



North Central Chapter

209 N. Garfield Ave., Sioux Falls, SD 57104
1-605-336-0494 * 1-800-505-4782
Email: info@ncpva.org Website: www.ncpva.org
National PVA Website: www.pva.org



North Central Chapter

Volume 2 of 4

April/May/June 2024

Upcoming Events

April

April 3...PVA/DAV Pizza Luncheon-SF VAHC-11:30-1:00 p.m.

April 5... Melissa Stockwell Program

Military Heritage Alliance

April 11...Membership Mtg-1pm

April 17... SD Veterans Council Mtg VFW Post 1273 Rapid City 9:00 AM

April 18..VAVS Meeting

April 27...MS Walk-Fargo, ND

May

May 9...Membership Mtg-1pm

May 12...Mother's Day

May 14-17...National Convention, Minneapolis

May 18...MS Walk-Sioux Falls

May 23-24...21st Annual Wall-eye fishing, Chamberlain

May 27...Memorial Day

June

June 11-13... PVA Legislative Seminar, Washington D.C.
June 13...Membership Mtg-1pm

June 14...Flag Day
June 16...Father's Day

PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA (PVA)
&
DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS (DAV)

Will host the

ANNUAL SIOUX FALLS VA
PIZZA LUNCHEON

On

April 3, 2024

11:30—1:00 p.m.

VA Auditorium

This is our way of thanking the Staff & Volunteers

For their dedication and service to our Veterans!



SAVE THE DATE

**21st Annual Joel Niemeyer/
Firefighters Memorial
“Gone Fishing Event”**

23-24 May 2024

The 21st Annual Fishing Event will be taking place at Chamberlain, SD on 23-24 May 2024. Room Reservations will be coordinated through the PVA chapter office. We ask that you do not call the resort for reservations as this will create confusion with the rooms.



The registration and waiver requirements have been sent out and are also available on the chapters website. We would ask that everyone that is bringing a boat must coordinate that through Bill Curry. We look forward to seeing you all at the event and do not hesitate to call the office at (605) 336-0494 if you have any questions or concerns.

PVA NORTH CENTRAL CHAPTER

**North Central Chapter
Paralyzed Veterans of America**

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Brad Friez

VA Dakota Regional Office
2501 West 22nd Street, Room 100
Sioux Falls, SD 57105

605-333-6801

800-795-3632

OFFICE STAFF

Lisa Cummings, Executive Director
Terry Paulsen, Government Relations Director

Office Hours: Monday through Friday, 7:30 - 4:00

Sioux Falls VA Health Care SCI Coordinator

Melissa Suter, Social Worker
605-336-3230 ext. 7898

Fargo VA Health Care SCI Coordinator

Tracy Lamont, SCI Coordinator
701-239-3765

Black Hills VA Health Care SCI Coordinator

Amber Jones, SCI Coordinator
605-347-2511 ext. 17003

— Attention Members —

If you are receiving your newsletter by mail and would like to receive this via email, please contact me at the Chapter Office (LisaC@ncpva.org/605-336-0494) with your email address. This will help save the Chapter on postage and printing costs.



<http://www.facebook.com/ncpva>

Disclaimer: The North Central Chapter PVA newsletter is published six times a year. It serves its members and interested parties by informing them about chapter activities, veterans' issues, SCI related matters, advocacy and legislative developments and other relevant issues concerning disabilities and the disabled community. The opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the North Central Chapter, its Officers, Board Members or the Editor. Similarly, appearance of advertising herein does not constitute an endorsement of their products or services. The editor has the right to edit all articles.

PVA NORTH CENTRAL CHAPTER

Membership-Duane Biesboer

The Chapter currently has a total of 155 members and 92 Associate Members.

Regular membership is FREE! If you know of anyone who has a spinal cord injury or disease, please have the Veteran contact the Chapter office.

Beginning October 1st, all Associate Members will be invoiced for Annual Dues. Annual dues are \$30 per year and Life Dues are \$200.00.

Thank you to those who have sent in their dues!!

Please notify the Chapter when you have a change of address.

Volunteer Program-Charles Doom

The Chapter had 208 hours for the month of December YTD - 646. Donna Deutsch and Rick Albrect Volunteers of the Month. Remember to look for your volunteer number in the newsletter and win a \$25 Gift Card! If you see your number, call the Chapter Office!



“Friends Aiming High”

by John Green

Framed and Matted - \$275

Print Only - \$75

To order your print, please contact the Chapter Office at (605) 336-0494

Homeless Veterans

The Department of Veterans Affairs plans to move more than 41,000 homeless veterans into permanent housing in 2024 and conduct outreach with up to 40,000 veterans living in cars, parks or on the streets, VA Deputy Secretary Tanya Bradsher said Thursday.

The VA’s initiative involves a combination of “rapid rehousing” and community-support services that include job training, education assistance and health care, she said. “We’ve made progress in tackling this problem, but there’s still a long way to go and that’s why we’re setting these aggressive goals,” Bradsher said. For fiscal 2024,

VA funding for homeless programs is \$3.1 billion, up by more than \$400 million from 2023. Funding spans housing vouchers, rental assistance and other forms of support, the VA said. The VA anticipates it will need \$3.21 billion in 2025 for its homeless programs, according to projections in fiscal 2025 budget documents.

Homelessness has been a chronic problem for veterans for many years as service members return to civilian life with physical disabilities from injuries and mental health problems related to combat experiences, the VA said. The VA has increased efforts in immediate housing placement for veterans in conjunction with services that include mental health counseling, job training and disability benefits.

The VA said its strategy is to fulfill housing needs quickly and then provide services for ensuring the veteran can keep the housing.

The VA “engaged” 40,000 unsheltered veterans in 2023 to inform them of housing, food assistance and other services, according to the agency.

Additional resources often are targeted for unsheltered veterans who are more likely to have a criminal justice history, medical or drug abuse problems, lack of social support from family members and greater financial hardship, the VA said.



1-800-273-8255 PRESS 1



Online
My Health, My Care: 24/7 Access to VA

988 - SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE

PVA NORTH CENTRAL CHAPTER

Incorrect VA Forms

The [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs](#) was recently notified and confirmed an error by a contract service provider that nearly 6,000 veterans and/or accredited representatives received letters advising them to submit an incorrect form.

Veterans and/or accredited representatives who submitted outdated forms for decision review requests (VA forms 0995 and 0996) were sent letters directing them, inaccurately, to submit form 526EZ.

VA will ensure all affected veterans are made whole and they receive the benefits they have earned.

Claims identified as impacted are being processed with adjusted effective dates and using the date of their original submission as appropriate.

VBA continues to examine data to identify which cases are resolved satisfactorily and those that remain to be completed. The data breakdown will be provided once it is available.

On March 7, 2024, VA was first alerted to the error by veterans, Veteran Service Organizations, and VA Regional Office staff members.

VA and the service provider took immediate corrective action to stop inaccurate letters from being sent by deploying system fixes to the automation process.

Additionally, VA has initiated appropriate contractual actions to hold the service provider accountable for the failure and lack of appropriate configuration management procedures.

VA utilizes the service providers automation capabilities to support receipt of claims and evidence submitted to VBA.

To ensure the automation services are operating as designed, a full operational review will be required by the vendor. In parallel, VA will conduct an independent technical analysis of the service provider's solution and after-action report.



Helpline Center Offers New Survivor of Suicide Loss Website

The Helpline Center has offered support to those bereaved by suicide loss since 1999 and now, thanks to funds raised through The 437 Project, they are able to expand how they can meet individuals in their grief.

We're happy to announce that they have also launched a new website designed with the goal of providing hope and help to even more suicide loss survivors. There are many new features on the site and we encourage you to take a look and help us spread the word!

[Healing After a Suicide Loss](#) booklet, [In Remembrance](#) page, [Resource Library](#)

In addition to the website and resources, they will begin offering a virtual support group online on the third Wednesday of each month via Zoom. They truly want to support individuals across South Dakota and are hopeful these new opportunities will provide just that. To learn more about their survivor resources or their virtual support group, please email griefsupport@helplinecenter.org.

CFC Campaign

If you are a federal government employee or your employer offers a charitable giving campaign through United Way, you can help us to continue our programs and services we offer to our members, veterans and other individual with disabilities.

CONTRIBUTION CODE: 54682



PVA NORTH CENTRAL CHAPTER,

Message from SDDVA Secretary Whitlock

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs recently announced that all veterans who were exposed to toxins and other hazards while serving in the military, at home or abroad, will be eligible to enroll directly in VA healthcare beginning March 5, 2024. This expansion of VA healthcare eliminates the phased-in approach called for by the PACT Act. This means that veterans can become eligible for VA healthcare up to eight years earlier than written into law. A major part of the expansion is that veterans who never deployed but were exposed to toxins or hazards while training or on active duty in the United States are eligible to enroll in VA healthcare. Many veterans believe they must receive VA disability benefits to be eligible for VA healthcare, but with this expansion millions of eligible veterans can enroll directly in VA care without the need to first apply for other VA benefits. We encourage all veterans to contact a state, county, or tribal veterans service officer to discuss these changes to get assistance. Can veterans file directly online? Yes. Do we recommend they take that path? No – why go it alone when there are experts that can assist you? State, county, and tribal veterans service officers are trained to navigate a bureaucracy that is complex and ever-changing. They are here to help with all your earned benefits! I encourage all veterans and their families to work with a state, county, or tribal veterans service officer. Please visit our website to assist in locating the VSO nearest you: <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/veteransserviceofficers/locatevso.aspx> or call (605) 773.3269 to locate the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs location nearest you. As a veteran, you served your country honorably, and your state, county, and tribal veterans service officers want to say thank you by ensuring you obtain all the benefits to which you and your family members are entitled.

What's in FY 2025 VA Budget

The total fiscal year 2025 request for the VA is \$369.3 billion, a \$33 billion (+10%) increase above the fiscal year 2024 Budget estimate level. This includes a discretionary request of \$134.0 billion. The fiscal year 2025 mandatory funding request is \$235.3 billion, which includes \$24.5 billion from the Cost of War Toxic Exposures Fund (TEF), for a total increase of \$41.8 billion (21.6%) above fiscal year 2024. The VA believes this proposed budget will:

Expand health care and benefits for veterans who were exposed to toxins and other hazards while serving our country. As part of the PACT Act, Congress authorized the TEF to invest in the delivery of health care associated with exposure to environmental hazards and any expenses incident to the delivery of health care and benefits associated with exposure to environmental hazards in the military. The Budget continues this commitment and includes \$24.5 billion for the TEF in fiscal year 2025.

- Support the delivery of health care for veterans across America: This Budget invests \$112.6 billion in discretionary medical care funding in fiscal year 2025. In addition to fully funding inpatient, outpatient, mental health, and long-term care services, the Budget supports programs that enhance VA healthcare quality and delivery, including a \$2 billion investment for non-recurring maintenance to improve medical facility infrastructure, and continued efforts to address the opioid and drug overdose epidemic.
- Prioritize mental health care and suicide prevention for veterans. The Budget invests \$135 million in VA research programs – along with \$17 billion within the VA Medical Care program – to increase access to quality mental health care and lower the cost of mental health services for veterans, with the goal of helping veterans take charge of their treatment and live full, meaningful lives. In addition, the Budget provides \$583 million to further advance the Administration's Veteran suicide prevention initiatives, including continued support of the 988 Veterans Crisis Line (Dial 988, press 1) and additional support for the VA's National Suicide Prevention Strategy.
- Support health care for women veterans. The Budget invests \$13.7 billion for women veterans' healthcare, including \$1.1 billion towards women's gender-specific care.
- Bolster efforts to end veteran homelessness. The Budget invests \$3.2 billion to help the VA's efforts to end veteran homelessness and prevent veterans from becoming homeless in the future. The Budget also includes funding for the Department of Housing and Urban Development to expand housing vouchers to more veterans in need.
- Invest in claims processing and benefits delivery for veterans. The Budget provides \$4 billion to the Veterans Benefits Administration to support the processing of claims and delivery of benefits to Veterans. For more information on the VA budget, please visit the VA's budget website.

PVA NORTH CENTRAL CHAPTER

From the Office of Brad Friez **National Serviced Officer**

I want to encourage clients to keep our office up-to-date on address or phone or email changes that occur. Also, if there is a change in your family we need to know that information as well. Sometimes a Veteran or a family member who is a client updates the VA but does not update our office with that same information. And to piggyback this message please set up your voice mail box and keep it from becoming full. There are times when one or the other of these situations occurs when we attempt to return a call and thus we are not able to connect with that person. We very much appreciate it when we do have your current contact information and are able to connect with you as you need us to.

President Biden signed the new Auto Grant legislation into law in January of 2023. Apparently there are still some issues with this program. During our last Chapter meeting in March we heard from one of our members that the contractor the VA works with in performing drivers testing in Sioux Falls does not have a handicapped accessible vehicle and so they literally have to have two individuals lift this person into the vehicle for his drivers test. At another VA location we are told they do not have a local contractor in place to actually do the drivers testing. There are also delays in some locations to the processing of this benefit. If any of these examples with respect to the Auto Grant Program describes your specific situation we want and need to hear about those so we can inform the VA and work with our chain of command to resolve those issues.

Lastly, the PACT Act was expanded as of March 5, 2024. Whether you were active duty or in the National Guard or Reserves and feel you were exposed to toxins you are encouraged to complete the application form for enrollment into the VA Health Care System.



Bonnie Schmidt and Kristine Schaeffer attended the Standup for Women Veterans Retreat on May 23. Bonnie and Kristine represented the PVA Chapter with a booth and giveaways. The event had approximately 60 women Veterans in attendance.



Casey Davidson presented the Chapter with a picture of him skiing while he attended Ski For Light at Terry Peak.

PVA NORTH CENTRAL CHAPTER, FUNDRAISING



We're proud to be a Thrivent Choice®-enrolled organization. Through the Thrivent programs, we are eligible to receive grant dollars, fee-free donations, and support from Thrivent Action Team service projects.

To learn more about Thrivent's membership benefits and generosity programs visit thrivent.com/generosity

Qualified Charitable Distributions



The Pension Protection Act of 2006 first allowed taxpayers age 70½ or older to make tax-free charitable donations directly from their IRAs. Technically, these taxpayers were allowed to exclude from gross income otherwise taxable distributions from their IRA ("qualified charitable distributions," or QCDs), up to \$100,000, that were paid directly to a qualified charity.

These gifts are also known as "Charitable IRA rollovers." The law was originally scheduled to expire in 2007, but was extended periodically through 2014 by subsequent legislation, and finally made permanent by the Protect Americans from Tax Hikes (PATH) Act of 2015.

Newsletter Booster Program
Thank you for your support!

Alan & Kathryn Gobczynski (2)
Paul Hanson (2)
Dennis Hahnemann (2)
Jim and Marilyn Arneson (2)
Paul Groenweg

Please support your local Chapter!

Newsletter Booster Program

The North Central Chapter PVA publishes the newsletter 6 times per year. We would like to invite our PVA members, Associate Members, and business associates to help support the Newsletter Booster Program. Your name will be published in each newsletter (unless otherwise specified) for only \$10.00. Please help defray the cost of publishing by supporting **YOUR** Chapter. Thank you!

I wish to make the following donation to the Newsletter Booster Program:

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Amount of donation \$ _____

Send all remittance payable to:
PVA North Central Chapter, 209 N. Garfield Ave., Sioux Falls, SD 57104

PVA NORTH CENTRAL CHAPTER, ADVOCACY/LEGISLATION-TERRY PAULSEN

Bill Allowing Disabled Veterans to Collect Full Benefits Gets New Push from Supporters on Capitol Hill

Leading lawmakers and veterans groups are renewing their push for a bill that would dramatically expand benefits for veterans injured in combat.

The Major Richard Star Act, as the bill is called, would ensure all service members who medically retire have full access to both military retirement pay and Department of Veterans Affairs disability benefits. The bill had some momentum last year but has since stalled.

But veterans service organizations on Capitol Hill this week and lawmakers from both parties who are sponsoring the bill are now vowing to keep fighting until the bill crosses the finish line. "We're not going to stop until we fix this injustice for our veterans and their loved ones," Senate Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Jon Tester, D-Mont., said at a news conference Tuesday afternoon alongside a throng of veterans.

"I know that the VSOs and the veteran community can come together, and they can help us get this done," Tester added. "We saw it with the PACT Act. We saw veterans step up and make a big difference and actually, the truth is, got the bill passed in the United States Senate. We're going to have to do it again with the Major Richard Star Act."

Right now, veterans with fewer than 20 years of service and a disability rating of less than 50% have their retirement pay reduced by a dollar for every dollar of disability pay they get. Those rules mean an estimated 50,000 retirees are ineligible for concurrent benefits. The average offset was about \$1,900 per month in 2022, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

The Major Richard Star Act would remove those restrictions so that all retirees with combat-related disabilities can collect their full retirement and disability benefits. The bill's namesake was an Iraq and Afghanistan veteran who was forced to retire before 20 years of service after he was diagnosed with lung cancer he developed following burn pit exposure. Star died from cancer in 2021. (Continued)

"By far, Richard's greatest goal was to pass this," his widow, Tonya Star, said at Tuesday's news conference. "These men and women earned their retirements the hard way, and Richard made myself, along with many of you, promise that we would not stop until we got this done. It hasn't been an easy road to travel. I know many of you, like myself, were in offices today advocating for this bill. I cannot thank you enough for all of your support. We are closer than we have ever been. We're going to get it done this year."

The news conference was held ahead of Wednesday's start of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs committees' annual veterans service organizations hearings, where the groups were expected to advocate for the bill. Veterans groups also held private meetings with several congressional offices Tuesday to lobby for the bill.

The bill, which falls under the jurisdiction of both the Veterans Affairs and Armed Services committees, was advanced out of the House Armed Services Committee last year. It has also garnered more than 320 co-sponsors in the House and more than 70 in the Senate.

Despite the broad bipartisan support, there has been no movement on the bill since the House committee vote amid questions about how it would be paid for. The Congressional Budget Office has projected the legislation could cost an estimated \$9.75 billion in what's known as mandatory spending over the next decade.

But supporters of the bill argue the country owes the benefits to its veterans, regardless of cost. Supporters said they are hoping to get the legislation attached to the annual defense policy bill that will move through Congress later this year and, if that doesn't work, look for any other legislative vehicle they can find.

"We're not going to rest until we pass the Richard Star Act," Rep. Gus Bilirakis, R-Fla., the lead House sponsor, said at the news conference. "This is a righteous cause."

PVA NORTH CENTRAL CHAPTER, ADVOCACY/LEGISLATION-TERRY PAULSEN**VA aims to emphasize free burial benefits for veterans at national cemeteries**

The Department of Veterans Affairs is nearing its goal to provide 95% of veterans with burial options at national and grant-funded veterans cemeteries within a two-hour drive of their homes. Yet less than a quarter of veterans and their families take advantage of the free burials, headstones and other services offered at the 158 national veterans cemeteries the VA operates, “Increasing awareness is a top priority,” “We need to get the message out that this is the final benefit the nation will be able to provide veterans for their service, An informal survey by the National Cemetery Administration found that only a third of veterans were aware of the benefits.

The National Cemetery Administration provides “perpetual care” at more than 5 million gravesites of military veterans. More than 135,000 veterans were laid to rest at national veterans cemeteries last year. Burial services are extended to eligible veterans, their spouses and qualifying dependents. Families often have a difficult time gaining entrance to the cemetery without calling ahead and waiting several days for permission, and Sullivan encouraged Quinn and other VA officials to provide easier access.

The National Cemetery Administration’s work extends to managing national cemeteries and supporting state and tribal veterans cemeteries through the veterans cemetery grants program. Quinn said the National Cemetery Administration is reaching out to veterans service organizations to provide information about the memorial benefits and encourage veterans and their families to consider end-of-life planning long before they need it through certification known as “pre-need eligibility determination.”

Previously veterans and their families had to wait for two to three months for eligibility confirmation, but the process is now completed in days, Quinn said. Veterans cannot select a particular space for a burial plot, but they may choose the cemetery as long as there is space available. “Planning ahead is really helpful since many families don’t worry about required documents until there is an event.” Figlioli said that inflation has taken its toll at veterans cemeteries, where the price to maintain the headstones and landscape has increased as the price of tools and supplies has risen. A fiscal 2024 budget increase of \$50 million — 11% higher than the previous year — to fund operations and maintenance at national veterans cemeteries will pay for additional staff and cover higher prices for grounds maintenance due to inflation. “Cemeteries are unlike telemedicine, where the cost-of-living differences can be fixed with the implementation of remote solutions,” Figlioli said. “Bids are extremely high for construction, landscaping, fertilizer, grants and janitorial services.

The number of interments at VA national cemeteries is expected to be 137,440 in 2025 and will decline gradually, according to budget documents. The fiscal 2025 budget for the National Cemetery Administration includes nearly \$500 million for funding memorial benefits as well as support for operations and maintenance. “These funds maintain national shrine standards,” according to budget documents.

The National Cemetery Administration also is seeking to increase the availability of state, territory and tribal veterans cemeteries in areas of the country not served by national veterans cemeteries. The grants program plays a crucial role in achieving the administration’s strategic target of providing 95% of veterans with reasonable access to a burial option, the administration said.

PVA NORTH CENTRAL CHAPTER

VA has processed more than one million Veteran benefit claims in fiscal year 2024, the fastest rate in VA history

WASHINGTON — Today, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced that it has processed its one millionth Veteran benefits claim in fiscal year 2024. VA reached this milestone March 4 — the earliest in VA history and nearly six weeks faster than the previous all-time record (from fiscal year 2023). VA has completed almost 35% more claims than at this point last year.

As a part of President Biden’s Unity Agenda for the nation, VA is continuing to deliver more benefits, more quickly, to more Veterans than ever before. Through February of this fiscal year, VA provided \$69 billion in earned compensation and pension benefits to 6.5 million Veterans and survivors. This milestone builds on last year’s historic pace, when VA delivered record amounts of earned benefits to Veterans and survivors.

This increase in Veteran benefits is largely due to the PACT Act, which has empowered VA to expand health care and benefits to millions of Veterans who were exposed to toxins and other hazards while serving our country.

“We’re proud to be delivering more benefits, more quickly, to more Veterans and survivors than ever before – but we’re not slowing down,” said VA Under Secretary for Benefits Josh Jacobs. “We won’t rest until every Veteran and every survivor to get the VA benefits and care that they’ve earned. So, to any Veteran or survivor out there: don’t wait, submit your claim today.”

Whenever a Veteran files a claim, our goal is to work with them every step of the way to get to “yes.” As a result of this approach, VA has been able to grant benefits for 60.4% of claims filed in 2024 — including 75.1% of PACT Act claims — a sharp increase in the grant rate from pre-PACT Act levels. Veterans also continue to apply for benefits at record rates, with VA receiving 4.5% more claims thus far in fiscal year 2024 than at this point in 2023. Since the PACT Act was signed into law by President Biden, Veterans and their families have filed more than 3.5 million claims.

As a part of reaching one million claims, VA processed 221,592 disability compensation and pension claims during January 2024 alone – making it VA’s highest single month of claims production ever, surpassing the previous monthly record of 193,411 from May 2023. VA’s top 11 best claims production months in agency history all happened in the last 12 months. Additionally, the organization continues to achieve single day processing milestones – VA processed between 9,000 and 10,000 Veteran claims 43 times in fiscal year 2024 and more than 10,000 Veteran claims 35 times during the same time period. February 7, 2024 was the best single production day ever in VBA history with 10,997 claims completed. Before fiscal year 2024, VA had only had three 9,000 claim production days in history.

As a result of this record pace, Veteran claims pending over 125 days – known as the backlog – has decreased by more than 42,000 claims over the past three months. Due to record numbers of claims applications, the backlog is still expected to grow in 2024 before decreasing at the end of this year – and VA will continue to hire new claims processors, invest in continuous learning for all claims processors, and make technology improvements to ensure that Veterans, family members, caregivers and survivors receive the benefits they’ve earned and deserve as quickly and accurately as possible.

VA remains focused on hiring and training new claims processors and has grown the claims processing workforce more than 50% since fiscal year 2021. This growth, along with new technology to assist those processors, has allowed VA to meet the historic demand for benefits precipitated by the pas-



PVA NORTH CENTRAL CHAPTER

VA expands in vitro fertilization for Veterans

WASHINGTON — Today, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced that it will soon be able to provide in vitro fertilization (IVF) to eligible unmarried Veterans and eligible Veterans in same-sex marriages. VA will also be able to provide IVF to Veterans using donated sperm or eggs – a critical step toward helping Veterans who are not able to produce their own sperm or eggs due to service-connected injuries and health conditions.

Under existing law, all Veterans who receive IVF from VA must be unable to procreate without the use of fertility treatment due to a health condition caused by their military service. Before today's expansion of care, VA was only allowed to provide IVF services to Veterans who were legally married and – within that relationship – able to produce their own gametes (both eggs and sperm). Under this expansion of care, VA will offer IVF benefits to qualifying Veterans regardless of marital status and – for the first time – allow the use of donor eggs, sperm, and embryos.

VA is taking immediate steps to implement this policy and expects to be ready to deliver this care to Veterans nationwide in the coming weeks.

“Raising a family is a wonderful thing, and I’m proud that VA will soon help more Veterans have that opportunity,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “This expansion of care has long been a priority for us, and we are working urgently to make sure that eligible unmarried Veterans, Veterans in same-sex marriages, and Veterans who need donors will have access to IVF in every part of the country as soon as possible.”

All Veterans enrolled in VA health care are eligible for a wide range of reproductive health services at VA – including maternity care, gynecology care, access to contraceptives, cervical cancer screening, menopause care, and more. All enrolled Veterans are also eligible for fertility evaluation, management and select treatment for fertility conditions.

VA can also cover up to \$2000 of adoption expenses for Veterans who have a service-connected disability that causes infertility. Under current law, however, VA is not authorized to cover surrogacy for any Veterans.14678

VA has advocated for this IVF expansion for years, including submitting repeated legislative proposals to expand IVF services at VA.

Notice of PVA North Central Chapter Election

Election Timeline

April 1 = Nominations open. Nominations may be made in person or by any other electronic means.

April 30 = Nominations Close.

May 1 = Ballots will be mailed out with a self-addressed return envelope. Ballots must be returned in the envelope in a timely manner.

June 13 = Election results will be reported at the Annual Membership Meeting.

October 1 = New term of office begins.

In accordance with Chapter bylaws, Election of Officers will be held annually, and the Officers will serve a one (1) year term. Officers include: President, Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer. The Board of Directors will serve a three (3) year term. At the Annual June Chapter Membership Meeting, election results will be announced.

The Chapter Election Committee will count the ballots and tally up the results. This committee is Steve Wagner and Rick Albrecht who are two non-voting individuals.

In the event of a tie, it will be broken at the next membership meeting. A tie will be broken by a verbal vote of the membership where a quorum, as defined by a chapter's bylaws, is present.

If you have any questions on the election procedure, contact the Chapter Office.

PVA NORTH CENTRAL CHAPTER



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Co-Presented by:



PVA NORTH CENTRAL CHAPTER



PVA North Central Chapter

Birthday Roster

April 2024

John Martin	Carl Stricherz
Cliff Koele	Rodney Melcher
Terry Williams	Bruce Hoffman
David Allen	Victor Kienetz
Thomas Olson	Carl Oleson
Frederick Ellwein	Linn Garber
David VanHorn	Christine Speirs
Shaun Rupe	

May 2024

John Kuhlman	Bob Buchanon
Larry Johnson	Merle Kjer
John Huntington	Vernon Howie
Gary Nordean	Gary Howie
Dennis McNulty	Steve Whitney
Roger Holtzman	Perry Grimme
Ken Laughlin	Bob Uecker
Scott Peterson	Bob DeJong
Michael McGinnis	Travis Kasten
Eric Vetter	Sarah Bierman
Kimberly Hubers	

June 2024

Alan Hughart	Dean Wilson
Steve Wagner	Chuck Doom
Gene Murphy	James Arneson
K. Myers	Ray Durband
Kerry Parker	David Wren
Fidell Wadsworth	Duane Biesboer



June Continued

Eileen White	Troy Metzinger
William Deknikker	Dennis Elfring
Kelly Eszlinger	Cameron Hoverson
Jon Albers	Brian Nelson

Veterans Provided Incorrect Information

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs was recently notified and confirmed an error by a contract service provider that nearly 6,000 veterans and/or accredited representatives received letters advising them to submit an incorrect form. Veterans and/or accredited representatives who submitted outdated forms for decision review requests (VA forms 0995 and 0996) were sent letters directing them, inaccurately, to submit form 526EZ. The VA will ensure all affected veterans are made whole and they receive the benefits they have earned. Claims identified as impacted are being processed with adjusted effective dates and using the date of their original submission as appropriate. The VBA continues to examine data to identify which cases are resolved satisfactorily and those that remain to be completed. The data breakdown will be provided once it is available. On March 7, 2024, the VA was first alerted to the error by veterans, veteran service organizations, and VA Regional Office staff members. The VA and the service provider took immediate corrective action to stop inaccurate letters from being sent by deploying system fixes to the automation process. Additionally, the VA has initiated appropriate contractual actions to hold the service provider accountable for the failure and lack of appropriate configuration management procedures. The VA utilizes the service providers automation capabilities to support receipt of claims and evidence submitted to VBA. To ensure the automation services are operating as designed, a full operational review will be required by the vendor. In parallel, the VA will conduct an independent technical analysis of the service provider's solution and after-action report.

PVA NORTH CENTRAL CHAPTER

Sleep apnea device improves Veteran's health and sleep

A nerve stimulator placed under the skin

For years, Air Force Veteran Deanna King struggled with fatigue and exhaustion. After seeking help at Michael E. DeBakey VA in Houston and receiving a new device designed to treat sleep apnea, she sleeps like a baby.

"I was a walking zombie. I would often wake myself up because of snoring, but I really thought I was getting plenty of sleep. It wasn't until my daughter brought up my snoring that I decided to get it checked out."

Houston VA's Sleep Disorder Research Center team

King participated in a sleep study which revealed a diagnosis that almost six-million people in the United States have received. She had obstructive sleep apnea. King was quickly given a CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) machine but knew it was not for her. "The CPAP machine was a total no-go for me. I brought it back the next day."

That's when Dr. Supriya Singh, director of Houston VA's Sleep Disorder Research Center, stepped in. After hearing King's story, Singh suggested she may be a great candidate for Inspire, a newer device designed to treat sleep apnea. The Inspire device is a nerve stimulator placed under the skin above the chest during a simple medical operation.

"This device works with the patient's natural breathing process to treat obstructive sleep apnea," said Singh, who is board certified in pulmonary disease, internal medicine and sleep medicine. "It stimulates the tongue and the palate to move them forward to open up the airway allowing oxygen to flow naturally."

Device designed to not wake the patient up

The medical procedure to implant the device is about two hours long and consists of one incision under the jaw where an electrode is placed. A battery is placed under the skin on the chest which connects to the electrode. The patient is then given a remote control to turn the device on before they go to sleep and off when they wake up. The stimulation is subtle and is designed to not wake the patient up, meaning it

shouldn't be painful or uncomfortable.

Deanna King: "I sleep great and wake up refreshed."

"Since I got this new device, my quality of life has improved so much. I sleep great and wake up refreshed. The remote is so easy to use. It really is a life-changer," King shared.

Despite being just a minor annoyance, there are several potentially serious side effects to sleep apnea. Left untreated, they include high blood pressure, strokes and heart issues. According to Singh, sleep problems such as insomnia, nightmares and sleep apnea affect everyone, but they are particularly common among military Veterans. She says her team at Houston VA is thrilled to offer Veterans the latest technology to treat sleep disorders. 13588

"We see thousands of Veterans every year in our sleep clinic. Numerous clinical trials have found this new device to be safe and effective and we are excited to see such wonderful results in our Veterans. Our goal is to improve the lives of each and every Veteran we see," said Singh, who is also an assistant professor of Medicine-Pulmonary, Critical Care and Sleep Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine.

Now that she is getting plenty of rest, King—retired from the Air Force with more than 20 years of service—is planning trips to Spain and Morocco later this year. "Travel is what I enjoy in my retirement and I'm looking forward to many more trips," she said.

SDDVA To host spring mini conferences

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs will be hosting spring mini conferences April 23-25. These conferences are a great educational opportunity for SDDVA staff to update county and tribal veterans service officers on recent benefit changes as well as provide training on new processes used to file various claims. This year's conferences will be held from 10:00 am—2:00 pm at the following locations: April 23—Rapid City—Pennington County Conference Room (321 Kansas City Street). Please utilize parking lot behind the building, parking on Kansas City Street is limited to two hours. April 24—Pierre—Post 8 American Legion cabin (520 S. Pierre Street). April 25—Sioux Falls—South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance (1600 W. Russell Street)

PVA NORTH CENTRAL CHAPTER

SD State Veterans Cemetery Endowment Fund

With the passing of SB 91, the South Dakota Veterans Council established an Endowment Fund with the South Dakota Community Foundation. This fund will be used for the maintenance and operations of the veterans cemetery in Sioux Falls, SD

The South Dakota State Veterans Cemetery is located at the 1-90/I-229 area in Sioux Falls, SD and encompasses up to 50 acres of land donated by the City of Sioux Falls.

All federally defined veterans, spouses, and dependent children are eligible for burial in the State Veterans Cemetery.

We are proud to be able to give our veterans their final resting place on the eastside and keep them close to their families.

<https://sdcommunityfoundation.org/for-advisors/existing-funds/south-dakota-veterans-cemetery-fund/>

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

VA Health Care Systems Contact Information

Sioux Falls VA Health Care System

2501 West 22nd Street
Sioux Falls, SD 57105
Phone: (605) 336-3230 or (800) 316-8387
Fax: (605) 333-6878

VA Black Hills Health Care System - Fort Meade Campus

113 Comanche Road
Fort Meade, SD 57741
Phone: (605) 347-2511 or (800) 743-1070
Fax: (605) 720-7171

VA Black Hills Health Care System

500 North 5th Street
Hot Springs, SD 57747
Phone: 605-745-2000
Fax: 605-745-2091

Minneapolis VA Health Care System

One Veterans Drive
Minneapolis, MN 55417
Phone: (612) 725-2000 or 866-414-5058
Fax: (612) 725-2049

Fargo VA Health Care System

2101 Elm Street
Fargo, ND 58102
Phone: (701)232-3241
Fax: (701)239-3705

VA Montana Health Care System

1892 Williams Street
Fort Harrison, MT 59636
Phone: (406) 442-6410
Fax: (406) 447-7916

Cheyenne VA Health Care System

2360 E. Pershing Blvd.
Cheyenne, WY 82001
Phone: (307)778-7550
Fax: (307) 778-7336

Sheridan VA Health Care System

1898 Fort Road
Sheridan, WY 82801
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The PVA North Central Chapter proudly serves the states of North Dakota, South Dakota, Southwest Minnesota, and portions of Montana and Wyoming.