confusion.
4. Please check with the driver after finishing your appointment (s) at the VA.
5. Please remember that you are all going for some type of care, nobody wants to stay later than needed, so just be nice to your fellow riders.

FOR THE CURRENT PICKUP POINTS AND TIMES GO TO: <http://www.co.delaware.ny.us/Veterans>

Some things you may not have known about our other drivers:

- ◆ Jerry Phoenix, one of our part-time drivers, is a father and grandfather who actually believes his grandchildren walk on water...who am I to argue.
- ◆ Jerry may not be a veteran but he is a caring individual who goes out of his way to ensure that every veteran he is responsible for gets the best treatment possible.
- ◆ Kevin Lee, another one of our part-time drivers, is a father and grandfather who actually believes his grandchildren walk on water...wait, where have I heard this before???
- ◆ Kevin is a veteran who is extremely active in the Delhi American Legion Post 190 and easily understands the issues that veterans face on a daily basis.

All I know is that both Donna and I feel extremely lucky to have such a warm and caring crew taking care of our Delaware County Veterans...THANK YOU MEN!

To reserve a seat, call our office...607-832-5345

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT VETERANS AND OUR SERVICES

- ◆ Veteran Services and Veteran Affairs are the same...definitely not, we're the advocate for the Veteran!
- ◆ We have immediate computer access to Veteran's files...not yet, we have forms management and hard copy.
- ◆ We can bring up any Veterans DD Form 214...never have, the Veteran has to bring it in and we copy it.
- ◆ Applications for Aid & Attendance is simply picking up a form...much more than just that, it requires many items that needs to be reviewed, including income verification, kinship documents, military discharge, medical expenses, & net worth.
- ◆ The Director for Veteran Services is George Clooneys twin...wait, I don't understand where's the misconception?
- ◆ All Veterans are entitled to burial benefits...unfortunately, not true.
- ◆ Anyone who has been in the military is entitled to benefits...no, there are many case-by-case requirements.
- ◆ Only veterans who served during a war time period can get VA health care...nope, any veteran who was honorably discharged.
- ◆ Donna is always prim and proper...no way, I personally heard her say a swear word one day... I think.
- ◆ Most of our homeless population consist of veterans...not even close. Less than 10% of our homeless population are veterans.
- ◆ Veterans have an unemployment issue...not really. Unemployed veterans currently stand at 7.8% as opposed to civilian rate of 8.2%.
- ◆ War movies are just like real life...please! As is the usual case, real-life and fiction are nowhere the same.
- ◆ All Air Force members know the words to the Air Force song...nope, present company included.
- ◆ Those of us in Veteran Services truly enjoy what we do. Okay, this is true. From our drivers to the office staff, we look forward to assisting our veterans.

Donna's Favorites:

- ◆ Dogs & Veterans
- ◆ Shopping
- ◆ Pens, pads, and supplies (don't ask)
- ◆ Caring & assisting
- ◆ Her family, especially her Granddaughter
- ◆ Hallmark Channel
- ◆ Plants and more plants
- ◆ Our Veterans (twice)

DONNA ELDERKIN, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR DELAWARE COUNTY VETERAN SERVICES



Caring for veterans shouldn't be a partisan issue. It should be an American one. Jennifer Granholm

A man of substance

In closing, let me tell a story. Mr Hughes, the local football coach found out that Eddie, a high school senior on the football team had lost his Dad (a Vietnam Veteran) to a sudden illness. Coach remembered seeing the Dad at every game, even though Eddie rarely played. On the morning of the next game, Eddie showed up in full gear and really wanted to play. Coach was hesitant but didn't want to upset the young man anymore than he had to.

Eddie went in the game and played the game of his life. He was everywhere. Defense, offense, special teams, his energy took the coaches breath away. After the game Mr Hughes sat down with Eddie and let him know how much he appreciated his effort and that he felt bad because his Dad wasn't able to see Eddie perform. Eddie told him, "Coach, you don't understand, my Dad was blinded saving a fellow GI. This was the first game he could actually see me play and I wanted to make him as proud of me as I was of him!"

Most Veterans never realize how often they have touched a life in some way!

DELAWARE COUNTY VETERAN SERVICES

1 Gallant Avenue, Suite A
Delhi, NY 13753

Phone: 607-832-5345

Fax: 607-832-6079

E-mail: [vet@co.delaware.ny.us](mailto:veter@co.delaware.ny.us)



Charlie Piper, Director

Never was so much owed by so many to so few— Winston Churchill