

Vet Benefits Legislation

Each year over 300 bills are submitted in Congress that are related to various veteran benefits. After many committee meetings, rewrites and compromises only a hand full are approved and sent to the President to sign. Most don't impact the general veteran population e.g. naming a National Highway stretch after a Medal of Honor recipient or issuing a postage stamp about a famous World War II battle. But some have major impact. The recent Blue Water Navy Veterans Act comes to mind. Passed into law last January, it has generated over 500 million dollars in VA compensation benefits to those Navy vets who served off the coast of Vietnam and the DMZ in Korea (12 miles) during the Nam War, and were exposed to Agent Orange. HR 7105 was recently signed into law as part of the NDAA and is hundreds of pages long. Many are not aware of certain provisions of that legislation.

- Veterans will once again be able to submit Disability Benefit Questionnaires from PRIVATE Doctors to support their claims for service-connected compensation. The VA had banned that for a while.
- The Vietnam War Era has been extended back to 11/1/55, which means certain peacetime veterans who served from that date up to 1961 may now be able to qualify for Non-Service Connected pension.
- Vocational Rehabilitation benefits for disabled vets used to have a 12 year limit of use after the VA rating. For those disabled vets who were discharged after 1/1/13, they will now have no time limit.
- Child care for veterans who use the VA hospitals or clinics will now be available.
- Widows and widowers who's spouse died of their service-connected condition, etc. can now remarry at age 55 and still keep their DIC benefits. The age was 57.
- Veterans filing claims for Military Sexual Trauma can choose whether they are examined by a male or female doctor.
- Homeless programs and vouchers at the VA may be extended to those veterans who received an "Other than Honorable" discharge.
- IMPORTANT: this law also added three new presumptive conditions to the list of Agent Orange related problems for those who serviced in Vietnam (boots on the ground), off the coast (within 12 miles) or near the DMZ in Korea during certain dated. They are BLADDER CANCER, HYOPTHROIDSIM AND PARKINSONISM (have symptoms but full blown Parkinson's disease has not yet been diagnosed. If you know of a Vietnam vet who died of any of these conditions, and there is a surviving spouse, they may qualify for benefits.

As with any new law, the VA must first prepare regulations, then guidelines and policy mandates before all these take effect. But if you think you may be affected by any of the above, be sure to reach out to your VA hospital, clinic or the VA benefits department. They can be reached at 1-800-827-1000. [Source: American Legion IL District 9 | Raymond P. Toczek | April 2021 ++]