

VETERANS FOR CHRIST, INC.  
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February 2023

## PACT Act Fraud Prevention

Have you recently been contacted by a company aggressively seeking to legally represent you in filing presumptive VA claims authorized by the [PACT Act](#)? If so, be wary as the company might be seeking a portion of your VA benefits.

Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022 (PACT Act) represents the biggest expansion of Veteran benefits in history, and many Veterans may be eligible to receive compensation for their service. The PACT Act adds 23 burn pit and toxic exposure-related conditions to VA's list of service presumptions, including hypertension, with the expansion of presumptions related to Agent Orange exposure by including Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Guam, American Samoa, and Johnston Atoll as locations for Agent Orange exposure.

While this legislation brings great promise to Veterans, it's also a monumental opportunity for fraud. VA has received multiple reports of unaccredited law firms or companies targeting Veterans to offer their services to file claims for presumptive conditions. Unaccredited law firms and companies are reaching out to help for a fee as high as 40% of the Veteran's retroactive payment and 40% of the Veteran's first year of entitlement payments.

VA is committed to help protect Veterans from predatory entities, by educating Veterans, their families, and all partners about the types of activity and tactics being used against them.

To avoid being a victim of these schemes, here are some helpful tips to remember:

- Apply directly to VA. You may submit your application securely [online](#) via [VA.GOV](#) or in person at any regional office. You may file your claim directly with VA, and VA will help you gather the necessary evidence to support it. There are no costs or hidden fees to apply. Do not agree to pay an unaccredited individual or organization a percentage of your disability compensation payment or retroactive entitlement. If you need help filing a claim, there are [accredited representatives](#) to assist you.
- **Be cautious of aggressive law firms or companies.** Firms may use frequent communications (phone, text, and media messages) to establish a sense of urgency.
- **Be cautious of for-profit companies that use VA's name.** They may alter their name to create a false association with VA and establish legitimacy. Examples include a website such as [VAclaimsassistance.com](#) that incorporates VA into its name.
- **Review all legally binding documents thoroughly.** Never sign a blank form someone else will fill out later or give them full discretion to act on your behalf. See the contents before you sign and keep a copy for yourself.

- **Be wary of media advertisements regarding legal representation for presumptive VA claims.** Companies advertising legal services may be predatory and financially motivated to obtain your VA benefits.
- If a company or individual is projecting misinformation or has questionable business practices regarding VA entitlements, file a complaint with the [Federal Trade Commission](#) and the [Better Business Bureau](#).
- To report suspected fraudulent activity, please contact the VA Office of Inspector General ([OIG Hotline \(va.gov\)](#)).
- Veterans and survivors who think they might be eligible should apply for PACT Act benefits right now. Go to [va.gov/PACT](#) or call 1-800-MYVA411 for more information.

## VA program helps Veterans, caregivers plan for future health care needs

[VA's National Advance Care Planning via Group Visits Program](#) engages Veterans, [caregivers](#) and those they trust in facilitated group conversations about the kind of care that's right for each of them. It also covers the steps you can take to have your wishes heard and respected when the need arises. The words "advance care planning" can mean different things depending upon who you ask. It's a process of identifying your values and preferences for future health care if you are unable to make health care decisions.

Any time a person is unable to communicate for themselves, advance care planning can assist caregivers and health care providers in decision-making. Unexpected life events can happen in an instant. Advance care planning can empower individuals in gaining a sense of control over their health care.

Participants connect through sharing their experiences and stories in small group settings. A trained facilitator meets with participants who are encouraged to consider what matters most to them. Groups are offered in person and virtually.

Veterans and caregivers are welcome to attend a group session regardless of age or health status. Participants are invited to bring a person they trust with them. Knowledge of advance care planning is not necessary for participation.

The conversation includes questions such as:

- Have you thought about what you would want if you were hurt, injured or sick and could not communicate?
- Have you named someone to make health care decisions for you?
- Have you discussed these topics with someone on your health care team?

Feedback from group participants:

- "My VA providers have asked me about completing an advance directive so many times they have even given me copies of the form! It never made sense to me until I attended an ACP-GV group." – Veteran, Nashville, TN
- "I had the chance to attend a group for myself with other caregivers in the Caregiver Support Program. The discussion with other caregivers helped me realize

that I had been neglecting my own health care planning! I set a goal for myself during the group and followed through.” – Caregiver, Houston

Those interested in attending a group visit may reach out to their local [VA Healthcare System Site Lead](#).

## Resources

- Learn more at [VHA Social Work](#)
- Check out [The Conversation Project](#) for non-Veteran, state specific resources
- See this additional information on VA [Geriatrics and Extended Care](#)
- Learn how to implement this program at the VA [Diffusion Marketplace](#)
- Contact us by email: [National ACP-GV Program](#)

## **Don't skip a beat on your heart health**

**Discuss your risk factors for heart disease with your primary care team**

Fifteen minutes of exercise a day can help prevent heart disease. This can be as simple as taking a walk, riding a bike, swimming, or even some strength training or stretching while you are watching TV.

Not only does exercise help you maintain a healthy weight and lower your blood pressure, but it also helps you reduce stress and improve your mental health.

### Heart disease in women Veterans

Heart disease is the leading cause of death among all adults in the U.S. Traditional risk factors for heart disease include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, obesity and smoking. However, mental health conditions like [posttraumatic stress disorder \(PTSD\)](#) and [depression](#), which are common in women Veterans, can also increase heart disease risk.

Be sure to work with your primary care team to discuss your risk factors for heart disease, especially when coping with stress, PTSD or trauma.

Women Veterans are more racially and ethnically diverse than non-Veteran women. This is another reason heart disease is more prominent in women Veterans. Black or non-Hispanic African American women experience higher rates of heart disease and related risk factors, such as diabetes, obesity, smoking and high blood pressure than white and Hispanic women Veterans.

Your primary care team can discuss your risks with you, and together, you can make a heart healthy plan for your life.

### Risk factors for heart disease

A number of factors can increase your chance of getting heart disease:

- Smoking (women have an even greater risk for heart disease if they smoke compared to men)
- Being overweight
- A sedentary lifestyle (not moving enough throughout the day)
- High blood pressure
- Too much stress in your life
- History of preeclampsia (high blood pressure) or diabetes while pregnant
- Having PTSD, depression or experiences of trauma
- Having sleep apnea and/or not getting good sleep

What's the good news?

Fortunately, many of these risk factors can be addressed with lifestyle change—things you can do at home. You can reduce your chance of heart disease and improve your heart health by eating more vegetables and less sugar, getting enough sleep, taking your prescribed medicines as directed, and exercising at least 15 minutes a day.

Exercising can be as simple as going for a brisk walk in your neighborhood.

Risk factors for heart disease include inactivity and being overweight.

Eating green leafy vegetables such as spinach, kale and collards is very healthy for your heart. In fact, people who regularly eat green leafy vegetables [can prevent heart attacks](#) and significantly reduce their chance of heart disease. If you don't like these vegetables, try [mixing them up into a smoothie](#) with some fruit.



Risk factors for heart disease include inactivity and being overweight.

If you smoke, work on quitting

Because of the effect it has on your heart, smoking throughout your life can [shave 13-14 years from it](#). But it is not too late to quit. When you stop smoking, your risk for heart

disease can be cut in half just one year later and continues to decline until it's as low as a nonsmoker's risk.

VA understands your unique health needs and has resources to help you.

- **Whole Health approaches** like yoga, tai chi, mindfulness or meditation can benefit your physical and heart health and can help reduce stress.
- How to quit offers several resources for quitting tobacco.
- **VA Mindfulness Coach App:** Mindfulness has been shown to reduce stress, an important risk factor for heart disease.
- **MOVE! Weight Management Program:** The MOVE! Weight Management Program encourages and offers resources for healthy eating behaviors, physical activity and exercise, and weight loss.
- **She Wears the Boots: Heart Health:** This podcast episode details facts and myths about heart health among women Veterans and provides tips on how to take steps to improve your heart health.
- **VA News: Whole Health Series:** This Live Whole Health series details practices that can improve both physical and mental health.
- **Healthy Teaching Kitchen: Heart Health:** This video includes heart healthy tips and recipes and outlines which foods are best for your heart.

Don't skip a beat on your heart health

Commit to 15 minutes of exercise each day. And see your provider to check for high blood pressure, diabetes, or high cholesterol, all of which can affect your heart. Remember to talk with your provider about your specific risk factors and make a heart health plan.

If you don't already use VA health care, you can also use the following online tools:

- **Find out if you are eligible for VA health care.**
- **Enroll in VA health care if you haven't already.**
- **Find your local VA** to learn about what services may be available and to make an appointment.

If you have questions about VA health care services for women Veterans, or don't know where to start, you can call, text or chat online with our Women Veterans Call Center at 855-829-6636.

"Be on your guard, stand firm in the faith, being men of courage, be strong." 1Cor 16:13

Sincerely,

*William A. Harris, Jr.*

William A. Harris, Jr., USAF Retired  
President, Veterans for Christ, Inc.

[www.veteransforchristinc.org](http://www.veteransforchristinc.org)

## **Need to contact VA?**

Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255 and press 1, [Chat](#), or Text 838255

Homeless Veteran Resources: 1-877-424-3838 or [Chat](#)

White House VA Hotline: 1-855-948-2311

1-800-MyVA411 (800-698-2411) is never the wrong number