

# VET Connection



Winter 2011



## **THE COURAGE TO COME FORWARD:**

The psychological wounds left by war are significant but treatable. Vietnam Veteran Stu Shipley shares his story of recovery and reconnecting.

Your Link to the VA Salt Lake City Health Care System

## Helping One Veteran At A Time

*“He lived just a couple blocks away from the VA. He was alone, frustrated, and unsure where to turn.”*  
*Andrew Wittwer, OEF/OIF Case Manager*

Family members and friends are often times much more aware of a Veteran struggling than the Veteran themselves. Recently our OEF/OIF team was contacted by a Veteran’s family concerned about his nightmares, isolation, anxiousness and thoughts of suicide. This Veteran served two tours of duty as a flight medic. After several unsuccessful attempts to call the Veteran, two members of our team went to his house. At first he was guarded and nervous, but it soon became very clear he was glad we were there. The Veteran finally opened up about difficulties with PTSD, unemployment, and financial concerns. He was informed of the benefits and services available to him, but more importantly we wanted him to know he was not alone. Several weeks later the Veteran walked into our clinic for help. Since that initial meeting, the Veteran has enrolled at the medical center, is service-connected for PTSD, and is connected with mental health and PTSD treatment. In addition, the Veteran is working and has plans to go back to school. He is also pursuing a passion for running, which helps him manage symptoms of PTSD. Today that Veteran is back on track thanks to his own courage and hard work.

We wanted to share this story in hopes that another Veteran may gain strength from this Veteran’s triumph. We all need to look out for our Veterans. Patience, persistence, and that one extra phone call or visit can make the difference.



## VHA Focuses on Excellence

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is the largest integrated health care system in the United States and is dedicated to providing the best care possible for Veterans. Their commitment is affirmed by their mission statement to “Honor America’s Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being.”

To achieve this mission, VHA is committed not only to providing top-notch care, but becoming the definition of it. In fact, VHA has a new vision statement to reflect this goal:

*VHA will continue to be the benchmark of excellence and value in health care and benefits by providing exemplary services that are both patient-centered and evidence-based.*

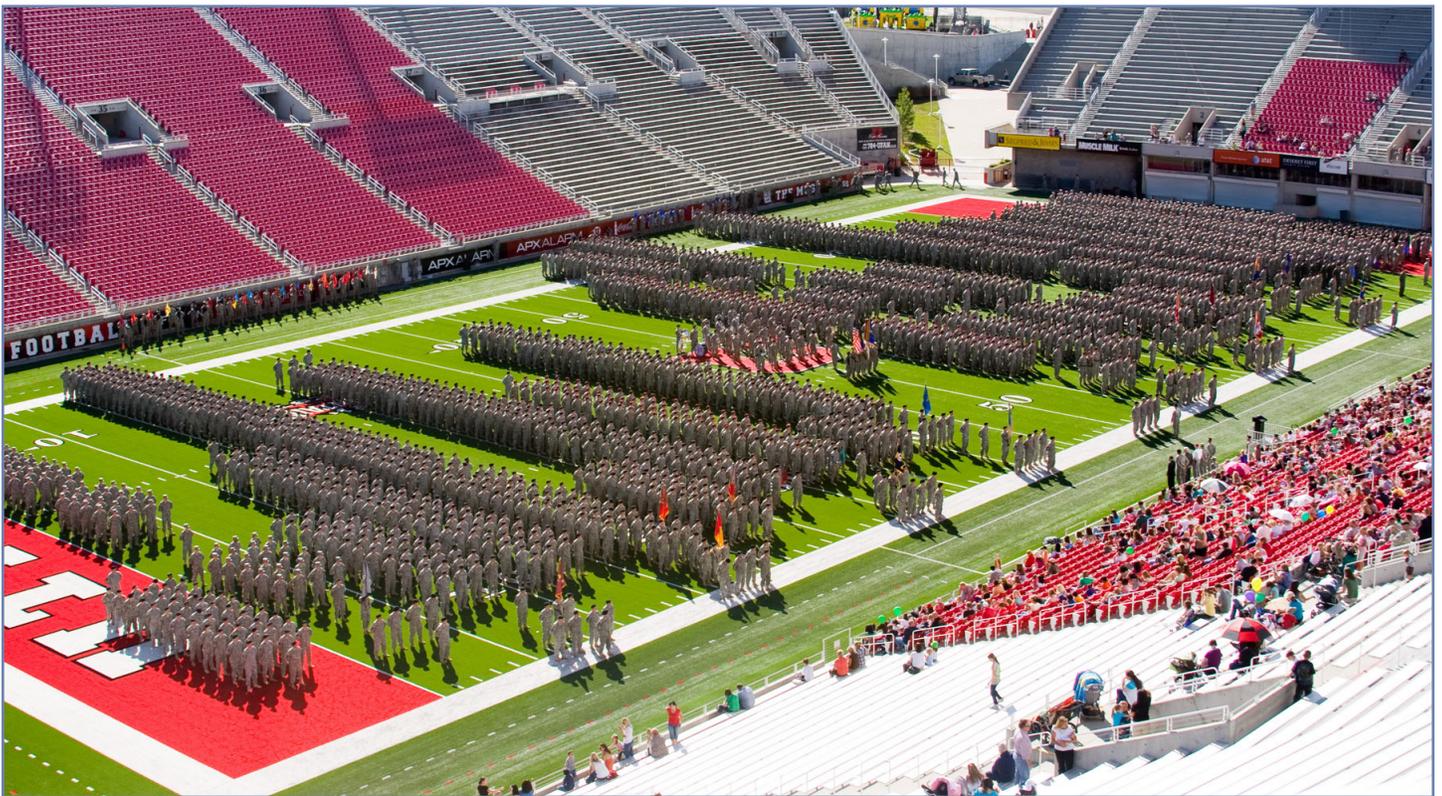
*This care will be delivered by engaged, collaborative teams in an integrated environment that supports learning, discovery and continuous improvement.*

*It will emphasize prevention and population health and contribute to the Nation’s well-being through education, research and service in national emergencies.*

**VA  
HEALTH  
CARE**

Defining  
**EXCELLENCE**  
in the 21st Century

## Outreach Corner



*Utah National Guard troops fall in to be reviewed by Governor Herbert.*

### Welcome Home Vets!!

Thousands of National Guard troops and families all in one place at the same time! Not only was it an awesome sight, but what an opportunity to reach out to Veterans. Governor's Day in conjunction with our "Welcome Home" event highlights all of our brave men and women from the Air and Army National Guard. Each year this tradition brings our entire state together, along with our great Governor, to celebrate their commitment and sacrifice. This year Governor Gary Herbert reviewed the troops with a salute and a smile followed by eloquent words of thanks. Afterwards our OEF/OIF team, Womens Clinic and Mental Health staff rounded up Vets and made sure they were educated on the benefits they have coming. In all, we talked to about 200 Veterans!



*VASLCHCS spoke with over 200 Utah National Guard troops and educated them on VA benefits.*

## “Unite For Veterans” with Channel 2

The “Unite For Veterans” concept is our way of putting a face to VA and displaying our unwavering commitment to those who have sacrificed so much. It is done through our valuable partnership with the Utah Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration and KUTV Channel 2.

We logged over 450 phone calls and mailed out over 150 enrollment applications on Veterans Day. However, this event was not really about the numbers, it was about perception and pride in what we do and who we do it for. It was about raising awareness and starting conversations in living rooms all over. It was about Veterans and making sure they know they are not alone. This is not just a VA event, this is a community event. For many of our Veterans the battle continues, even on the home front.



*Hundreds of Veterans stuck a pin in the “Where Did You Serve?” map, VA staff spoke with nearly 2,000 of them.*

## Utah State Fair

It’s not enough to wait for our nation’s Veterans to come to us, we must go to them and inform them about the benefits they have earned and are entitled to. One 70-year-old decorated Vietnam Veteran stated “I didn’t know I was eligible for VA benefits.” A Gulf War era Veteran stated “I didn’t know I was considered a Veteran let alone eligible to receive health care at the VA.” Thanks to our great employee volunteers, we were able to speak with a whopping 1,982 Veterans and inform them about VA health care and VA benefits.



*The 350 lb. Veterans Tribute Tower Bell helped raise money for the tower construction in Ogden.*



*Combat Veteran Josh Hansen, speaks with KUTV's Debbie Worthen.*



*Volunteers answered over 450 calls from Veterans and Veterans' family members during the Unite for Veterans telethon.*



*Volunteers packed over 200 duffel bags of winter clothes for homeless Veterans.*



*Volunteers from Hill Air Force Base pitching in to feed homeless Veterans.*

## 2010 Homeless Veteran Stand Down

Over 230 homeless Veterans came through the enrollment office that day, one of which was a female Veteran who was experiencing serious health problems. We took care of her and all of the other Veterans relying on us for services. The Stand Down is such an incredible team effort year after year, working with other lifelines in the community.



**Employees from the VA Salt Lake City Health Care System proudly marched in the Taylorsville Veterans Day Parade.**



*Womens Clinic Program Manager, Gina Painter, (left) awards Veda Jones (right) a Lifetime Achievement Award.*

## A Tribute To Women Veterans

We had about 180 women present proudly wearing uniforms and hats representative of their service and era. The highlight of the evening was most certainly the recognition of one extraordinary female Veteran. Veda Jones received the lifetime achievement award for her lifelong commitment to country and other Veterans.

## Women's Program Makes Huge Strides!

A remodeled waiting room and children's corner are two things you will notice right away in the clinic but there is so much more going on.

**Have you heard?** There is a new nutrition clinic being offered and also a support group for female Veterans twice a month. Also, first appointment times have been extended to a full hour with your choice of a male or female provider.

## Warm Hearts and Warm Blankets



*The Blankets for Boots team handed out over 800 blankets to Veterans.*

One thousand blankets translates into a lot of warm hearts inside the George E. Wahlen VA Medical Center. Seventeen-year-old Jacque Mulholland of Hillcrest High School launched an all out social media blitz and the end result was blankets by the truckload.

"I've been working hard to try and get myself recovered from this stroke so I can get a heart transplant," Gulf War veteran Doug Wiley said. "It really brings me up, I mean just to get something like this from somebody just because I'm a Veteran, you know?"

Mulholland posted her wish list on Facebook and before she knew it, she had blankets coming in from all over the United States. She plans to make this an annual event, although she is the first to admit that to her, every day is Veterans Day.

"Patriotism means you know what this country stands for and you know what it's worth, and you understand the great sacrifice that went into making it the way it is," Jacque says. "I hope it just shows they are loved, that they're appreciated, and that we know the great sacrifice they go through for us."

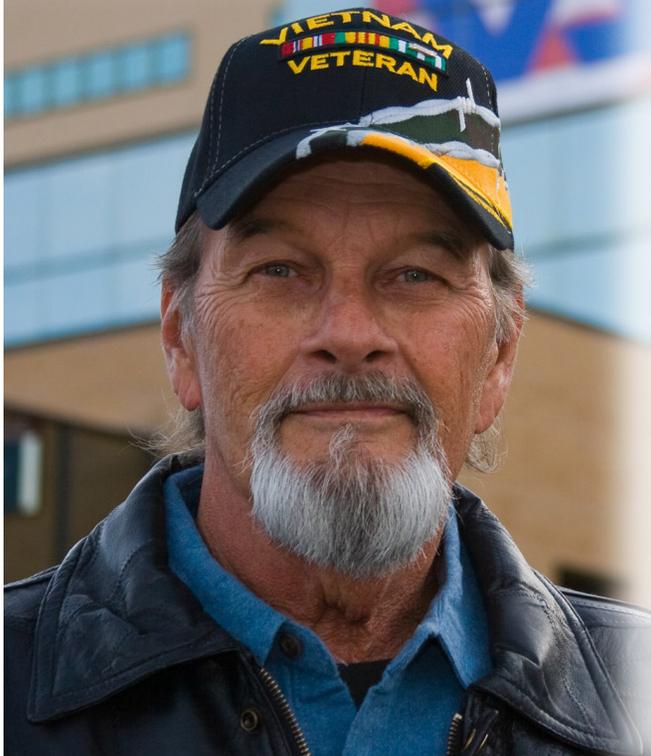
Jacque also spent \$200 of her own money to have baby onesies silk-screened with the saying "MY MOMMY'S A HERO" for the expectant female Veterans.



*17-year-old Jacque Mulholland gets a hug from a grateful Veteran.*

## Our Mental Health Teams are Working to Better our Veterans' Lives on a Daily Basis and in Many Cases, They are Saving Lives.

*The psychological needs of our Veterans continue to grow at a staggering rate. Over 10,000 Veterans were seen in 115,000 visits last year. Demand for PTSD services, substance abuse treatment, and psychotherapy also climbed rapidly.*



Stu Shipley was just 17 years old when he joined the Marine Corp and was sent to Vietnam. He did two tours, and like tens of thousands of others just like him, came home a different man. “If you were in the jungle or even if you were in country you were subject to some brutal, horrific scenes in your mind and they don’t go away real easy,” says Stu Shipley. Back then, research and resources on PTSD were scarce, so Veterans like Stu stumbled through the system disillusioned and bitter. Forty years later Stu found himself on the brink. Afraid for his life he finally reached out. “I fought this and fought this and fought this to the point of being suicidal and friends and family pushed me to get help,” Stu says. And ultimately the thought of the affect suicide would have on his family is what kept him from taking his own life.

“Everyday our calls go out to them trying to assess their degree of suicidality, their risk factors, what they have positive going on in their life,” says Mike Koplun, VASLCHCS Suicide Prevention Coordinator. Stu now relies on his family, counselors and peers at the VA. He says there is nothing more therapeutic then talking to other Vets who have been through the same things. “It’s a healing process,” Stu says. “It’s not a quick fix overnight. There is not one pill fixes all. You have to want it and have a desire to get

## VA Secretary Announces New Hotline for Homeless Veterans Responders at 1-877-4AID VET Help Veterans Find Food, Shelter and Assistance

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki announced the establishment of a new telephone hotline to provide emergency support and resources to homeless Veterans.

“It is unacceptable for a single Veteran to spend the night on the streets of America,” said Shinseki. “The hotline of the new National Call Center for Homeless Veterans will provide homeless Veterans with caring, timely assistance and coordinated access to VA and community services.”

Family members, workers at community agencies and non-VA providers also may call the hotline at 1-877-4AID VET to find out about the many programs and services available to assist homeless Veterans.

Well-trained expert responders will staff the hotline 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They will join other responders who staff VA’s Suicide Prevention Hotline.

Responders are cross trained to handle calls at either call center. While a responder will know which type of call is

incoming, all Veteran callers will receive a brief suicide screening.

VA officials recognize that homeless Veterans are in need of food and shelter, clothing, financial assistance, and treatment for medical conditions. Additionally, many require access to permanent housing, Veterans benefits and vocational resources.

VA assistance is available for homeless Veterans who may suffer from mental health issues, substance abuse, depression, traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder. The responders operating the new hotline will ensure Veterans receive the help they need and deserve.

The National Call Center for Homeless Veterans is the latest in a series of initiatives to help homeless Veterans. Last year, Shinseki launched a campaign to eliminate homelessness among Veterans within five years. Since then, the number of Veterans homeless on a typical night has dropped 18 percent.

## VA Simplifies Access to Health Care and Benefits for Veterans with PTSD

WASHINGTON (July 12, 2010) – Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki announced a critical step forward in providing an easier process for Veterans seeking health care and disability compensation for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), with the publication of a final regulation in the Federal Register.

“This nation has a solemn obligation to the men and women who have honorably served this country and suffer from the often devastating emotional wounds of war,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “This final regulation goes a long way to ensure that Veterans receive the benefits and services they need.”

By publishing a final regulation in the Federal Register to simplify the process for a Veteran to claim service connection for PTSD, VA reduces the evidence need-ed if the trauma claimed by a Veteran is related to fear of hostile military or terrorist activity and is consistent with the places, types, and circumstances of the Veteran’s service.

This science-based regulation relies on evidence that concluded that a Veteran’s deployment to a war zone is linked to an increased risk of PTSD.

Under the new rule, VA would not require corrob-oration of a stressor related to fear of hostile military or terrorist activity if a VA doctor confirms that the stressful experience recalled by a Veteran adequately supports a diagnosis of PTSD and the Veteran’s symptoms are related to the claimed stressor.

Previously, claims adjudicators were required to corroborate that a non-combat Veteran actually experienced a stressor related to hostile military activity. This final rule simplifies the development that is required for these cases.

VA expects this rulemaking to decrease the time it takes VA to decide access to care and claims falling under the revised criteria. More than 400,000 Veterans currently receiving compensation benefits are service connected for PTSD. Combined with VA’s shorter claims form, VA’s new streamlined,

science-based regulation allows for faster and more accurate decisions that also expedite access to medical care and other benefits for Veterans.

PTSD is a medically recognized anxiety disorder that can develop from seeing or experiencing an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury to which a person responds with intense fear, helplessness or horror, and is not uncommon among war Veterans.

Disability compensation is a tax-free benefit paid to a Veteran for disabilities that are a result of -- or made worse by -- injuries or diseases associated with active service.

For additional information, go to [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) or call VA’s toll free benefits number at 1-800-827-1000.



### Our Volunteers:

They sold a lot of popcorn to make this happen! You may have noticed the new “Wheelchair Corral” for parking and picking up in Parking Lot 1. This will make a huge difference to our Veterans who struggle to get around especially now with the snow flying.

This is the first time something like this has been used for wheelchairs. It is typically a shed used for grocery carts. How creative!



## Register Today and Get an Upgraded Account with In-Person Authentication (IPA)

My HealthVet is VA's award-winning online Personal Health Record (PHR), located at [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov). It offers Veterans, active duty service members, and others Internet access anywhere, anytime, to health care information, resources, and tools.

Launched nationwide in 2003, My HealthVet is the gateway to web-based tools that empower Veterans to become active partners in their health care. With My HealthVet, users access trusted, secure, and informed VA health and benefits information at their convenience 24/7.

### Registering for My HealthVet is Easy as 1...2...3...

1. Type [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov) in the address bar on your web browser, and then press Enter. This takes you to VA's My HealthVet website.
2. On the right-hand side of the screen, click the "Register Today" button. Complete the registration page, and review and accept the Terms & Conditions and the Privacy Policy for using the My HealthVet website.
3. Log into your My HealthVet account and begin to create your Personal Health Record (PHR).

## My HealthVet Features at a Glance:

- ☆ Refill VA prescriptions online\*
- ☆ View personal VA Wellness Reminders\*
- ☆ Access Online Medical Libraries
- ☆ Keep track of personal health information
- ☆ Self-enter military and family health histories
- ☆ Track illnesses, accidents, or other events
- ☆ Enter and track over-the-counter medications, immunizations, and tests
- ☆ Record, track, and print (if desired) important vital statistics
- ☆ Explore the Healthy Living Centers and Diseases & Conditions Centers
- ☆ Future features specifically for VA patients include Secure Messaging between VA patients and their participating VA health care providers, receiving VA laboratory results, viewing VA appointments, and more.\*

\* Requires In-Person Authentication (IPA)

## Get an Upgraded Account with In-Person Authentication (IPA)

To get the most out of My HealthVet, Veterans are urged to visit their local VA health care facility to get an upgraded account, known as In-Person Authentication (IPA). Before VA patients can refill their VA medications by name, access their VA Wellness Reminders, communicate with their providers through Secure Messaging\*, and participate in the future features of My HealthVet, Veterans need to complete the IPA process (takes approximately 10 minutes) as a security measure. The purpose of the one-time IPA process is to verify the Veteran's identity, in person. This complies with VA policy and protects Veterans' identities. It's a simple process that will enhance a Veteran's use of My HealthVet and allow access to other features as they become available.

**\*Secure Messaging** through My HealthVet is a web-based message system that allows participating VA patients and VA health care teams to communicate non-urgent, health related information in a private and safe computer environment. Secure Messaging is not e-mail, but an encrypted, secure communication tool available through My HealthVet. Users who have an upgraded IPA account may use Secure Messaging at participating VA facilities. It is being implemented as a phased release for VA health care teams and clinics through 2010.

For more information, questions, or assistance with My HealthVet and IPA contact 801-584-1209, or visit your local VA health care facility.

# Coming Soon



## New Outpatient Mental Health Building

Our beautiful new 32,000 square foot mental health outpatient clinic is just about open for business. We anticipate seeing our first patient sometime in the spring. The demand is great for these services but our clinicians are committed to easing the psychological suffering our returning soldiers endure after combat. Thirty percent of our returning Operation Iraqi/Enduring Freedom Veterans come home with some sort of mental health or readjustment issue and some of our Vietnam Veterans are seeking help for the first time. We provide comprehensive mental health treatment in a variety of specialties including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), substance abuse, mental health intensive case management, military sexual trauma, as well as general mental health treatments such as psychotherapy and medication management.

## New Clinics

Our outreach clinics in Idaho Falls and Price, Utah will open later this winter bridging the healthcare gap for many of our Veterans in more rural areas. The clinics will offer primary care as well as some specialty care through telehealth technology.

## More Beds For Our Homeless Veterans



The new Valor House should begin taking shape this spring. This grant and per diem residential treatment program will provide transitional housing for up to two years with case management and treatment to homeless Veterans. The VA currently provides funding for 172 beds/units that are operated by four community-based agencies: First Step House, Catholic Community Services, Homeless Veterans Fellowship, and the Housing Authority of Salt Lake City.

The goal of our residential treatment programs are to assist homeless Veterans with improving their physical, emotional, social, financial, intellectual, and spiritual needs while returning them to a stable living environment that is as independent as possible. Valor House should be complete by the winter of 2012.

## Joint Commission Accreditation



We passed! We had a total of seven surveyors here looking at three specific Joint Commission accredited programs: hospital, behavioral health, and home health. They spent 176 total hours surveying our organization. They encountered scores of exceptional employees who eagerly shared their passion for providing health care to Veterans. They were also impressed with many of our programs. The Joint Commission inspection is something we are not required to do but choose to do because it just makes us better at providing quality healthcare.

## Attention Veterans Who Use Home Oxygen!



There is a minor change you need to be aware of if you are on home oxygen. You are now required to renew it yearly. You can accomplish this with just a simple finger probe test at your next primary care appointment. Please talk to your provider at your next visit. If you are not scheduled for an appointment by the time your oxygen comes up for renewal you will automatically be scheduled for the test either at the main facility in Salt Lake City or at one of our community clinics closest to you.

If you only wear oxygen at night or if you do not qualify for oxygen renewal based on the last finger probe test or other saturation checks you will need to complete an overnight oximetry study. This may be done by an outside contractor for the VA. In most cases the contractor will get in touch with you about the test.

If you are not using your oxygen, please contact the Home Oxygen staff within the Prosthetics and Sensory Aids Service at 801-584-1220 to arrange for discontinue and equipment pick up. We also ask that you use

your oxygen concentrator as much as possible, and only use your tanks while you are away from your concentrator.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact Margie Daley, Lead Home Oxygen Respiratory Therapist, at 1-800-612-6013 or (801) 582-1565 extension 2279.

## Although We May Think We Know Your Name...



### Who is Who:

Chris Rock or Kammron Taylor

Francis Fisher or Lauren Holly

### ~ People DO Look Alike ~

So every time you come to the clinic,  
we will ask you for your:

Full name and

Full social security number.

**Help us prevent medical mistakes  
related to patient identity!**

## VA Makes Filing Claims Easier and Faster for Veterans

### Simpler Forms and New Program Reduce Paperwork and Speed Process

WASHINGTON – As part of Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki’s effort to break the back of the backlog, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is reducing the paperwork and expediting the process for Veterans seeking compensation for disabilities related to their military service.

“These reductions in paperwork, along with other improvements to simplify and speed the claims process, symbolize changes underway to make VA more responsive to Veterans and their families,” said Secretary Shinseki.

VA has shortened application forms to reduce paperwork for Veterans. The new forms, which are being made available on VA’s Web site at [www.va.gov/vaforms](http://www.va.gov/vaforms), include:

- A shortened VA Form 21-526 for Veterans applying for the first-time to VA for disability compensation or pension benefits. This form has been cut in half – from 23 to 10 pages. It is immediately available to Veterans via Web download, and will be available through VA’s online claim-filing process later this summer at <http://vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp/main.asp>
- VA Form 21-526b for Veterans seeking increased benefits for conditions already determined by VA to be service-connected. This new form more clearly describes the information needed to support claims for increased benefits.

In order to make the claims process faster, VA has also introduced two new forms for Veterans participating in the Department’s new fully developed claim (FDC) program, which is one of the fastest means to receive a claims decision.

Gathering the information and evidence needed to support a Veteran’s disability claim often takes the largest portion of the processing time. If VA receives all of the available evidence when the claim is submitted, the remaining steps in the claims-decision process can be expedited without compromising quality.

To participate in the FDC program, Veterans should complete and submit an FDC Certification and VA Form 21-526EZ, “Fully Developed Claim (Compensation),” for a compensation claim, or a VA Form 21-527EZ, “Fully Developed Claim (Pension),” for a pension claim.

The forms were designed specifically for the FDC program. These six-page application forms include notification to applicants of all information and evidence necessary to “fully develop” and substantiate their claims. With this notification, Veterans and their representatives can “fully develop” their claims before submission to VA for processing.

Along with the application and certification, Veterans must also submit all relevant and pertinent evidence. A submitted claim may still require some additional evidence to be obtained by VA, to include certain federal records and a VA medical examination.

Disability compensation is a tax-free benefit paid to a Veteran for disabilities that are a result of, or made worse, by injuries or diseases that happened while on active duty, active duty for training or inactive duty training. Pension is a benefit paid to wartime Veterans with limited income, and who are permanently and totally disabled or age 65 or older.

For additional information, go to [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) or call VA’s toll free benefits number at 1-800-827-1000.



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