



LEXINGTON COUNTY VETERANS NEWS

"Serving those who served and sacrificed for America"

January/February 2019



Lexington, SC.

YOUR VA OFFICE STAFF

ED LUNDEEN

ELUNDEEN@LEX-CO.COM

DIRECTOR

JENNIFER HENDRIX

JHENDRIX@LEX-CO.COM

VETERANS AFFAIRS SUPERVISOR
NEWSLETTER EDITOR

KATHY DEBERRY

KDEBERRY@LEX-CO.COM

VETERANS AFFAIRS BENEFITS COUNSELOR

JENNIFER PARLER

JPARLER@LEX-CO.COM

VETERANS AFFAIRS BENEFITS COUNSELOR

MARY KAY HATCHELL

MHATCHELL@LEX-CO.COM

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

OFFICE EMAIL ADDRESS

VETERANSAFFAIRS@LEX-CO.COM

605 WEST MAIN STREET
SUITE B
LEXINGTON, S.C. 29072
8am to 5pm
Monday through Friday

TELEPHONE: (803) 785-8400
FAX: (803) 785-0115

TOLL-FREE TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Lexington Main Office: 785-8400
From Batesburg/Leesville: 332-8400
From Chapin: 941-0231

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At a Glance Calendar January/February

For a list of events in Lexington County for January/February	See page 16 - Happenings Around Lexington County
Weekly on Tuesdays in January	Lexington County Veterans Group Meeting from 10am to 12 noon
Tuesday, January 1st	New Years Day County Offices Closed
Tuesday, January 8th	County Council Meeting
Friday, January 11th	Batesburg/Leesville Outreach
Saturday, January 12th	Dang-it Doll Workshop - for more information see page 11
Monday, January 21st	Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday County Offices Closed
Tuesday, January 22nd	County Council Meeting
Weekly on Tuesdays in February	Lexington County Veterans Group Meeting from 10am to 12 noon
Friday, February 1st	Chapin Outreach
Saturday, February 2nd	Groundhog Day
Thursday, February 7th	Gaston Outreach
Friday, February 8th	Batesburg/Leesville Outreach
Saturday, February 9th	Dang-it Doll Workshop - for more information see page 11
Tuesday, February 12th	County Council Meeting
Thursday, February 14th	Valentine's Day
Monday, February 18th	President's Day County Offices Closed
Tuesday, February 26th	County Council Meeting

From the Director...

As the new year begins, we are continually thankful for the opportunity to serve Veterans. We take great pride in the work we do every day and always want to get it right. The VA made many changes for improvement in 2018 and the road ahead looks brighter than ever before for 2019.

I attended many Christmas functions during December at local Veterans service organizations and in the community. It was a joy to meet and greet old and new friends.

We have been in our new office complex for nearly one year and we are proud of it and encourage you to stop by and take a tour of this wonderful office. The County did a great job in designing our office to serve disabled Veterans and many of you have commented how beautiful, organized and spacious it is. We will endeavor to keep it looking new.

Happy New Year!

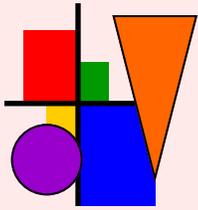
Enjoying the journey,



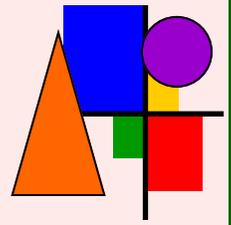
CALENDAR KEY

Purple —Holidays/Special Days	Brown —County Council Meetings
Blue —Outreach dates	Pink —Special Events throughout the County
Red —County Offices Closed, and Special Notices	Orange —Director Out of Office
Black —Director's appearances in the County	Green —Lexington County Veterans Group Meetings



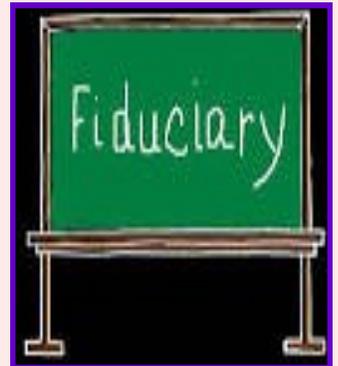


Fiduciary Program



The fiduciary program provides oversight of the VA's most vulnerable beneficiaries who are unable to manage their VA benefits because of injury, disease, the infirmities of advanced age, or under 18 years of age. The VA appoints fiduciaries to manage VA benefits for these beneficiaries and the VA has oversight of the VA-appointed fiduciaries to ensure that they are meeting the needs of the beneficiaries they serve. This appointment and oversight of fiduciaries is handled through fiduciary hubs. Currently, there are seven fiduciary hubs in the United States. We are lucky to have one at the Columbia VA Regional Office. This fiduciary hub handles the fiduciary claims for South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia and Florida. Approximately 28,000 claims are being processed through the Columbia fiduciary hub. Currently, South Carolina has 12 field examiners, roughly one examiner for every four counties in the state.

A fiduciary is an individual or entity who has been appointed by the VA to receive VA benefits on behalf of a beneficiary for the use and benefit of the beneficiary and the beneficiary's dependents. It is the VA's policy that every beneficiary has the right to manage his or her VA benefits. However, in cases where medical evidence indicates that the beneficiary cannot manage their VA benefits, the VA may decide that the beneficiary needs the assistance of a fiduciary. This determination may also be made based upon notice that a court has appointed a guardian for the beneficiary. The VA's decision that a beneficiary needs a fiduciary may be appealed to the Board of Veterans Appeals.



In deciding who should act as fiduciary for a beneficiary, the VA will always select the most effective and least restrictive fiduciary arrangement. This means that the VA will first consider whether the beneficiary can manage their VA benefits with limited VA supervision under supervised direct pay. The VA will consider the choice of the beneficiary, this could be the beneficiary's spouse, family members, friends, or caregivers who are qualified and willing to provide fiduciary services for the beneficiary without a fee. As a last resort, the VA will consider appointment of a paid fiduciary.

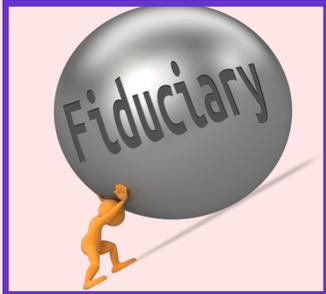


Prior to appointment of a fiduciary, the VA will assess the well-being and needs of the beneficiary and the beneficiary's dependents in light of their funds. This assessment or field examination is based, in part, upon a face-to-face meeting with the beneficiary at the beneficiary's home or place of residence.

Continued on page 4

Fiduciary continued from page 3

An assessment or field examination, conducted by a VA field examiner, checks the qualifications of a proposed fiduciary to include, but is not limited to: the willingness to serve and fulfill the responsibilities of a fiduciary; a face-to-face meeting with the prospective fiduciary; a credit history check; a criminal background check; and character witness interviews.



In some cases, the VA may require the appointed fiduciary to submit annual accountings and/or obtain a surety bond. The VA instructs the fiduciary regarding the duties and obligations of the position, and provides information regarding the beneficiary's needs, to include recurring monthly bills. After the initial appointment of a fiduciary, the VA conducts follow-up visits with beneficiaries and fiduciaries to monitor the beneficiary's well-being and fiduciary's performance. If the VA identifies unmet needs or adverse conditions, the VA may remove the fiduciary and appoint a new fiduciary for the beneficiary.

WHAT INFORMATION IS NEEDED AT AN ASSESSMENT/FIELD EXAMINATION?

During the assessment/field examination, please have the following information available for review by the field examiner:

1. Photo Identification.
2. The source and amount of all monthly bills, recurring expenses and income for the beneficiary.
3. A list of all assets, to include bank accounts, owned property, stocks, bonds, life insurance, burial plans, for the beneficiary.
4. A list of all current medications for the beneficiary.
5. Name, phone number, and address of the beneficiary's primary care doctor
6. Name, phone number, and address of the beneficiary's next of kin.

HOW DO I BECOME A FIDUCIARY?

If you are interested in serving as a fiduciary without a fee for a family member, friend, or person for whom you are a caregiver, please submit a request with the beneficiary's name, VA file number, and your name and contact information, to the VA Regional Office nearest you. You may obtain the address of the office nearest you by calling 1-800-827-1000.

If you are interested in being considered to serve as a fiduciary who may receive a fee, please submit your resume with a cover letter to the following e-mail address: VA_Fiduciary@va.gov. Please include your name, the name of your organization or business (if applicable), and your mailing and e-mail addresses with your request.



Continued on page 5

Fiduciary continued from page 4

You have the right to appeal the VA's decision finding that you are unable to manage your VA benefits. You also have the right to appeal the VA's selection of the fiduciary. If you disagree with the VA on either of these matters you may:

1. Appeal to the Board of Veterans' Appeals by telling the VA you disagree with their decision and want the Board to review it, or
 2. Give the VA evidence we do not already have that may lead them to change their decision.
- You may also request to have your ability to manage your VA benefits re-evaluated, or to have a new fiduciary appointed, at any time. If you wish to have a re-evaluation, please submit your request in writing with any supporting medical evidence to the fiduciary hub of jurisdiction.

The Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act prohibits you from purchasing, possessing, receiving or transporting a firearm or ammunition if you have "been adjudicated as a mental defective or been committed to a mental institution." In compliance with this act, the VA reports the names of incompetent beneficiaries to the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), which then adds the names to a database called the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS). Gun dealers must check NICS for the name of a potential buyer before selling him/her a firearm. You may be fined and/or imprisoned if you knowingly violate this law. You may apply to the VA for relief of firearms prohibitions imposed by the law by submitting your request to the VA. The VA will determine whether such relief is warranted.



The determination that you are unable to manage your VA benefits does not affect your non-VA finances, or your right to vote.

For more information, you may contact the Columbia fiduciary hub at: PO Box 9367, Columbia, SC 29209 or toll free at 1-888-407-0144 option 1.



**No-cost
flu shots**
for VA-enrolled veterans²
Just walk into your local Walgreens.

**Now through
the end of
March 2019!!**

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Did you know that the following events occurred during the months of January & February?



January 1, 1993 - Czechoslovakia broke into separate Czech and Slovak republics.



January 7, 1714 – A patent was issued for the first typewriter, designed by British inventor Henry Mill.



January 10, 1863 - The world's first underground railway service opened in London.



January 12, 1991 – Congress authorized use of military force against Iraq following its invasion of Kuwait.



January 15, 1870 – The donkey was first used to symbolize the Democratic Party in America.



January 19, 1809 – Edgar Allan Poe was born in Boston, Massachusetts.



January 20, 1945 – Franklin D. Roosevelt was inaugurated to an unprecedented fourth term as the President of the United States.



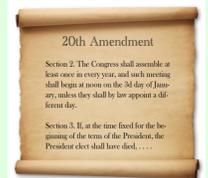
January 25, 1961 – President John F. Kennedy conducted the first live televised presidential news conference.



January 27, 1967 - Three American astronauts were killed as a fire erupted inside Apollo 1 during a launch simulation test at Cape Kennedy, Florida.



January 29, 1919 - The 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (Prohibition Amendment) was ratified.



February 1, 2003 - Sixteen minutes before it was scheduled to land, the Space Shuttle *Columbia* broke apart in flight over west Texas, killing all seven crew members.



February 6, 1933 - The 20th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was adopted. It set the date for the Presidential Inauguration as January 20th, instead of the old date of March 4th.



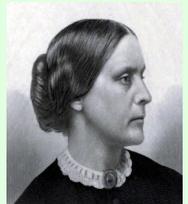
February 8, 1910 – The Boy Scouts of America was founded by William Boyce in Washington, DC.



February 10, 1942 - The first Medal of Honor during World War II was awarded to 2nd Lt. Alexander Nininger (posthumously) for heroism during the Battle of Bataan.



February 11, 1847 – American Inventor Thomas Edison was born in Milan, Ohio.



February 15, 1820 - Susan B. Anthony was born in Adams, Massachusetts.

February 20, 1962 - Astronaut John Glenn became the first American launched into orbit. Traveling aboard the "Friendship 7" spacecraft.



February 22, 1732 – George Washington was born in Westmoreland County, Virginia.



February 27, 1950 - The 22nd Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified, limiting the president to two terms or a maximum of ten years in office.

February 28, 1994 - NATO conducted its first combat action in its 45-year history as four Bosnian Serb jets were shot down by American fighters in a no-fly zone.



Lexington County Veterans Group

All Honorably Discharged Lexington County Veterans are invited to attend the weekly meetings. The group meets weekly on Tuesdays from 10 am to 12 noon in the auditorium at 605 West Main Street in Lexington. The group meets for Health Issues and PTSD counseling with a licensed counselor.

On the second Tuesday of each month, they meet at a different local restaurant for food and fellowship. Check their website for the location.

The Veterans group also participates in various social activities such as group lunches, group dinners with wives/significant other, boat trips on Lake Murray, participation in the Lexington County Veterans parade and other general group tours.



Veteran Wives Support Group

Meets 1st Friday of each month

2 to 4pm

Crossroads Counseling Center

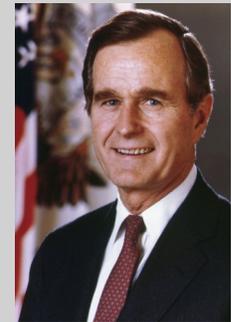
130A Whiteford Way

Lexington, SC 29072

For further information, please visit their website at lex-coveteransgroup.com or contact our office at 803-785-8400.

We are a nation of communities...
a brilliant diversity spread like stars, like a thousand
points of light in a broad and peaceful sky.

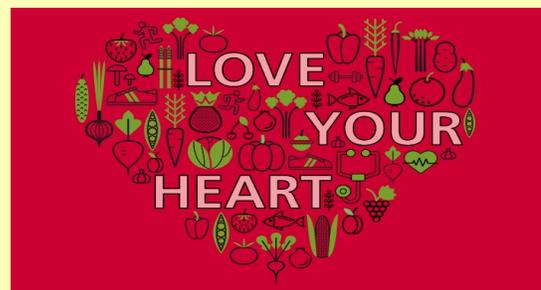
- George H. W. Bush



January is National Blood Donor Month!



February is National Heart Month!



VA Life Insurance

As part of our mission to serve service members, Veterans, and their families, the VA provides valuable life insurance benefits to give you the peace of mind that comes with knowing your family is protected. The VA's life insurance programs were developed to provide financial security for your family given the extraordinary risks involved in military service.

Benefit Descriptions, Eligibility Requirements, and How to Apply

Service Members' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) is a low-cost group term life insurance program for service members. Coverage can be extended for up to two years if the service member is totally disabled at separation. Coverage is automatic for most active duty service members, ready reserve and National Guard members scheduled to perform at least 12 periods of inactive training per year, members of the Commissioned Corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Public Health Service, cadets and midshipmen of the U.S. military academies, and ROTC members. Use SGLV 8286 to designate beneficiaries, or reduce, decline, or restore SGLI coverage.



Veterans' Group Life Insurance (VGLI) allows Veterans to convert your SGLI to a civilian program of lifetime renewable term coverage after separation from service. Service members with full-time SGLI coverage are eligible to convert SGLI to VGLI after separation from service. You would need to complete form SGLV 8714.

Family Service Members' Group Life Insurance (FSGLI) insures spouses and children of service members with SGLI coverage. Spousal coverage may not exceed the service member's coverage. Dependent children are automatically covered at no charge. The term life insurance coverage is automatically provided to spouses and dependent children of service members insured under SGLI. Use form SGLV 8286A to decline, reduce, or restore FSGLI coverage.

Service Members' Group Life Insurance Traumatic Injury Protection (TSGLI) is an automatic feature of SGLI that provides payments to service members who suffer losses, such as amputations, blindness, and paraplegia, due to traumatic injuries that occur in service. All service members insured by SGLI are automatically covered by TSGLI. To file a claim for the TSGLI benefit, complete for SGLV 8600.

Service-Disabled Veterans' Life Insurance (S-DVI) provides life insurance coverage to Veterans who have been given a VA rating for a new service-connected disability in the last two years. Totally disabled Veterans are eligible for free coverage and have the opportunity to purchase additional life insurance. This insurance is available for service members who were released from active duty under other than dishonorable conditions after April 25, 1951, AND have been granted service connection for any disability (even 0 percent) within the last two years, AND are in good health except for any service connected conditions may be eligible. For this coverage you would need to complete VA form 29-4364.



Veterans' Mortgage Life Insurance (VMLI) provides mortgage life insurance protection to disabled Veterans who have been approved for a VA Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) grant. VMLI is available to Veterans who received a SAH grant, have a title to the home, and have a mortgage on the home. You would need to complete VA form 29-8636.

The History of Apollo 1



NASA had a lofty goal, set by President John F. Kennedy in 1961, to land a man on the moon and return him safely to Earth by the end of the decade. Earlier Mercury and Gemini flights had been the first steps toward that goal, testing how humans behaved in space and how to do technical spacecraft procedures such as rendezvous. Now the Apollo missions would take astronauts all the way to the moon for orbital missions and landing missions. The first manned mission — an Earth-orbiting mission — was originally designated Apollo Saturn-204, or AS-204, but was later renamed Apollo 1.

The Apollo 1 crew commander, Virgil "Gus" Grissom, was an Air Force Veteran of the Korean War. He was chosen to be among NASA's first group of seven astronauts, the Mercury Seven. Grissom was America's second person in space in 1961. On that mission, Mercury's Liberty Bell 7, the hatch door blew for unknown reasons upon splashdown. Grissom ended up in the water and was rescued by a helicopter. Some in the Astronaut Office were skeptical that Grissom's reputation would recover however, Grissom successfully commanded the first Gemini flight, Gemini 3, and was selected to do the same for Apollo. Fellow spaceflight Veteran, Ed White, an Air Force lieutenant colonel, was the first American to make a spacewalk, on Gemini 4 in 1965. Roger Chaffee was a seasoned Navy lieutenant commander who joined the program in 1963. Although a rookie in space, he had spent years supporting the Gemini program, most publicly as CapCom on Gemini 4.



Every astronaut in the Apollo program had flight experience, and many were test pilots. They were used to seeing machines under development and dealing with delays, and assessing the airplanes' readiness for flight. In the view of many of these astronauts, the Apollo command module just wasn't ready yet. Engineering changes were still in progress as NASA prepared for the countdown test.

The morning of the test, January 27, 1967, the crew suited up and detected a foul odor in the breathing oxygen, which took about an hour to fix. Then the communications system acted up. With communications problems dragging on, the practice countdown was held. Then at 6:31 p.m. came a frightening word from the spacecraft: "Fire."

Deke Slayton, who oversaw crew selections at NASA and was present for the test, could see white flames in a closed-circuit television monitor pointing toward the spacecraft. The crew struggled to get out. Technicians raced to the scene, trying to fight the fire with extinguishers amid faulty breathing masks. At last, the door was open, but it was too late.

A NASA review board found a stray spark, probably from damaged wires, started the fire in the pure oxygen environment. Fed by flammable features such as nylon netting and foam pads, the blaze quickly spread. Further, the hatch door — intended to keep the astronauts and the atmosphere securely inside the spacecraft — turned out to be too tough to open under the unfortunate circumstances. The astronauts had struggled in vain to open the door during the fire, but the pressure inside the spacecraft sealed the door and made it impossible to open. The board listed a damning set of circumstances, failures and recommendations for future spacecraft designers to consider. The U.S. Senate conducted its own investigation and hearings and published recommendations of its own, while saying NASA's failure to report its problems with Apollo "was an unquestionably serious dereliction."

Several changes were made to the design of the Apollo spacecraft to improve crew safety. The flammable oxygen environment for ground tests was replaced with a nitrogen-oxygen mix. Flammable items were removed. A new respect developed between the astronauts and the contractors concerning design changes, which were implemented more effectively.

Continued on page 11

The History of Apollo 1 continued from page 10

Most notably, the door was completely redesigned so that it would open in mere seconds when the crew needed to get out in a hurry. Manned Apollo flights were suspended for 20 months while the command module's hazards were addressed.

The Apollo 1 fire was a difficult time for NASA and its astronauts, but the improvements in astronaut safety allowed the agency to complete the rest of the program with no further fatalities. The agency also met Kennedy's goal of landing a man on the moon in 1969, during Apollo 11.

Decades later, NASA recalls the Apollo 1 incident every January in an annual Day of Remembrance. NASA had a special ceremony honoring the Apollo 1 astronauts on the 50th anniversary of their deaths in 2017, which included unveiling a new exhibit at the Kennedy Space Center showing the hatches of the damaged command module.



County Council Needs You!

Veterans are still needed to lead the Pledge of Allegiance at County Council meetings on the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays of the month.

County Council meetings start at 4:30pm, so please be present around 4:15pm.

Contact the office at 803-785-8400, if you are interested.

The office would like to thank Sam "Tank" Owens, Mike Gordon, & Robert Romer. These individuals volunteered their time to say the Pledge of Allegiance during the months of November & December.

THANKS



Appointments are strongly encouraged to meet with our Veterans Benefits Counselors. You can call 803-785-8400 to schedule an appointment.

Reminder



Dang-it Dolls Workshops

Saturday, January 12th & Saturday, February 9th, from 10am to 2pm

Cayce Masonic Lodge, 1701 12th Street, Cayce, SC.

The Lodge Brothers will be preparing their famous Hot Dog Lunch for everyone.

Grab a friend and come join in with the stuffing and decorating of the dolls so we can bring smiles and stress relief to our service men and women. To date, with your help, we have shipped over 200,000 Dang-it Dolls all over the world.

We have volunteers ranging in age from 5 years to 90 years old.

There is something for everyone to do and this is the one place where **THE MORE THE MERRIER** really counts.

Just a reminder, Wal-Mart is only carrying minimal amounts of the Morning Glory stuffing in their stores, but it can be ordered from them on-line and shipped free to the store for a little less than the price we were paying. This is the only stuffing we use for the dolls as the other brands are too soft and silky for our purpose. A 5 pound box costs approximately \$13.00. **We can always use stuffing donations. We are also in need of funds to ship the dolls.** Any help you can give will be appreciated. The average cost of shipping a box of 25 to 30 dolls is \$35.00.

For more information, contact Carol Davis at omsrd@yahoo.com.

VOLUNTEER SERVICES AT DORN VAMC

Volunteer

Volunteers provide many important functions throughout the Medical Center and help make our patients' stay more enjoyable. Volunteers can perform a number of services, and volunteer's talents are closely matched with one of our many assignments.

To volunteer call or visit the Columbia VA Health Care System Voluntary Service Office. We will be happy to receive your application or discuss how you can help us in our mission to provide comfort and care to America's veterans.

Donate

Cash donations are used for the comfort and welfare of our Veteran patients, including:

- hygiene products
- refreshment supplies
- recreational activities

Non-cash contributions are used to make our patients' stay more enjoyable. Items which are accepted include:

- magazines
- coffee and cookies
- new sweat suits, t-shirts and socks
- telephone cards

To make a cash or non-cash contribution, please contact the Wm. Jennings Bryan Dorn VA Medical Center, Voluntary Service at telephone (803) 776-4000 extension 6780.

Contact Information

Voluntary Service Office
Building 106, Room E108
803-776-4000 Extensions 6780/7081
803-695-6780
Monday through Friday 8 am to 4:30 pm

VA and DOD senior leaders commit to aligned electronic health records system rollout

The U.S. Secretaries of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Defense (DOD) signed a joint statement September 26, 2018 pledging that their two departments will align their plans, strategies and structures as they roll out a new electronic health records (EHR) system that will allow VA and DOD to share patient data seamlessly. Signed by Defense Secretary James N. Mattis and VA Secretary Robert Wilkie, the joint statement reinforces both departments' commitment to ensuring the successful transition from a legacy patient-data system to a modernized one that will continue to support active-duty service members, Veterans and their families.

The VA signed a contract with Cerner Corporation on May 17, 2018 to replace the VA's 40-year-old legacy Veterans Integrated System Technology Architecture (VistA) health care records technology over the next 10 years with the new Cerner system, which is in the pilot phase at DOD. Collaborating with DOD will ensure that the VA: understands the challenges encountered as DOD deploys its EHR system called Military Health System GENESIS (MHS GENESIS); adapts an approach by applying lessons learned to anticipate and mitigate known issues; assesses prospective efficiencies to help deploy faster; and delivers an EHR that is fully interoperable. For more information about VA's Office of Electronic Health Record Modernization, go to www.ehrm.va.gov.

List of Common Allowable (Recurring) Medical Expenses for an Initial Claim Application

The list below shows recurring VA allowable medical expenses for the initial claim application for pension benefits. The list is not all-inclusive and must be unreimbursed by insurance. They must be paid for by the applicant and are used to reduce outside income that exceeds the VA income limit.

1. Medicare Part B Premiums
2. Medicare Part D Premiums
3. Insurance Premiums for supplemental medical insurance
4. Home Health Services
5. Assisted Living Facility Services
6. Nursing Home Services
7. Long Term Care Insurance
8. Medical Monitoring Program (like Life Alert)



There is a new number to call for billing issues through the VAMC for any private health care that was fee based out. That number is 1-877-881-7618 9am to 5pm EST.



SC Hunting and Fishing Licenses for Disabled Veterans

Residents of SC may apply for a disability license by mail or in person at a DNR Regional Office. Offices are located in Columbia, Charleston, Clemson, Florence, York, and DNR at the Market, located at the SC State Farmer's Market in West Columbia. In order to qualify for a disability license you must be declared disabled and receiving disability benefits from one of the following agencies:

- Federal Civil Service
- Medicaid or Railroad Retirement
- SC State Retirement System
- Social Security Administration
- Veterans Affairs (the VA)



In order to qualify for a Disability license you must have been a SC resident for 365 days. DNR must have a completed application, a photocopy of your SC driver's license or SC state issued ID card and current proof (dated within the past 12 months) stating you are disabled and receiving benefits.

The license will be valid for 3 years and includes privileges of hunting, big game, WMA permit, migratory waterfowl permit and fresh and saltwater fishing.

For more information, you can contact DNR at 803-734-3833 or by visiting their website at dnr.sc.gov/regs/pdf/disabilitylicense.pdf.

Did You Know...



Veterans can obtain advance directives through the Dorn VAMC. For more information contact Cheryl Geddings at 776-4000 ext. 4084.



Dorn VA hospital getting \$114 million in new buildings & renovations

The W.J.B. Dorn VA Medical Center in Columbia has been undergoing a massive \$114 million construction and renovation program to improve patient care, parking and security. It is the largest update for the medical center since the five-story main hospital was built in the late 1970s.

The dozen or so projects will continue throughout this year, include more parking, a new police station and fencing, new clinics, extensive modifications to the main hospital and renovation of the historic former nurses quarters, one of the original 1932 buildings. The program also includes four new community-based outpatient clinics in Sumter, Orangeburg, Rock Hill and Florence. The new facilities will be twice to four times the size of the present clinics.

The new facilities are needed because of the influx of new post 9/11 patients and the trend of more retirees moving south or migrating here to spend the winter. The number of patients using the facility has increased by 3.5 percent over the past two years and female patients have increased by 13.6 percent. The Dorn hospital treats 83,918 patients now. That number is expected to rise to nearly 90,000 by 2022.

Today, Columbia is the third largest Veterans' hospital in the Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina and Alabama region. It ranks behind Atlanta (112,614 patients) and Salisbury, N.C., (87,299). Charleston is number 4 with 74,533 patients. There is more demand for primary care services and surgical needs, and more and more people who are interested in coming here in the winter. To care for those additional patients, Dorn plans to add more than 500 new staffers. It has approximately 2,500 staffers today and is expected to swell to over 3,000 in the next five years.



CHANGES TO PENSION BENEFITS

Effective October 18, 2018, the VA has amended the law that affects pension benefits. The basic changes are outlined below.

The VA now considers net worth to be assets plus annual income and they cannot exceed \$127,061 combined. Unreimbursed medical expenses are still factored the same way if the client goes past this amount and used to reduce their net worth under this amount. If the expenses do not reduce their net worth under this amount, they will be denied a benefit. The benefit that will be awarded is still calculated the same way based on income and out of pocket medical expenses.

In addition, the VA now does a three-year look back on assets sold or given away, as well as money given away to anyone. This look back will determine if the client sold or gave away anything in order to get below \$127,061 to qualify for VA pension benefits. The VA will check this through the IRS, Social Security or other computer matching programs.

For the first time the VA is admitting there is a net worth cap and there is a look back on assets and income. If you have questions or concerns, contact the VARO at 1-800-827-1000.

County Offices will be closed on the following dates:

**Monday, January 1st -
New Year's Day**

**Monday, January 21st -
Martin Luther King Holiday**

**Monday, February 19th -
President's Day**

CLOSED



The VA ranked 6 out of 18 federal government agencies in 'Best Places to Work' annual tabulation

The Partnership for Public Services has ranked the VA 6th among the 17 largest federal government organizations in 2018 in the organization's annual 'Best Places to Work' tabulation. In 2017, the VA was ranked 17 out of the 18 organizations listed that year.

DID YOU KNOW...



Copies of all of our newsletters can be found on the Lexington County website at lex-co.com/departments/veteransaffairs/newsletters. The newsletters are listed on the site by year.



About Our Office

On March 22, 1945 the SC General Assembly adopted a bill creating a VA office in each of the state's 46 counties. The Lexington County VA Director is appointed by the Lexington County delegation. This office is employed by Lexington County; not the Federal VA. The Lexington County Veterans' Affairs Office is an advocate for Veterans and their surviving dependents. We provide the assistance needed in applying for benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs and for VA medical care. The Lexington County VA Office assists former and present members of the US Armed Forces and their dependents in preparing claims. Types of benefits include but not limited to: service connected disabilities and non-service connected pension; death pension benefits; burial; medical care; educational assistance, including vocational rehabilitation; guaranteed home loans; government life insurance and other benefits. We are not trained in Social Security or Department of Defense Benefits but can assist with some of these forms. Our office also provides off-site appointments at three of the County libraries once a month and we can provide home visits on a case by case basis.

OUTREACH DATES AND TIMES

 **Batesburg/Leesville Outreach** is the 2nd Friday of the month at the Batesburg/Leesville Library from 10 a.m. to 12 noon.

Chapin Outreach is the 1st Friday of the month at the Chapin Library from 10 a.m. to 12 noon. 

 **Gaston/Swansea Outreach** is the 1st Thursday of the month at the Gaston Library from 10 a.m. to 12 noon.

Appointments are strongly encouraged. Call the office at 803-785-8400 to schedule a time.

There will be no outreach in Gaston or Chapin during the month of January.

The VA has a website anyone can access for all VA questions, SEP user guides, regulations, policies, laws and any other VA resources. The website is: www.knowva.ebenefits.va.gov.

Website

VA and U.S. Digital Service Launch New Web Tool to Help Veterans Track their Benefits Appeals

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the U.S Digital Service announced their launch of an improved Appeals Status tool to increase transparency and enable Veterans to track the progress of their benefits claims appeals.

The tool, which went live March 21 on VA's Vets.gov website, will allow Veterans to access detailed information about the status of their benefits appeals and will include alerts about needed actions, as well as estimates of how long each step of the process takes.

Some Veterans who have previewed the new tool said it had given them hope and helped them understand that the process might take longer than expected.

News Tidbits from the VA & Dorn VAMC

The VA has released a Spanish version of the application for health benefits, as part of the VA's effort to simplify and improve the health care, enrollment process for Veterans. The new language version implements the VA Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans' recommendation to provide Spanish versions of the application and instructions. .



According to an independent Dartmouth study, the Department of Veterans Affairs hospitals outperform private hospitals in most health care markets throughout the country. One of the most notable findings in the study showed VA hospitals were the best or above average for treating heart attacks, heart failure and pneumonia.



The VA is celebrating the 15th anniversary of My HealthVet, an online patient portal created to empower Veterans to become active participants in their health care.

Happenings Around Lexington County

During the Months of January & February

Saturday, February 9th

Murders & Mysteries Lexington Walking Tour
Tour begins @ 8pm at the Icehouse Amphitheater.
Free to the public. For more information contact
Lexington County Museum @ 803-359-8369.



Saturday, February 16th

"Love Letters from the Past: Honoring our
Veterans" Fundraiser 6pm to 10pm.
Lexington Town Hall. For more information
contact Lexington County Museum @ 803-359-8369.



Featured Medal:

Korea Defense Service Medal

The Korea Defense Service Medal is an American military award that was first created in 2002 when it was signed into law by President George W. Bush. The bill to create the proposal was introduced and championed by Rep. Elton Gallegly and Senator Ben "Night Horse" Campbell. In 2004, the Institute of Heraldry approved the final design and the medal became authorized for distribution.

The Korea Defense Service Medal (KDSM) is authorized for those members of the U.S. military who have served duty in the Republic of Korea after the signing of the Korean Armistice Agreement in support of the defense of the Republic of Korea. To qualify for the KDSM, a service member must have served at least thirty consecutive days in the Korean theater. The medal is also granted for 60 non-consecutive days of service which includes reservists on annual training in Korea.

Exceptions are made for the 30/60 days time requirement if a service member participated in a combat armed engagement, was wounded or injured in the line of duty requiring medical evacuation, or participated as a regularly assigned aircrew member in flying sorties which totaled more than 30 days of duty in Korean airspace. In such cases, the KDSM is authorized regardless of time served in theater.

The Korea Defense Service Medal is retroactive to the end of the Korean War and is granted to any service performed after July 28, 1954. The National Personnel Records Center is responsible for verifying entitlement of the KDSM to discharged members of the military who served in Korea prior to the creation of the KDSM.

As an official Department of Defense exception to policy, service members may be entitled to both the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, and the KDSM for participation in operations in Korea during the same timeframe between October 1, 1966 - June 30, 1974



Picture of the Korean Defense Service Medal and Ribbon.

Coming in the Next Issue...

Compensation Benefits,
Special Monthly Compensation (SMC), &
presumptive disabilities