
VFW team, here is the NVS Update, please disseminate to your Post Commanders. Thanks JJ

VA makes several cancers presumptive for Gulf War and Post 9/11 veterans

On January 8, 2025, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced that it is making **acute and chronic leukemias, multiple myelomas, myelodysplastic syndromes, myelofibrosis, urinary bladder, ureter,** and **related genitourinary cancers** presumptive for service-connection for:

- **Gulf War Veterans:** Veterans who served in Somalia or the Southwest Asia theater of operations (which includes Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the neutral zone between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, the Gulf of Aden, the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, the Red Sea, and the airspace above these locations) during the Persian Gulf War on or after August 2, 1990.
- **Post-9/11 Veterans:** Veterans who served in Afghanistan, Iraq, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, or Uzbekistan and the airspace above these locations during the Gulf War on or after September 11, 2001. This includes Veterans who served at the Karshi-Khanabad (K2) base in Uzbekistan after September 11, 2001.

**K2
Update
from VA**

Below is a plain language summary that NVS received from VA which outlines the current progress of VA's efforts to address the issues of veterans who served at Karshi-Khanabad (K2) Air Base in Uzbekistan.

VA Continues Efforts to Address K2 Veterans' Health and Benefits Claims

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is continuing its comprehensive efforts to address the needs of veterans who served at Karshi-Khanabad (K2) Air Base in Uzbekistan, focusing on toxic exposure assessments, presumptive conditions, and enhanced support for veterans and their survivors. As part of its commitment to improving the lives of K2 Veterans, VA has been actively pursuing several initiatives to ensure that those who served at K2 have access to the benefits and care they deserve.

K2 PACT Act Presumptive Process

In October 2024, Secretary Denis McDonough committed to utilizing an accelerated PACT Act presumptive process to assess whether VA should recognize unique presumptions for veterans who served at K2. As part of this process, VA published a Federal Register Notice on November 27, 2024, announcing plans to evaluate K2 exposures and related conditions and inviting Veterans, caregivers,

survivors, and other members of the public to share relevant information with VA. The publication can be accessed here: [Federal Register Notice](#).

Medically Unexplained Chronic Multi-Symptom Illness (MUCMI)

On December 2, 2024, the comment period closed for VA's Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to update regulations for disability or death benefit claims related to toxic exposure. VA specifically sought input on expanding the applicability of regulations for Gulf War Illness to include Uzbekistan and other countries with documented toxic exposures. VA is currently reviewing the public comments so that it can move forward with this important rulemaking.

Genitourinary Cancers

VA is making progress toward creating a regulatory presumption for Gulf War-deployed veterans, including those who served at K2, suffering from bladder and ureter cancers due to exposure to fine particulate matter. On November 14, 2024, VA submitted an Interim Final Rule for review and is currently engaged in the inter-agency review process, with a goal to complete it by mid-January.

Multiple Myeloma and Leukemias

As the Secretary previewed during his October 29, 2024, remarks at the National Press Club, the preliminary findings of the PACT Act presumptive process scientific review are promising and suggest the possibility that VA will initiate the rulemaking process, to establish these conditions presumptive for Gulf War deployed Veterans, including all those that served at K2. Following that speech, VA appointed a Technical Working Group to conduct a formal evaluation and provide a recommendation to the Secretary pursuant to the PACT presumptive process (38 U.S.C. Sec. 1173(d)) whether to initiate the rulemaking process to establish acute and chronic leukemias and multiple myelomas as presumptive service-connected conditions. VA is working expeditiously on an Interim Final Rule, with a goal to complete it by mid-January.

Rare Blood Cancers

The Secretary also directed the Technical Working Group conducting the formal evaluation of multiple myeloma and leukemia to evaluate other rare blood cancers: polycythemia vera, myelodysplastic syndromes, essential thrombocythemia, chronic myeloproliferative disease, myelofibrosis, histiocytosis, and mastocytosis. VA expanded the evaluation beyond multiple myeloma and leukemia so that if there is a basis for making any of these conditions presumptive, we will do so.

Adjudicating K2 Veterans' Toxic Exposure Claims

VA continues to ensure that the unique exposures faced by K2 veterans are fully considered in claims processes. Recent actions include:

- On October 4, 2024, VA's Compensation Service and Medical Disability Examination Office released a job aid to assist examiners in evaluating K2-related exposures.
- On October 11, 2024, VA released K2-specific training for claims processors to improve the handling of claims related to potential exposures at K2.
- On October 16, 2024, VA published a K2 Fact Sheet, which has been shared publicly on VA.gov since November 25, 2024.

Additionally, since November 4, 2024, VA has implemented a pre-decisional review process for K2 veterans filing new exposure-related claims. As of December 4, 2024, VA has reviewed 12 claims and completed five reviews.

Outreach and Engagement

VA has ramped up outreach efforts to K2 Veterans and their survivors. These include direct outreach to 148 individuals, including 74 who received personal contact. Many veterans have expressed their gratitude for the attention and advocacy from VA.

Additionally, VA has reviewed 39 K2 claim files and made corrective actions, resulting in retroactive benefits totaling \$345,228.83 for affected veterans and survivors. VA is also working closely with individual veterans to resolve claims, providing assistance and expediting reviews when needed.

Individualized Outreach Stories

VA's outreach efforts have resulted in significant positive outcomes for K2 veterans and survivors, including:

- One widow of a service member who had been denied service-connected death benefits received retroactive benefits after VA identified an error in the prior claim processing.
- A K2 veteran with a craniectomy received corrected evaluation and \$70,000 in retroactive benefits after VA identified a mistake in the initial evaluation of his medical condition.
- A widow received enhanced benefits after VA reviewed her husband's K2 service and expedited her claim.

Looking Ahead

VA remains committed to supporting K2 Veterans and their families, addressing the challenges posed by toxic exposure, and ensuring that those who served at K2 receive the benefits and recognition they deserve. VA encourages all K2 veterans and survivors to engage in the ongoing comment processes and stay informed about upcoming developments in the recognition of service-connected conditions.

For More Information, please visit [VA's K2 Information Page](#)

Change in VA Websites and Apps Sign in

After **January 31, 2025**, all veterans will need to sign into VA websites and apps with a DS Logon, Login.gov or ID.me. The MyHealthVet user ID and password will no longer be an option after January 31, 2025.

If you don't have a [Login.gov](#) or [ID.me](#) account, you can find out how to create an account here:

[Prepare For VA's Secure Sign-In Changes | Veterans Affairs](#)

You may also scan this QR code with your phone camera.

If you have questions about this, please contact Gregg Orto at



Gorto@vfw.org.

Veterans may be eligible for 12 additional months of education benefits

In January 2025, VA announced that they will begin authorizing additional education benefits resulting from the [Rudisill V. McDonough](#) Supreme Court decision.

What has changed - On April 16, 2024 the U.S. Supreme Court decided that veterans who served at least two periods of service - one that qualifies for the Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) and another that qualifies for the Post - 9/11 (PGIB) - may be able to receive additional GI Bill benefits up to 48 months instead of the 36 months they were previously limited to.

Prior to the Supreme Court's decision, though eligible for both benefits, beneficiaries who wanted to use their PGIB benefits had to forfeit using any remaining MGIB benefits, even when PGIB eligibility was based on a period of service separate from the period of service that MGIB eligibility was based.

Additionally, beneficiaries who previously used MGIB had their months of entitlement for PGIB limited to

the number of remaining MGIB months of entitlement. These requirements are no longer valid under the Supreme Court's decision.

Potentially impacted individuals include approximately 1,040,000 beneficiaries with at least two periods of service—one period that qualifies for MGIB and a second that qualifies for PGIB—where the beneficiary waived all or part of their MGIB benefits so they could use PGIB benefits. Over 835,000 are likely eligible to receive additional education benefits. Of the potentially impacted beneficiaries, approximately 4,000 are also Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) beneficiaries who did not have PGIB benefits while participating in VR&E, were paid the standard VR&E subsistence allowance rate, and may now be eligible to have those previous subsistence allowance awards amended to receive the higher PGIB rate as a result of the Rudisill decision.

Note: PGIB and MGIB eligibility is limited to a maximum of 48 months of combined benefits. VA will determine the amount of time left to use the benefit based on the date the veteran elected to switch to PGIB then they will add 90 days. For example, if a veteran at the time of their election from MGIB to PGIB had 3 years left to use their MGIB benefit, VA will give the veteran 3 years and 90 days to use the additional 12 months.

If a veteran previously applied for VA education benefits, they may be eligible for additional benefits if:

- they completed more than one eligible period of service, (there must be a break between periods of service) and
- they waived all or part of their MGIB benefits to use PGIB benefits.

If a veteran meets the above criteria, the recommended action is

First time education benefits users

Apply for education benefits. VA will review the claim and determine eligibility.

They last received an education claim decision on or after August 15, 2018

No action is required from the veteran. These claims will be automatically reviewed, and VA will notify veterans of eligibility.

They last received an education claim decision before August 15, 2018

VA will review and determine the veteran's education benefit eligibility only after they submit a claim. To submit a claim, complete VAF 22-1995.

For More Information, please visit: [Impact of Rudisill Supreme Court Decision on Veterans' Education Benefits - Education and Training](#)

**Character of Discharge VA
Letter Update**

On September 20, 2023, DoD began reviewing cases for former service members (FSMs) who were administratively discharged under the "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy, typically an Other than Honorable (OTH).

On October 15, 2024, DoD announced it completed a proactive review of the military records of more than 800 FSMs who were administratively separated from the services for their sexual orientation during the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" era. DoD considered 851 cases and granted some form of relief in 824 of those cases, although not all received discharge upgrades, and not all upgrades were to honorable discharges. Other types of relief provided to some individuals (in addition to or instead of discharge

characterization upgrades) included corrections to re-enlistment codes, separation program designator codes, and the corresponding narrative reasons for discharge on their DD-214s.

The former service members whose records were reviewed were sent notifications by DoD on October 3, 2024.

DoD then provided VA a list of those with discharge upgrades and other forms of relief, so VA may inform them of VA benefits for which they may now qualify. For example, if the discharge was upgraded to honorable or general-under honorable conditions, the FSM would be eligible for most VA benefits. GI Bill benefits specifically require an honorable discharge; therefore, not all who were upgraded will receive this benefit unless they were upgraded to honorable.

VA is engaging in proactive outreach efforts to the FSMs impacted by this review, including outgoing phone calls, an outreach letter, and the creation of a hotline for FSMs to obtain information about potential VA benefits. VA expects that FSMs who received discharge upgrades may file a claim with VA before receiving their corrected records or new discharge certificates.

In advance of sending letters to the affected FSMs, VA convened experts from within VA and representatives from some Veteran Service Organizations to ensure the letters were appropriate, clear, and understandable.

VA plans to send the letters in January 2025, both to the affected FSMs and, in some cases, to their survivors.

We appreciate your continued support and will ensure we provide any additional information regarding notifications and updates provided to FSMs and their beneficiaries and survivors.

VFW and Veterans Help Group, LLC

On November 6, 2024, VFW and Veterans Help Group, LLC signed a Memorandum of Understanding to help the VFW support veterans by providing help with Social Security Disability claims through an online tool that checks if the veteran qualifies for Social Security Benefits. Veterans Help Group can assist veterans who are eligible, and they only get paid if they win the Social Security disability case for the person they are helping. This tool can be accessed by visiting <https://veteranshelpgroup.com/vfw/> SSDI is a government-administered insurance program, where individual taxpayers earn coverage through their years of paying Social Security payroll taxes. Many veterans are unaware that SSDI benefits “stack” with VA service connected disability payments, meaning a veteran can collect both at the same time, if they qualify for each. For 2025, the max SSDI payment is \$4,018 a month (for those without dependents).

The point of contact at Veterans Help Group for this project is Senior Disability Advocate Scott Layden, Jr., who is a member of the Florida Bar (# 73871) and accredited by the VA Office of General Counsel (# 57558). Scott Layden, Jr. can be reached at slaydenjr@disabilityhelpgroup.com

Please Note: Veterans Help Group will only assist VFW veterans with SSDI claims, not the VA claims process. Though accredited, they will not assume POA for any veterans who are already represented by VFW. Rather, they will direct any VFW represented veteran to their local representative for VA claims help.

For More Information: Additional information and training on this new collaboration will be provided at the upcoming PTC in April. In the meantime please visit

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=exCBGAvMqOw&feature=youtu.be> to watch a short introduction video from Mr. Layden.

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“Our debt to the heroic men and valiant women in the service of our country can never be repaid. They have earned our undying gratitude.” Harry S. Truman