



The Post 320 Service Officer Monthly

Veterans Benefits • VA Updates • Claim Tips • Legislative Watch
A Monthly Update for Veterans, Families, Advocates, And Post Members.

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Post 320 Has a Seat at the Table: Fredericksburg VA Roundtable

On Monday, August 24, 2026, from 12:00–1:00 p.m. at Howell Library in Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania - American Legion Post 320 was represented during an 11-member veterans roundtable with Congressman Eugene Vindman and Senator Tim Kaine addressing access to care at the Fredericksburg VA Health Care Center.

Service Officer Angela Hall participated on behalf of The American Legion and the 12th District, covering for the 12th District Accredited Service Officer Rita Chandler (Post 55), who had a prior commitment. Service Officer Dave Barile of the 16th District also represented The American Legion (Post 28- Triangle).

This Month's Topics

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One message remained consistent throughout the discussion: **veterans spoke highly of the VA professionals providing their care; however, the greater concern was timely and consistent access to that care.**

Seven major concerns emerged:

- 1. Staffing, Recruitment and Retention:** Participants emphasized hiring more personnel, shortening onboarding times and retaining existing providers. Frequent provider turnover forces veterans to repeatedly rebuild relationships and explain their medical histories.
- 2. Appointment Cancellations and Long Waits:** Veterans reported lengthy waits and canceled appointments, sometimes after traveling or while en route. This can be particularly difficult for elderly and mobility-impaired veterans and those relying on transportation assistance.
- 3. Community Care Gaps:** Community Care can provide quicker local access, but participants identified missed communications, expiring authorizations, referral delays and difficulty getting complete outside medical records back to VA.
- 4. Medical Record Continuity:** Gaps among DoD, VA, Community Care and older military records can affect both treatment and the evidence needed for VA benefit claims.
- 5. Continuity of Care:** Veterans with PTSD, chronic illnesses and complex conditions may be especially affected by frequent provider changes. Building trust with a provider matters.
- 6. Medication and Formulary Concerns:** Participants discussed disruptions that can occur when medications that have successfully treated a veteran are unavailable or changed because of formulary limitations.
- 7. Using Existing Capacity:** Participants questioned why a modern facility built to serve the region's veterans remains underused. Suggestions included staffing additional services, reliable urgent-care coverage and exploring expanded or evening appointment hours.

Congressman Vindman and Senator Kaine asked participants what policies they should fight for and what message they should take directly to Fredericksburg VA leadership from the Roundtable.

The answer was clear: hire and retain staff, improve access and continuity, strengthen communication and record sharing, and fully utilize the facility built to serve our veterans. The roundtable demonstrated an important part of The American Legion's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation (VA&R) mission—bringing veterans' experiences directly to those positioned to make a difference.

Post 320 Service Officers remain committed to showing up, engaging in meaningful conversations, and advocating alongside our veteran community to help ensure their concerns, needs, and experiences are heard.

Post 320 Service Officers: Margarida Figueroa, Loretta Gulley, and Angela Hall

“Advocacy begins by showing up, grows through listening, and matters when we turn veterans’ voices into action.”

No VA Disability Rating? VA Health Care May Still Have Benefits for You

Did you know you do not necessarily need a service-connected disability rating to receive VA health care? Veterans who are eligible and enrolled in the VA health care system may have access to a broad range of health care services based on their individual eligibility and medical needs.

Services may include: Primary and preventive care, including health screenings and immunizations | Specialty care such as cardiology, orthopedics and podiatry | Mental health services | Prescription medications | Laboratory work, X-rays and other diagnostic testing | Physical therapy and rehabilitation | Audiology services, including hearing aids for eligible enrolled Veterans | Routine eye examinations and preventive vision testing | Prosthetics, orthotics and medically necessary equipment | Whole Health programs, which may include services such as Tai Chi, mindfulness and other complementary approaches | Home health and long-term care services for Veterans who meet applicable requirements | Urgent care through VA's approved network for eligible enrolled Veterans who have received VA care within the previous 24 months | Community Care when VA eligibility and authorization requirements are met

Some services have additional eligibility requirements, and copayments may apply depending on a Veteran's priority group, income, disability rating and other factors. **Don't assume that having no service-connected disability means VA health care has nothing to offer you.** If you're eligible for VA health care, enroll and learn what services may be available to you. If you are not service-connected or are not eligible for VA Healthcare due to income thresholds, etc., maybe consider sitting down with a Service Officer to review your records.

Did You Know VA Disability Compensation May Affect Eligibility for Some Public Assistance Programs

Veterans who receive VA disability compensation may face an unexpected challenge when applying for certain public assistance programs. Although VA disability compensation is generally not taxable, it can still be counted as income when eligibility is determined for some federal, state, or local benefit programs. A recent RAND Corporation study, reported by *Stars and Stripes*, examined a number of public assistance and insurance programs and found that rules are not consistent from one program to another. In some cases, VA disability compensation may push a veteran household above the income limit even when the household is still experiencing financial hardship.

Researchers found that households with a working-age veteran receiving VA disability compensation were less likely to participate in programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, commonly known as SNAP or food stamps, and certain housing and energy-assistance programs. The report also highlighted an important point: **not every program treats VA disability compensation the same way.** Some programs may exclude certain VA disability payments from income calculations, while others may count them fully or partially.

For example, eligibility rules for housing assistance, energy assistance, SSI, Medicaid, SNAP and other needs-based programs may differ significantly. Because those rules can also change over time, veterans should not assume that receiving VA disability compensation automatically makes them ineligible for assistance.

What Veterans Should Do

Veterans should also consider asking the program representative to provide the applicable eligibility rule in writing when there is uncertainty. If you are applying for a public assistance program, ask specifically:

- Does this program count VA disability compensation as income?
- Is all VA disability compensation counted, or are any portions excluded?
- Are there separate rules for veterans who are permanently and totally disabled?
- Are there deductions for medical expenses, dependents or disability-related expenses?
- Is eligibility based on gross income, adjusted income, household income or assets?

Why This Matters to Veterans

VA disability compensation is intended to compensate veterans for disabilities connected to military service. However, when that compensation is included in income calculations for needs-based assistance, some veterans may find themselves in a difficult position: earning too much on paper to qualify for assistance, while still facing significant disability-related expenses and financial hardship. The RAND study recommended that policymakers examine whether VA disability compensation should be treated differently when determining eligibility for public assistance and also called for better communication so veterans understand how their VA benefits may affect other programs.

Recognize the signs. Ask the question. Listen. Connect.

The American Legion's Be the One initiative is focused on reducing Veteran and servicemember suicide. In May 2023, The American Legion National Executive Committee passed Resolution No. 13: 'Be the One Days,' recognizing the first day of every month as an opportunity to raise awareness, reduce the stigma surrounding mental health, and promote veteran suicide prevention. Through the Columbia Lighthouse Project, Legion Family members can take free training on the Columbia Protocol (C-SSRS) to learn how to recognize possible suicide risk, ask appropriate questions and connect someone to help.

According to VA data cited in the training, 6,398 Veterans died by suicide in 2023—about 17.5 per day. But suicide risk does not always look obvious. Warning signs may appear during times of financial hardship, relationship problems, job loss, legal trouble, chronic pain, declining health, isolation, hopelessness, substance misuse or other major life changes.

A Veteran may never say, "I'm thinking about suicide." Instead, you may hear:

"I'm about to lose my house." | "I can't work anymore." | "My health keeps getting worse." | "Nobody needs me." | "Everyone would be better off without me."

Sometimes the problem presented is not the whole problem.

RECOGNIZE → ASK → LISTEN → CONNECT

- Recognize concerning words, behaviors or circumstances.
- Ask directly when you are worried. Asking about suicide does **not cause suicide**.
- Listen without judgment, shame or minimizing what the person is feeling.
- Connect the individual with appropriate professional help.

You do not have to be a clinician to make a difference. Sometimes the most important thing is simply recognizing that a person needs more help than the issue they first came to discuss.

Take the Be the One Training: The American Legion offers free virtual Be the One / Columbia Protocol training on multiple dates throughout the year. The course is scheduled for approximately 90 minutes and teaches warning signs, risk factors, suicide screening and how to respond appropriately.

Members can register through The American Legion Be the One webpage and select an available training date.

After completing the course, members are encouraged to let their Post Service Officer and Adjutant know they have completed Be the One training. The training also provides easy-to-use smartphone resources and QR codes that can help guide someone through the appropriate questions and level of concern when encountering a person in distress.

Immediate Help

Veterans Crisis Line: Call 988, then Press 1

Text: 838255

If there is an immediate threat to life or safety, contact emergency services.

Be the One to Recognize. Be the One to Ask. Be the One to Listen. Be the One to Connect.

One conversation can make a difference. Be the One.

Sources: The American Legion Be the One Initiative; Columbia Lighthouse Project Columbia Protocol/C-SSRS Training; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Veteran Suicide Prevention data. Be the One is The American Legion's nationwide initiative to help prevent veteran suicide by encouraging every Legionnaire to recognize when a veteran may be struggling, start a conversation, and connect them with support before a crisis occurs. Sometimes the most important thing we can do is simply reach out, listen, and remind a fellow veteran that they are not alone.

Our Mission: Whether assisting with a disability claim, visiting a veteran in a nursing home, checking on a homebound member, advocating for better legislation, or simply making a phone call, these programs work together toward one purpose:

To ensure every veteran is informed, connected, supported, and never forgotten.

Veteran ID Cards: Which One Do You Need—and How Do You Get It

Veterans have several ways to show proof of military or Veteran status, but you do not need every Veteran identification card available. The best choice depends on whether you are a military retiree, have a qualifying VA disability rating, are enrolled in VA health care, or simply want an easy way to verify your Veteran status. VA recognizes several different identification options, including DoD identification cards, the Veteran Health Identification Card (VHIC), the digital Veteran ID Card (VIC), and a Veteran designation on a state-issued driver's license or ID.

Department of Defense ID Card: A Department of Defense Uniformed Services Identification Card (USID) is available to certain eligible groups, including military retirees, Reserve members in qualifying statuses, eligible dependents, and Veterans rated 100% disabled by VA. It can be used to establish eligibility for authorized military benefits and services. Simply being a Veteran, however, does not automatically qualify someone for a DoD ID card.

- **How do you get it?** Eligible Veterans must be registered in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS). DoD uses DD Form 1172-2 as part of the enrollment and ID-card process. A Veteran seeking an ID based on a 100% VA disability rating should be prepared to provide documentation such as a DD Form 214 and the applicable VA rating determination. The card is issued through a RAPIDS/DoD ID Card Office.
- **Already Retired and 100% Disabled?** If you are a military retiree who also has a 100% VA disability rating, you generally do not need separate DoD identification cards for each status. Your information should be accurately reflected in DEERS, and the RAPIDS office can determine the appropriate credential based on your eligibility. DoD requires cardholders to keep DEERS information current when military, eligibility, or family status changes. Many retired or 100% disabled Veterans are also enrolled in VA health care and therefore may have a VHIC as well. If you already have a DoD ID and VHIC, there may be little practical need to obtain the separate digital Veteran ID Card solely to prove that you are a Veteran.

Veteran Health Identification Card — VHIC: The Veteran Health Identification Card (VHIC) is for Veterans enrolled in VA health care. It is primarily used for identification and check-in at VA medical appointments. It can also be useful as proof of Veteran status, and qualifying Veterans may use a VHIC for certain military installation privileges.

- **How do you get it?** First, you must be enrolled in VA health care. If you are not enrolled, you can apply for VA health care by phone, online, by mail, or in person. Once enrolled, you may request a VHIC online or in person at a VA medical center. If you are already enrolled in VA health care but have never requested a VHIC—or your old card has expired—it may be worth checking your current card status.

Veteran ID Card — VIC: The Veteran ID Card (VIC) is a digital photo ID that Veterans can use as proof of Veteran status, particularly when seeking discounts from participating businesses. It provides a convenient alternative to carrying a DD Form 214 or exposing sensitive information contained in military discharge records. All newly issued VICs have been digital since September 2022. Generally, Veterans may qualify if they served on active duty, in the Reserves, or National Guard—including the Coast Guard—and received an eligible discharge characterization.

- **How do you get it?** The Veteran ID Card is requested online through VA's Veteran ID Card application. Because the VIC is digital, there is no newly issued physical card mailed to the Veteran. For a Veteran who already has a DoD ID, VHIC, or driver's license with a Veteran designation, a VIC may simply be unnecessary.

Veteran Designation on Your Driver's License or State ID: All 50 states and Puerto Rico offer some form of Veteran designation on state-issued driver's licenses or identification cards. For many Veterans, this is one of the easiest forms of everyday Veteran identification because it is placed on a card they already carry. VA notes that requirements vary by state, but Veterans commonly need discharge documentation such as a DD Form 214.

- **How do you get it?** Contact your state's Department of Motor Vehicles or driver's licensing agency and ask about adding the Veteran designation. Be prepared to provide the military separation documentation required by your state.

Veteran Designation and REAL ID Are Not the Same Thing It is also important to distinguish the Veteran designation from REAL ID. A Veteran designation identifies you as a Veteran. A REAL ID-compliant driver's license establishes that your state-issued identification meets federal REAL ID requirements. They serve different purposes and may appear on the same driver's license.

The Bottom Line: Before applying for another Veteran ID, take inventory of what you already have. A military retiree may already have a DoD USID. A Veteran rated 100% may qualify for a DoD ID. A Veteran enrolled in VA health care may have a VHIC. Other Veterans may find that the digital VIC or Veteran designation on their driver's license is all they need. You don't need to collect every card. You just need the identification that works for you..(Sources: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, U.S. Department of Defense, and Department of Homeland Security/TSA.