

August 2014

Hangar Flying Newsletter

A Publication of the JBLM McChord Field Retiree Activities Office for Air Force Retirees, their spouses and survivors. Department of the Air Force, 100 Joe Jackson Blvd, Customer Service Mall Rm 1001, McChord Field WA 98438-1114; Phone (253) 982-3214 (Voice Mail 24 hours a day) Fax 253-982-5234. Email – retaffairs@us.af.mil Web Site www.mcchordrao.com Retiree Activities Office: Open 0900-1200 Monday - Friday

TRICARE Website: Easier to Use: On July 24, TRICARE.mil unveiled a new design to give TRICARE's 9.6 million beneficiaries clear and easy access to benefit information. Users now have more ways to browse the site. They've added easier navigation, a login button for quicker access to their partner's secure services, and a section on the homepage dedicated to life-changing events. Tricare also streamlined and reorganized their content so users can find what they're looking for in the way they're expecting.

Tricare has been listening to their beneficiaries. The new design is the result of an ongoing review about what beneficiaries are looking for when they visit TRICARE.mil. They are using satisfaction surveys, analytics, and user feedback to highlight key information. They are also closely monitoring their most visited pages and the most frequent search terms on TRICARE.mil. Some of the most popular things that beneficiaries look for include:

- What plan can I use?
- What's covered?
- How do I find a doctor?
- How much will I pay?

Tricare has paired these findings with an extensive review of 34 government and private sector health insurance plan websites. This allowed them to apply common industry practices of website navigation, organization, content, naming convention, and readability.

TRICARE.mil is a powerful educational tool for beneficiaries to learn about their health benefits and stay updated on the latest changes. Visit www.tricare.mil <<http://www.tricare.mil/>> to see the new design and explore the TRICARE benefit. (SOURCE: TRICARE News Release at <http://www.tricare.mil/webupdates080514>)

TRICARE Increases Access to Qualified Mental Health Counselors: The TRICARE mental health benefit just got bigger. Beneficiaries can now choose between two qualified mental health counselor types: independently practicing TRICARE Certified Mental Health Counselors (TCMHC) and Supervised Mental Health Counselors (SMHC).

TRICARE will authorize TCMHCs as independent providers who meet specific qualification criteria. They must have a master's degree from a mental health counseling program accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP) and pass the National Clinical Mental Health Counseling Examination (NCMHCE) by Jan. 1, 2017. TCMHCs can independently treat TRICARE beneficiaries but SMHCs will continue to practice under the referral and supervision of TRICARE-authorized physicians. (Continued on next Page)

Some beneficiaries may worry they won't be able to continue seeing their current mental health care provider under this new guidance. "This does not have to be a concern," says Patricia G. Moseley, Ph.D., military child and family behavioral health senior policy analyst at the Defense Health Agency. "TRICARE will not phase out SMHCs but instead will continue to authorize them as TRICARE providers indefinitely. So beneficiaries who are currently receiving treatment from a mental health counselor can continue their care with their existing provider whether that is an SMHC or a TCMHC."

The Defense Health Agency is tasked with making military medicine stronger, better and more relevant for the future. This change moves us one step closer to that goal, ensuring the availability of well-qualified, independent providers for our beneficiaries. For more information about TRICARE mental health coverage, visit www.tricare.mil/mentalhealth. (Source: *Tricare*)

TRICARE Prime® Enrollment Fees for Fiscal Year 2015: TRICARE Prime enrollment fees are changing for fiscal year 2015 (Oct. 1, 2014–Sept. 30, 2015) for retired service members and their eligible family members, survivors and former spouses. The annual fee for an individual beneficiary will be \$277.92 and the annual fee for beneficiary family coverage will be \$555.84. There are no TRICARE Prime enrollment fees for active duty service members and active duty family members. For details or more information, visit www.tricare.mil/costs. (Source: *Tricare Health Matters West*)

Services and Aid for Blind Veterans: Managing Agency Veterans Health Administration.
Program Description

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides personal and social adjustment programs and medical or health-related services for eligible blinded Veterans at selected VA Medical Centers maintaining blind rehabilitation centers.

Assistance comes in many forms. Services include assessment skill training, counseling, peer support, family education, and the provision of and training with assistive technology such as magnification devices, and adapted computers.

General Program Requirements

Blind Veterans' services are part of the Medical Benefits Package. You must be enrolled in the VA health care system or be eligible based on one of the exceptions in the law. Please visit the [Basic Medical Benefits Package for Veterans](#) program for more information.

Generally, in order to receive VA benefits and services, the Veteran/Service member's character of discharge or service must be under other than dishonorable conditions (e.g., honorable, under honorable conditions, general). However, individuals receiving undesirable, bad conduct, and other types of dishonorable discharges may qualify for VA benefits depending on a determination made by VA.

Your Next Steps: The following information will lead you to the next steps to apply for this benefit.

Application Process : For more information, see the Program Contact Information below.

Program Contact Information: For more information, visit: <http://www.va.gov/blindrehab>

If you have questions:

- Visit the [Inquiry Routing & Information Systems](#) (IRIS) website to search Frequently Asked Questions or ask a question online
- Call 1-877-222-8387

eBenefits is a one-stop source for information on Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs benefits and services. With a free Premium level eBenefits account, Veterans and Servicemembers can conduct self-service transactions such as checking claim status information, GI Bill enrollment, and obtaining copies of

civil service preference letters, DD214, and other personal information. For further information and to register for a free Premium level account, visit the [eBenefits website](#). (Source *Benifits.gov*)

Military Exposure Registry Examination Program

Managing Agency U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs <http://www.va.gov/Subscribe>

Program Description

Veterans may have been exposed to a range of chemical, physical, and environmental hazards during military service.

Veterans who believe they may have been exposed to toxins or certain vaccinations with side effects are eligible to receive a voluntary medical assessment that will help the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) track data on Veterans' health.

General Program Requirements: Registry examinations are not part of the Medical Benefits Package. You do not have to apply for health care to get a registry exam. There are no length-of-service requirements.

For more information, please visit [VA's Public Health homepage](#).

Your Next Steps: The following information will lead you to the next steps to apply for this benefit.

Application Process : To receive a medical exam, contact your local VA Environmental Health Coordinator. Contact information for local health coordinators can be found on [VA's Public Health "Directory of Environmental Health Coordinators" page](#).

Program Contact Information: For more information about military exposures, visit [VA's Public Health homepage](#). If you have questions:

- Visit the [Inquiry Routing & Information System](#) (IRIS) website to search Frequently Asked Questions or ask a question on-line
- Call 1-800-827-1000
- Call 1-800-829-4833, if you are hearing impaired

To apply for additional Veterans' benefits and view your benefit status, open an eBenefits Premium account. eBenefits is a one-stop source for information on Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs benefits and services. With a free Premium level eBenefits account, Veterans and Service members can conduct self-service transactions such as checking claim status information, GI Bill enrollment, and obtaining copies of civil service preference letters, DD214, and other personal information. For further information and to register for a free Premium level account, visit the [eBenefits website](#). (Source: *Benefits.gov*)

VA executive: Wait times can be fixed in 2 years: Long wait times for veterans to get health care can be cleared up in two years, along with investigations of employees accused of falsifying data to hide the problem, Deputy Veterans Affairs Secretary Sloan Gibson said Wednesday.

Gibson, who toured the Denver VA hospital, said his department has to change its culture to get employees to take responsibility for solving problems. Most VA workers are dedicated and know change is necessary, he said.

"I really believe that in as little as two years the conversation can completely change," Gibson said.

Asked if that meant both the wait times and the personnel investigations can be resolved in that much time, he said yes.

The department has been shaken by reports of long wait times and that some veterans had died while waiting for treatment. Some workers have been accused of hiding the scheduling problems.

The VA has reported recent progress on reducing delays. An audit released last month showed 46,000 new applicants for care have had to wait at least three months for initial appointments as of mid-June, down from 57,000 in mid-May.

The agency announced last week it planned to fire two supervisors and that four others would be disciplined, all in Colorado and Wyoming. They were accused of falsifying health care data.

Gibson said those were the only personnel investigations completed so far but more employees will be disciplined.

One of the six facing discipline is Ralph Gigliotti, who oversees VA health care facilities in all or parts of nine states in the Rocky Mountain region. The VA did not say what action Gigliotti faced, but he attended Gibson's news conference Wednesday, sitting just to Gibson's right.

He left without speaking and didn't immediately respond to a request for comment left with a spokesman.

Gibson repeated his pledge that whistleblowers would not be retaliated against. The Project on Government Oversight, a private watchdog group, reported last month that medical professionals nationwide who pointed out problems at the VA suffered retaliation.

Gibson said the Denver veterans hospital was the 14th he has visited in two months. He was headed for hospitals in Seattle and Portland, Oregon, when he left Colorado.

Gibson became deputy secretary in February and was appointed acting secretary when retired Gen. Eric Shinseki resigned in late May amid the scandal. Robert McDonald was confirmed as the new secretary last week. *(Source: Defense News Early Bird Brief)*

VA audit: A third of Puget Sound schedulers say they're told to manipulate patient wait-time data:

One third of Lakewood and Seattle Veterans Affairs hospital schedulers surveyed in an audit say they were instructed to change how long military veterans waited for appointments, according to a nationwide VA record-keeping audit.

It is a strikingly high percentage that surprised lawmakers and appeared to contradict statements from top VA officials who said in May that Northwest hospitals did not have serious problems with wait-time data being doctored.

"These revelations are unacceptable to everyone who believes it's our responsibility to provide quality care for those who served," said Rep. Derek Kilmer, D-Gig Harbor.

The new data comes from an audit launched amid allegations that VA hospitals in Arizona and Colorado manipulated data on how long patients waited to see doctors by keeping "secret waiting lists" outside of normal VA record-keeping systems.

The VA in June released a preliminary report confirming that officials at the VA medical center in Phoenix misreported data on delays in care. The report indicated the practice was common across the VA, and it led to the resignation of VA Secretary Eric Shinseki. Congress has been working on a bipartisan deal to improve care and increase accountability at the VA, with a projected price tag of at least \$15 billion.

The preliminary audit report indicated VA hospitals in the Puget Sound, Portland and in Spokane should receive further review from VA inspectors, but it did not cite any specific wrongdoing.

At the time, VA Northwest Director Lawrence Carroll wrote in a memo to employees that auditors "found no evidence of secret waiting lists. Rather it was confirmed, that on the whole, staff understood what they needed to do in regards to scheduling and managing wait times."

Megan Crowley, spokeswoman for the VA's Northwest region, said Carroll made those statements after hearing preliminary reports from auditors following their hospital visits. She had not seen the more detailed information until this week.

"There was absolutely no intent to paint a better picture or give false information," she said. "We were responding with the information we had at the time."

It's not clear how many schedulers in Lakewood and Seattle were interviewed by the VA auditors. A total of about 3,700 VA staffers were interviewed nationwide.

At 33.3 percent, the percentage of VA Puget Sound staffers surveyed who reportedly were told to manipulate data is far higher than the national average of 13 percent.

It's also the highest percentage among large hospitals in the Northwest, according to a report obtained by The News Tribune. In Portland, 2.5 percent of schedulers surveyed reported being told to manipulate data. In Anchorage, the rate was 10 percent.

Rep. Denny Heck, D-Olympia, called the new information from the audit "deeply disturbing." He is planning to visit the VA's American Lake hospital in Lakewood to follow up on the report.

A small portion of VA Puget Sound staffers surveyed — fewer than 5 percent — told auditors they sometimes track appointment requests outside the VA's official scheduling system. *(Continued on next page)*

By contrast, 31.3 percent of staffers surveyed in Spokane told auditors they track appointments outside the normal system. That kind of “off the books” record-keeping was central to the allegations of wrongdoing in Phoenix. “We’re just taking every new bit of information as we get it, and we’re taking it very seriously,” Crowley said.

VA Puget Sound Director Michael Murphy has held several staff meetings on appropriate record-keeping over the past three months, VA spokeswoman Kim Wilkie said. About 300 Seattle and Lakewood schedulers attended the first meetings in May.

He told staff members they should notify senior managers “if they are ever directed to do anything they believe to be improper,” Wilkie said.

Senior officials from VA Puget Sound have reinforced the message with regular visits to scheduling sites at the two main hospitals in six community clinics, she said.

The VA is straining with rapid growth fueled by new veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, expanded benefits for Vietnam veterans and a surge of other older veterans who are turning to the VA after leaving the workforce.

The VA set a high standard for delivering care as it braced for that growth, aiming to see 99 percent of patients within two weeks of a request for an appointment. (*Source: TNT*)

Vets awaiting primary care at VA can now seek private physician: Veterans waiting for a primary care appointment at a VA medical facility may now be able to get one at a private physician under a program that allows veterans to seek medical treatment outside the Veterans Affairs Department.

VA announced Wednesday that primary care has been added to its Patient-Centered Community Care, or PC3, program.

The initiative originally was designed to provide specialty care, in-patient and mental health treatment to veterans who could not access a VA hospital or clinic because of distance or prolonged wait times and their regular facility.

But it was expanded to include primary care in an effort to expedite treatment to patients sitting on wait lists, according to a VA release.

“With the addition of primary care services, VA medical centers can now use PC3 to provide additional types of care in order to reduce wait times,” VA Secretary Robert McDonald said in a prepared statement.

In September, VA awarded contracts worth up to \$9.4 billion over five years to two health care companies to provide specialty care and mental health treatment in the private sector under the PC3 program.

Former Tricare West Region contractor TriWest Healthcare Alliance and Health Net Federal Services, the company that manages the Tricare North Region, run the program.

According to VA, the change is part of the department’s “Accelerated Care Initiative,” a massive effort to move veterans — many of whom have waited months for care — off appointment wait lists.

VA has been under fire since April for allegations that some facilities gamed the appointment system to meet VA metrics and excessive wait times for appointments and consults may have lead to patient deaths.

The scandal led to the resignation of several top officials, including VA Secretary Erik Shinseki, who left the department in May.

While VA facilities have had the authority to outsource care, many facilities have been reluctant to use the option and in turn, many veterans prefer to use the VA, which they perceive as a benefit earned with military service.

VA spent \$5 billion on private-sector care in 2013 and launched the PC3 program in January to provide care to veterans using established health care provider networks.

TriWest President David McIntyre described the PC3 program as a “release valve” for overburdened VA facilities.

“The first place care should be rendered is in the federal system with federal providers where it can be done. And where it can’t, we are that valve,” McIntyre told Military Times last month.

For more information on obtaining private medical care through VA, the department recommends [turning to its non-VA care web site](#).

Senate panel proposes ending tobacco discounts: Smokers could lose their discount on tobacco products sold at military exchanges under a provision unveiled in the Senate. Senate Appropriations defense subcommittee chairman Rep. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee's defense panel, called the move a common-sense decision to give troops less incentive to use tobacco. "There's no reason that deadly tobacco products should be subsidized," Durbin said, arguing that lower prices on the products lead to higher use, which in turn "leads to addiction, health problems, and in some cases death." The budget bill provision would dump the tobacco discount and force military exchanges to sell the items at full price.

DoD policy calls for limiting discounts on tobacco products sold in both military exchanges and commissaries to no more than 5 percent below "the most competitive commercial price in the local community." That effectively means the military discount can be much larger when compared to "average" off-base prices. The Navy ended discounts on tobacco products sold on Navy and Marine Corps bases in 2012. But Durbin said tobacco discounts at some installations in the other services run as high as 20 percent below local civilian stores. A 2013 National Institutes of Health study found military discounts of as high as 73 percent in some locations.

Critics say that's one reason why troops smoke and use chewing tobacco at dramatically higher rates than civilians. About 25 percent of troops smoke cigarettes, compared to about 20 percent of civilians, and about 13 percent use smokeless tobacco products, compared to 3 percent of civilians.

Military officials have launched a number of anti-tobacco initiatives in recent years, citing the long-term health costs to frequent users. Durbin cited DoD estimates that say tobacco-related illnesses drain \$1.6 billion annually from military health care accounts.

Earlier this year, an analysis from the Kansas-based Institute for Biobehavioral Health Research found that the discounted tobacco products at military bases send a contradictory message to troops and undermine those anti-smoking programs.

Navy officials have discussed dropping all tobacco product sales from service exchanges, commissaries and ship stores. That move prompted pushback from several House lawmakers, who argued that all service members should have access to the products if they're legal and available to civilians.

Those same House lawmakers would have to sign off on dropping the tobacco discount before the change could become law. The appropriations bill is expected to move through the Senate this month, but likely won't be finalized until late 2014. *(Source: Air Force Times)*

Results of the JBLM Annual Retiree Appreciation Day/Retiree Health Fair

The 2014 JBLM Lewis/McChord Retiree Appreciation Day and Health Fair was held at the American Lake Conference Center Bldg 8385. The Health Fair had the full support of Madigan Army Medical Center.

The Medical Center was on site to provide medical screenings, perform blood draws and provide a variety of information on healthcare programs and benefits, and distribute wellness and disease information. There were also a variety of representative of our local Veterans organizations and military staff agencies. Approximately 1,890 registered Retirees were in attendance.

There were a total 25 medical clinics participating in the Health Fair . These clinics performed a combined total of 9,633 interviews, and referred 206 cases for further medical screening appointments at Madigan Medical Center. *(Source: Madigan Information Management Department)*

50th Anniversary Commemoration of the Vietnam War

**Joint Base Lewis-McChord
Salutes Vietnam-era Veterans**

October 9, 2014

1-5 PM

- **Salute Ceremony to honor Vietnam-era Veterans and a massing of the Colors at Watkins Field begins at 1 pm**
- **Ceremony keynote speaker is General (Retired) Barry McCaffrey**
- **Enter at DuPont Gate Exit 119, Interstate 5**
- **Parking opens at 11 am**
- **Events include interactive displays with service members and Pinning Ceremony**
- **Families and Friends are Invited**
- **Vietnam-era Veterans register at <https://einvitations.afit.edu/inv/anim.cfm?i=210707&k=0060420E7B50>**
- **For more information call 593rd Expeditionary Sustainment Command at 253-967-5171 or 253-967-3570**

