

April 5, 2020

COVID-19 Resource Guide

Veterans



www.facebook.com/RepDelBene

[@RepDelBene](https://twitter.com/RepDelBene)



●● 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 emergency bipartisan funding bills to address this pandemic and provide relief to our communities. This guide contains information about the resources available to veterans impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This guide is meant to be 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 Bothell at 425-485-0085 for additional assistance.

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

Sincerely,



Suzan DelBene
U.S. Representative

TABLE OF CONTENTS

QUICK GUIDE	4
CARE ACT KEY TAKEAWAYS	5
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS	8

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

Bothell Office:
22121 17th Ave. SE,
Ste 220
Bothell, WA 98021
(425) 485-0085

Mount Vernon Office:
204 W. Montgomery St.
Mount Vernon, WA 98273
(360) 416-7879

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

CARE ACT KEY TAKEAWAYS

Includes **\$10.5 billion** for the Department of Defense, primarily for the protection of members of the Armed Forces, their families, and military retirees from coronavirus. The bill also includes funding for specific efforts which leverage unique capabilities of the Department of Defense to contribute to a whole-of-government response to the pandemic. Highlights include:

- **\$1.4 billion for deployments of the National Guard** – This level of funding will sustain up to 20,000 members of the National Guard, under the direction of the governors of each state, for the next six months in order to support state and local response efforts.
- **\$1 billion for the Defense Production Act** – This funding allows the Department of Defense to invest in manufacturing capabilities that are key to increasing the production rate of personal protective equipment and medical equipment to meet the demand of healthcare workers all across the nation.
- **\$415 million for research and development** – Military medical research programs have developed promising vaccines and anti-viral pharmaceuticals, which require additional investment for testing.
- **\$1.5 billion for expansion of military hospitals and expeditionary hospital packages** – To alleviate the anticipated strain on both the military and civilian healthcare systems, these funds will nearly triple the 4,300 beds available in military treatment facilities today.
- **Transfer Limitation** - Includes a general provision to prevent funds in this title from being diverted to build a wall on the southern border.

Includes **\$19.57 billion** in funding to ensure the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has the equipment, tests, and support services necessary to provide veterans with the additional care they need at facilities nationwide. Highlights include:

- **Direct Medical Care** – The bill provides **\$15.85 billion** in order to support an increase in demand for VA services specific to coronavirus. This covers treatment of veterans nationwide for coronavirus within VA hospitals as well as in community urgent care

clinics and emergency rooms. These funds allow VA to cover overtime for their clinical staff, the purchase of personal protective equipment, test kits, and other necessary equipment to manage the impacts of this pandemic among the veteran population.

- **Vulnerable Veterans** – The bill provides **\$590 million** for VA to devote to supporting veterans at an increased risk of contracting coronavirus. It includes funding for the Health Care for Homeless Veterans program, the Supportive Services for Veterans Families program, and the Grant and Per Diem program. This funding will help veterans get treatment, and provide support for those who are homeless or at risk of eviction. Funding is also included for keeping veterans within VA-run nursing homes and community living centers safe from coronavirus.
- **Facilities and IT Support for Telemedicine** – The bill provides **\$3.1 billion** for VA to purchase, staff, and equip temporary sites of care and mobile treatment centers to deal with this pandemic. It allows for remodeling to VA facilities and state run veterans homes to address the needs of veterans being treated for coronavirus. The bill includes funding for VA to expand the capacity on existing IT networks to address the demand in services, and broadens VA's tele-ICU and teleradiology capabilities. It further enhances the capability for telehealth visits, allowing more veterans to receive care from home, and for providers at home to continue to treat patients through technology. Additionally, it facilitates VA employees working from home to ensure benefits can still be processed.
- **Armed Forces Retirement Homes (AFRH)** – The bill includes **\$2.8 million** to provide staff treating veterans living at the AFRH with the personal protective equipment they need. The funding provides this and other necessary equipment and staffing support, which will help minimize the spread of coronavirus among residents.

Expanded Authorities – To strengthen VA's response to the coronavirus pandemic and enable them to best treat veterans across the country, the bill includes provisions which allow VA to:

- Pay providers for every hour they work in support of this pandemic, even if it means they go over salary caps;
- Consider veterans and their families eligible for pensions and other income-dependent benefits, even if an emergency benefit paid by the government would have put them over the threshold;

- Ensure that home health care workers have personal protective equipment and necessary equipment to protect veterans and themselves;
- Continue providing payment to State Veterans Homes when residents are transferred to acute care due to COVID-19, regardless of their occupancy rate; and allow VA to provide any available personal protective equipment to state homes;
- Provide flexibility for the Veteran Directed Care program, including telephone enrollment and renewals, and waivers for late paperwork and other limitations;
- Enhance health and housing initiatives for homeless veterans, including increased use of telehealth for programs with VA case managers, temporarily eliminating funding limits for programs providing direct support services to homeless veterans, and providing flexibility to serve veterans in those programs;
- Support veterans with limb loss by allowing veterans to seek prosthetic assistance at community providers rather than going to VA facilities during a pandemic; and
- Enter into agreements with telecommunications companies to provide broadband for veterans in support of providing telemental health care.

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 cancelled 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: What support is included for VA health care facilities and their COVID-19 response?

A: The CARES Act includes \$19.57 billion in funding to ensure the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has the equipment, tests, telehealth capabilities and support services necessary to support veterans and the health care workforce at facilities nationwide.

Q: I run a veteran-owned small business. Can the CARES Act help me?

A: Yes. If you are a veteran-owned small business, you can receive support through the Small Business Paycheck Protection Program to cover 8-weeks of your payroll, the mortgage interest, rent, and utility costs. There will be up to 100% loan forgiveness options for a veteran-owned small businesses that protects/fully maintains their workers.

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 are able to 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: Will homeowners be foreclosed on if they can't make their loan payments?

A: The bill includes a 60-day foreclosure moratorium starting on March 18, 2020, for all federallybacked mortgage loans. Borrowers with FHA, VA, USDA, or 184/184A loans, or loans backed by Fannie Mae

and Freddie Mac, will not see foreclosure actions and cannot be removed from their homes due to foreclosure during that time.

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 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 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, VA must provide PPE to any home health worker employed by or contracted with 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 VA's requirement to automatically dis-enroll veterans using the GPD program if they are absent 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 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 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/>.