



March 16, 2021

COVID-19 Resource Guide

Veterans



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●●● A NOTE FROM CONGRESSWOMAN SUZAN DELBENE ●●●

The COVID-19 pandemic is the largest public health and economic crisis our state and county have faced in a lifetime. Many people have lost their jobs, kids are out of school, and businesses have closed their doors. This situation requires bold action to provide relief to the most affected and provide a strong recovery.

I want you to know that I'm fighting for you in Congress. Since the beginning of this outbreak, my priorities at the federal level are protecting families, workers, and small businesses, and getting our health care system the resources it needs to save lives.

Congress has now passed three major relief packages to address this pandemic and provide economic resources to our communities. This guide contains information about the resources available to veterans impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is meant to be a reference tool and the information within is not exhaustive. Inside you will find a compilation of existing federal and state resources.

Because the situation is constantly evolving, check my website (delbene.house.gov) or call my office in Kirkland at 425-485-0085 for additional assistance.

Please know that my staff and I are here to help. Stay safe and healthy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Suzan DelBene".

Suzan DelBene
U.S. Representative

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QUICK GUIDE

Department of Defense Resources

- DOD Website
<https://www.defense.gov/>
- DOD Fact Sheet: COVID-19 Military Personnel Pay, and Benefits Policy
<https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2127448/fact-sheet-covid-19-military-personnel-pay-and-benefits-policy/>

Veterans Resources

- WA State Department of Veterans Affairs
<https://www.dva.wa.gov/>
- VA Puget Sound Health Care System
<https://www.pugetsound.va.gov/>
- Educational Benefits
<https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/72852/veterans-gi-bill-benefits-continue-covid-19-pandemic/>
- King County Veterans Services
<https://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/community-human-services/veterans.aspx>
- Skagit County Veterans Services
<https://www.communityactionskagit.org/skagit-vets-connect/>
- Snohomish County Veterans Services
<https://snohomishcountywa.gov/598/Veterans-Assistance-Program>
- Whatcom County Veterans Services
<http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us/866/Veterans-Program>

For assistance please contact any of my offices, or visit my website at www.delbene.house.gov

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Kirkland, WA 98033
(425) 485-0085

Mount Vernon Office:
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Mount Vernon, WA 98273
(360) 416-7879

Washington, DC Office:
2330 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515
(202) 225-6311

VACCINATION UPDATE

VA Puget Sound is now providing [Pfizer](#) and [Moderna](#) vaccines depending on the site. VA Puget Sound health clinic sites include the Seattle, American Lake, Silverdale, and Mount Vernon locations. The VA Puget Sound has been proactively contacting veterans of all ages to make vaccine appointments when it is their turn. **Vaccines will be administered by appointment only.** Eligible veterans can call **206-716-5716** to schedule or contact their primary care team. The VA has a Veteran COVID Vaccine Hotline, 206-277-4040, (recorded message only) with vaccine information.

The VA will continue to proactively contact veterans to make vaccination appointments. The [policy of no walk-in patients outside of emergent care needs](#) remains in place.

Where veterans should go for questions:

- For **COVID-19** or **COVID 19 vaccines questions** and information, veterans should call 800-myVA411 (800-698-2411) and visit the [VA Coronavirus Vaccine FAQs webpage](#).
- You can also use the [VA's Stay Informed](#) tool to indicate whether you intend to get the vaccine. That data will then be passed along to VA medical facilities, like VA Puget Sound. Veterans will also be able to use the tool to indicate their interest in getting continual updates from the VA.
- For **non-COVID-19** vaccine-related health care concerns, you should first call 800-329-8387 or reach out to your primary care team.

THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN

- Ensures veterans will not have any copays or cost-sharing for preventative treatment or services related to COVID-19 going back to April 2020 and authorizes the VA to reimburse those veterans who already submitted payments for their care during this period.
- Includes more than \$14.5 billion for VA to provide health care services and other related supports, including suicide prevention, Women's health services, telehealth expansion, medical facility improvements, to eligible veterans and allows up to \$4 billion in spending for the Veterans Community Care Program.
- Provides nearly \$400 million for up to 12 months of retraining assistance for veterans who are unemployed as a result of the pandemic and do not have access to other veteran education benefits. This funding covers the cost of the rapid retraining program as well as a housing allowance for enrolled veterans.
- Includes \$272 million for the VA to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the benefits claims and appeals backlog.
- Provides emergency paid sick leave for VA's frontline and essential health workers.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: What should veterans do if they think they have COVID-19?

A: Before visiting local VA medical facilities, community providers, urgent care centers, or emergency departments in their communities, veterans experiencing COVID-19 symptoms—such as fever, cough, and shortness of breath—are encouraged to call their VA medical facility or call MyVA311 (844-698-2311, press #3 to be connected).

Veterans can also send secure messages to their health care providers via [MyhealththeVet](#), VA's online patient portal. VA clinicians will evaluate veterans' symptoms and direct them to the most appropriate providers for further evaluation and treatment. This may include referral to state or local health departments for COVID-19 testing.

Q: What about routine appointments and previously scheduled procedures?

A: VA is encouraging all veterans to call their VA facility before seeking any care—even previously scheduled medical visits, mental health appointments, or surgical procedures. Veterans can also send secure messages to their health care providers via [MyhealththeVet](#) and find out whether they should still come in for their scheduled appointments. VA providers may arrange to convert appointments to [video visits](#), where possible.

Q: Can visitors still access VA medical facilities?

A: Many VA medical facilities have canceled public events for the time being, and VA is urging all visitors who do not feel well to postpone their visits to local VA medical facilities. Facilities have also been directed to limit the number of entrances through which visitors can enter. Upon arrival, all patients, visitors, and employees will be screened for COVID-19 symptoms and possible exposure.

Q: What about VA nursing homes and spinal cord injury units?

A: On March 10, 2020, [VA announced](#) that its 134 nursing homes (also called VA community living centers) and 24 spinal cord injury and disorder centers would be *closed* to all outside visitors. All clinical staff will be screened for COVID-19 daily before entering the nursing home or spinal cord injury units, and staff will work only within those units to limit possible transmission of the virus. Exceptions to the visitor policy will only be made for cases when veterans are in their last stages of life on hospice units or inpatient spinal cord injury units.

Q: I have a VA-backed mortgage, am I protected against foreclosure during the COVID-19 emergency declaration?

A: Yes, under CARES Act Section 4022, federally backed mortgages, including those guaranteed or insured by the VA are protected from foreclosure for 60 days beginning on March 18, 2020. If borrowers are facing financial hardship, they can by requesting a forbearance for up to 6 months, with a possible extension for another 6 months, through their mortgage holder.

Q: My school is converting to online education because of COVID-19, will I still receive my housing allowance?

A: Yes, with the passage of Senate Bill 3503 into law, VA will continue to make housing allowance payments to students using VA education benefits at the on-campus rate, if the school converted to online education due to COVID-19.

Q: I'm an AmeriCorps member and I'm unable to complete my term of service as a result of COVID-19. What happens to my education award?

A: Many AmeriCorps members will have difficulty completing the required number of volunteer hours due to current limitations on volunteer opportunities. The CARES Act allows the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) to have flexibility to waive the required number of volunteer hours so that members may still receive a full Segal Education Award even if their service was interrupted as a result of COVID-19. Additionally, the CARES Act increases the upper age limit for AmeriCorps members and expands the maximum term of service so that AmeriCorps members whose service was impacted by COVID-19 can reenroll once the emergency is over.

Q: Is there any relief for upcoming rent, mortgage, and utility payments?

A: Any homeowner with an FHA, VA, USDA, 184/184A mortgage or a mortgage backed by Fannie Mae or Freddie Mac, who is experiencing financial hardship is eligible for up to 6 months' forbearance on their mortgage payments, with a possible extension for another 6 months. At the end of the forbearance, borrowers can work within each agency's existing programs to help them get back on track with payments, but they will have to pay missed payments at some point during the loan, so if borrowers can pay they should continue to do so.

Renters who have trouble paying rent also have protections under the bill if they live in a property that has a federal subsidy or federally backed loan. Owners of these properties cannot file evictions or charge fees for nonpayment of rent for 120 days following enactment of the bill and cannot issue a renter a notice to leave the property before 150 days after enactment. After this period renters will be

responsible for making payments and getting back on track, so they should continue to make payments if they're financially able to do so. Renters who receive housing subsidies such as public housing or Section 8 who have had their incomes fall should recertify their incomes with their public housing agency or property owner because it may lower the rent they owe.

Q: I am a veteran living in a rural area and am being told that my appointments will now be through telehealth, but I can't afford internet services or don't have a good internet connection. How will this bill help me?

A: Talk to your provider and local VA about getting an iPad or other tablet from VA. This bill allows VA to enter into partnerships with local telecommunications companies to subsidize or completely pay for broadband internet services. Call your local VA facility or send a secure message to your provider on My HealtheVet to ask about this option.

Q: I run a State Veterans Home. Will I be penalized if my residents come down with COVID-19 and are transferred to acute care, putting me under the 90% occupancy rate threshold needed for payment from VA?

A: No. Under Section 20005 of the CARES Act, State Veterans Homes will continue to receive payment from VA during the COVID-19 pandemic, even if they don't meet the 90% occupancy rate or the 75% veteran occupancy rate requirements for per diem payment.

Q: I run a State Veterans Home and I don't have enough PPE or supplies. What support can VA provide?

A: In addition to requesting emergency supplies and PPE from your county or state emergency coordinator, Section 20005 of the CARES Act also allows VA to share PPE and supplies with State Veterans Homes to keep residents and staff safe.

Q: I'm a veteran in need of home-based care. Can I still enroll or renew my participation in the Veteran Directed Care program?

A: Yes. Under Section 20006 of the CARES Act, you can enroll or renew your participation in the Veteran Directed Care program through telephone or telehealth, no in-home visit is required.

Q: I run an area agency on aging or other agency that provides services to veterans in the Veteran Directed Care program. Our county is telling us to limit face-to-face services and home visits. Can I still process new participants and renewals?

A: Yes. Under Section 20006 of the CARES Act, agencies can now enroll or renew veterans in the Veteran Directed Care program through telephone or telehealth, no in-home visit is required.

Q: I'm a veteran using the Veteran Directed Care program for home-based care, but I can't get to a printer or post office to send in my renewal paperwork due to COVID-19. Will I be kicked out of the program?

A: No. Under Section 20006 of the CARES Act, veterans and their caregivers will not be penalized for late paperwork and will not be disenrolled or suspended from the program.

Q: I'm a veteran using the Veteran Directed Care program for home-based care, but I am currently living outside of my home state and can't travel home due to COVID-19 restrictions and health concerns. Can my caregiver still be paid for services, even if we are out of state?

A: Yes. Under Section 20006 of the CARES Act, veterans and their caregivers will not be penalized for being out of state for more than 14 days during the COVID-19 emergency and should continue to receive payments for care.

Q: I use VA's prosthetics service and need to get my prosthetic adjusted but am nervous to go into a VA facility because I have underlying conditions that make me more at risk of complications from COVID-19. Where can I go to get my prosthetic adjusted?

A: This bill gives VA more flexibility to allow veterans who need their prosthetics created or adjusted to do so in their local community. Call your local VA provider or message them on MyHealthVet and ask about this option.

Q: I'm a VA employee working lots of overtime due to COVID-19. Can I still receive overtime pay for hours worked, even if it puts me above the Federal pay caps?

A: Yes. Under Section 20008 of the CARES Act, any VA employee involved in COVID-19 response efforts can receive pay for all hours worked, even above the normal pay caps, for work done in support of VA's response to COVID-19.

Q: I'm a home health care worker for the VA, can I receive PPE for providing home care services to veterans?

A: Yes. Under Section 20009 of the CARES Act, the VA must provide PPE to any home health worker employed by or contracted with the VA to provide services to veterans.

Q: I'm a veteran receiving pension and health care benefits from VA. Will the emergency income from the CARES Act (the Recovery Rebate) count towards my income for determining my eligibility for pension, health care, and other needs-based benefits?

A: No. Under Section 20010 of the CARES Act, the 2020 Recovery Rebate payment cannot be counted as income when determining a veteran's eligibility for any VA needs-based benefits.

Q: I am a VA HUD-VASH caseworker, how can I make sure I am keeping up with my veterans in the HUD-VASH program?

A: This bill encourages VA to use more telehealth capabilities for yourself and your veterans. Call each other or use Apple FaceTime, Facebook Messenger Video Chat, Google Hangouts Video, or Skype. Ask your local VA about access to an iPad or other tablet for you or your veterans to use to facilitate virtual meetings.

Q: I am a Grant and Per Diem provider. Will I be able to keep my veterans enrolled after they are absent for 14 days?

A: Yes. This bill waives the VA's requirement to automatically dis-enroll veterans using the GPD program if they are absent for more than 14 days.

Q: Will I continue to get paid for veterans who are absent from my program for more than 3 days?

A: This bill gives VA the authority to pay GPD providers for a veteran even if they are absent from the program for more than 3 days. Contact your local VA about this option.

Q: Will I get paid the same amount as before?

A: This bill waives the current limit on the amount VA can pay GPD providers during the COVID19 emergency. Contact your local VA about this option. This bill includes additional funding for the VA to increase payments to many service providers, including the GPD program.

Q: I am an SSVF provider. How does this bill allow me to continue to help homeless veterans?

A: This bill includes additional funding for the VA to increase payments to many service providers, including the SSVF program. For more information about how to help veterans during COVID19, visit <https://www.va.gov/homeless/ssvf/>