



# VA HEALTHCARE ELIGIBILITY UPDATE

Beginning today, **March 5, 2024**, all Veterans exposed to toxins and other hazards are now eligible for VA health care without first applying for VA benefits.

This change impacts Section 103 of the PACT Act and eliminates the phased-in approach initially introduced with the act's implementation. It applies to Veterans exposed at home and abroad. Under the PACT Act, all toxic-exposed Veterans were originally supposed to become eligible for VA care – in increments – between now and 2032.

VA encourages all eligible Veterans to visit [//VA.gov/PACT](https://va.gov/PACT) or call 1-800-MYVA411 to learn more and apply for VA health care beginning March 5. Since President Biden signed the PACT Act into law on August 10, 2022, more than 500,000 Veterans have enrolled in VA health care.

This is a major change and we want to keep you informed. Please call our office with any questions.

Below is more information on what is changing and what it means for our Veterans/Families:

### **The three cohorts are:**

1. Veterans who participated in a toxic exposure risk activity (TERA), as defined by law, while serving on active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training.
2. Veterans who were assigned to a duty station in (including airspace above) certain locations during specific periods of time:  
On or after August 2, 1990, in the following countries: Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, or the United Arab Emirates.  
On or after September 11, 2001, in the following countries: Afghanistan, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Uzbekistan, or any other country determined relevant by VA. (Note: VA has not determined any other country relevant at this time.)
3. Veterans who were deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Freedom's Sentinel, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn, Operation Inherent Resolve, and Resolute Support Mission.

*Veterans who qualify under Section 103 will be allocated to Priority Group 6, unless eligible for enrollment in a higher priority group, and can enroll directly in VA health care without first applying for VA benefits.*

### **Who is now eligible for VA health care through PACT?**

#### Vietnam-era Veterans

If you served in the following countries during specific time periods, you're eligible to enroll in VA health care:

Republic of Vietnam between Jan. 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975

Thailand at any U.S. or Royal Thai base between Jan. 9, 1962, and June 30, 1976

Laos between Dec. 1, 1965, and Sept. 30, 1969

Certain provinces in Cambodia between April 16, 1969, and April 30, 1969

Guam or American Samoa (or their territorial waters) between Jan. 9, 1962, and July 31, 1980

Johnston Atoll (or a ship that called there) between Jan. 1, 1972, and Sept. 30, 1977

#### Gulf War and Post-9/11 Veterans

You're eligible to enroll in VA health care if you were assigned to a duty station (including air space above) in the following time periods and locations:

On or after August 2, 1990, in the following countries: Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, or the United Arab Emirates · On or after September 11, 2001, in the following countries: Afghanistan, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Uzbekistan, or any other country determined relevant by VA. (Note:

VA has not determined any other country relevant at this time.)

## **If you deployed in support of the following contingency operations:**

Operation Enduring Freedom  
Operation Freedom's Sentinel  
Operation Iraqi Freedom  
Operation New Dawn  
Operation Inherent Resolve  
Resolute Support Mission

You deployed to a combat zone and left active duty within the last 10 years.

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*If Veterans don't meet any of the above requirements but were exposed to toxins and other hazards while serving our country, they are eligible to enroll in VA health care. This includes air pollutants, chemicals, occupational hazards, radiation, warfare agents, and more.*

### **Why is it changing?**

Section 103 of the PACT Act required VA to make three new cohorts of Veterans eligible for VA health care, including hospital care (including mental health services and counseling), medical services, and nursing home care for any illness. These cohorts were originally scheduled to become eligible for health care on a phase-in schedule based on separation or discharge date, beginning October 2024 and continuing in two-year increments until October 2032.

The law allowed the Secretary to modify the eligibility dates if the Secretary determined appropriate based on the number of Veterans in these categories receiving care and services and the resources available to VA.

### **Why is it changing now?**

As President Biden directed in his 2023 Veterans Day speech, VA will accelerate the initial schedule under the law to give all three cohorts of Veterans health care eligibility on March 5, 2024, and allow those who served to begin receiving the benefits they earned and deserve. This will eliminate the phase-in approach called for under the law, meaning that millions of Veterans will get access to VA

health care more quickly. We want to bring as many Veterans as possible into our care, because VA is proven to be the best, most affordable health care in America for Veterans.

### **What's not changing?**

VA will continue to deliver the best health care in America for Veterans by leveraging strong practices already in place and improving processes to support this expansion of care. VHA will continue to draw upon the wealth of knowledge and world-class resources available to care for Veterans and their unique health care needs.

Additional PACT Act health care eligibility for Vietnam era and combat Veterans is also ongoing and unchanged. The changes to Section 103 implementation do not have any impact on the VA benefits process. Please visit [VA.gov/PACT](https://www.va.gov/PACT) for more information.

## What are the benefits of the change?

- Veterans exposed to toxins and other hazards during their military service will be eligible sooner and can begin receiving exposure-informed care at VA.
- This authority will benefit enrolled Veterans in Priority Groups 7-8 who may be eligible for an upgrade to Priority Group 6.
- Quicker access to individualized health care needs through toxic exposure screening.
- Improved health outcomes.
- Improved patient experience.
- Better alignment for continuity of care and services.
- Allow VA to move more quickly and comprehensively to determine if illnesses are related to a service-connected disability.
- Increased enrollment and reliance on VA's high quality health care.
- Opportunity for health care providers to better understand Veteran needs through additional training on toxic exposures and research on patient populations

## What is toxic exposure risk activity?

VA has determined that Veterans who were exposed to one or more of the following hazards or conditions during active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training participated in a toxic exposure risk activity:

**VA has determined that Veterans who were exposed to one or more of the following hazards or conditions during active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training participated in TERA:**

- Air pollutants (burn pits, sand, dust, particulates, oil well fires, sulfur fires).
- Chemicals (pesticides, herbicides, depleted uranium with embedded shrapnel, contaminated water).
- Occupational hazards (asbestos, industrial solvents, lead, paints including chemical agent resistant coating, firefighting foams).
- Radiation (nuclear weapons handling, maintenance and detonation, radioactive material, calibration and measurement sources, X-rays, nuclear weapon technicians and dental technicians, served on nuclear submarine and other nuclear ships or in shipyards, or were involved in nuclear weapons handling and maintenance, including clean-up after accidents).
- Warfare agents (nerve agents, chemical and biological weapons).

### **How can I submit for healthcare or file a claim?**

The most convenient way to submit your VA Form 10-10EZR and supporting documentation is by talking to one of our VSO's by calling us at:  
815-433-1761

or stop by and make an appointment:  
4231 Progress Blvd, Peru IL 61354

Other resources:

Veterans can learn more about the PACT Act at [www.va.gov/PACT](http://www.va.gov/PACT).

