



Meet Your Veteran Service Officers

We've been fortunate here in Washington County to obtain the support to double the size of the VSO unit over the past two years. Many people who visit our offices still think we work for the Department of Veterans Affairs but we're actually County employees. The VA provides much of our training but we are here as advocates for Veterans, their surviving spouses, and family members. Leading the charge is Ryan Carufel, County Veteran Service Officer and Coast Guard Veteran. We also have three Assistant CVSOs: Steve Despiegelaere (Army and Reserve Veteran), Lon Pardun (Navy Veteran), and Thallassa Gunelius (Air Force Retired).

Much of our time is spent meeting with and talking to the nearly 17,000 Veterans and countless surviving spouses that reside in Washington County. We average anywhere from 400-600 phone calls per month and 130 office visits per month where we provide benefits counseling and claims assistance for State and Federal benefits.

In 2015, County residents received \$43,215,000 in Disability Compensation and Pension benefits from new and pre-existing VA claims. Unfortunately, data for 2016 has not been released but it will be included in our next newsletter. Finally, we recently expanded our hours in the Cottage Grove and Forest Lake offices to better serve our customers. Our new hours, days, and contact information are listed on page two.

Disability Compensation

The most common benefit we assist people with are VA claims for Disability Compensation. Disability Compensation is a benefit paid for disabilities that resulted from a disease or injury incurred or aggravated during active duty service.

To be successful with a disability claim the Veteran's service records should show an in-service injury or illness. There must be evidence of a currently diagnosed condition and a link between the two must be shown

which most often comes in the form of ongoing medical treatment or therapy for the condition. There are some situations where disabilities may occur many years after service and they are still presumed to be service-connected. Such is the case with exposures and illnesses mentioned below.

Agent Orange:

Scientific evidence has demonstrated that there is an association between development of certain disabling medical conditions and exposure to Agent Orange. You may have been exposed if, as a veteran, you served:

- In the republic of Vietnam, regardless of the length of that service, from January 9, 1962, to May 7, 1975;
- On a ship or boat operated in Vietnam's inland waterways or which docked in Vietnam and the Veteran went ashore.
- In Korea between April 1, 1968, and August 31, 1971; in a unit recognized by the VA and DoD to have operated in an area in or near the Korean DMZ in which herbicides were applied.
- Certain occupations at certain air bases in Thailand.

Veterans and their survivors may be eligible for benefits for the following illnesses recognized by the VA as connected to Agent Orange exposure: AL Amyloidosis, Chronic B-cell Leukemia's, Chloracne, Diabetes Mellitus Type 2, Hodgkin's Disease, Ischemic Heart Disease, Multiple Myeloma, Parkinson's Disease, Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma, Peripheral Neuropathy Early-Onset, Porphyria Cutanea Tarda, Prostate Cancer, Respiratory Cancers, and Soft Tissue Sarcomas.

Gulf War Service:

For VA benefit purposes, Gulf War service is active duty in any of the following areas in the Southwest Asia theatre of military operations at any time from August 2, 1990 to present.

Southwest Asia theatre of military operations: Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, U.A.E., Oman, Gulf of Aden, Gulf of Oman, Persian Gulf, Red Sea, Arabian Sea. This includes Veterans who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003-2010) and Operation New Dawn (2010-2011).

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Retired Military Pay Now Tax Exempt in MN!

Are you, or do you know a, retired military Veteran living in Minnesota? A law was passed in 2016 that few people have heard about and we need your help spreading the word! Recently, Governor Dayton signed a bill into law that includes a full tax exemption of Veterans' retirement benefits. The supplemental budget bill, House File 2749, passed the House on a broad bipartisan vote.

Military retirees living in Minnesota will now see their military retirement pay exempted from state income tax. The law took effect in 2016 and instructions for obtaining a refund of taxes paid will be included in the filing instructions when they are published.

Mission

Washington County Veterans Services provides responsive, timely, accurate, and compassionate assistance to Veterans, their dependents, and survivors in applying for federal, state, and local benefits.

Contact Us

Phone: 651-430-6895
Email: vso@co.washington.mn.us
Website:
www.co.washington.mn.us/veteranservices

Locations

Cottage Grove

13000 Ravine Parkway South
Cottage Grove, MN 55016
Monday-Thursday

Forest Lake

19955 Forest Road North
Forest Lake, MN 55025
Tuesday-Friday

Stillwater

14949 62nd Street North
Stillwater, MN 55082
Monday-Friday

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A prominent condition affecting Gulf War Veterans is a cluster of medically unexplained chronic symptoms that can include: fatigue, headaches, joint pain, indigestion, insomnia, dizziness, respiratory disorders, and memory problems.

These presumptive illnesses must have appeared during active duty in the Southwest Asia theater of operations or by December 31, 2021, and be at least 10 percent disabling. These illnesses include: Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, Fibromyalgia, Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders, and undiagnosed illnesses.

Camp Lejeune:

From the 1950s through the 1980s, people living or working at the U.S. Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, were potentially exposed to drinking water contaminated with industrial solvents, benzene, and other chemicals.

The VA created a list of presumptive service-connected diseases for Veterans, Reservists, and National Guard members who were exposed to contaminants in the water supply and that later developed one of the following eight diseases: Adult Leukemia, Bladder Cancer, Parkinson's Disease, Liver Cancer, Kidney Cancer, Multiple Myeloma, Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma, Aplastic Anemia, and other Myelodysplastic Syndromes.

VA provides cost-free health care for these conditions to Veterans who served at least 30 days of active duty at Camp Lejeune from January 1, 1957 through December 31, 1987.

Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS):

Otherwise known as: Lou Gehrig's Disease.

No one knows what causes the disease, but according to studies conducted by the National Academies of Science, military Veterans within the last century are nearly twice as likely to develop ALS as individuals with no history of military service, regardless of where or when they served.

Our mission, at the Washington County Veterans Services office, is to ensure Veterans get the benefits they are entitled to in the most efficient manner possible. If you believe you have been exposed and you have one of the presumptive illnesses or diseases listed here, please contact us!

Where can I get a Veteran ID Card?

This is one of the most common questions we're asked and unfortunately the answer to the question is that there's currently no such thing in Minnesota. Active Duty members, military retirees, and 100% service-connected disabled Veterans can obtain the DoD-provided ID card and Veterans enrolled in VA health care can obtain a Veterans health care Identification Card (VIC).

A law was passed in 2015 authorizing the VA to provide the VIC card to all Veterans. When available, Veterans will be able to request an ID card from the VA for a fee. They are making plans to implement the new law in the most efficient and cost-effective way possible. The VA estimates they'll be able to implement the program in 2017 and the cost of each card has not yet been determined. Sorry to report that for now some will need to continue to carry a copy of their DD214 as proof of Veteran status.