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Communicator

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The COMMUNICATOR is the official publication of the California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO). Opinions expressed are those of contributing writers and do not necessarily reflect opinions or policies of CACVSO officers, members, or the editorial staff. The newsletter reserves the right to edit, amend, or reject any contribution submitted for publication.

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President's Message

(Solano CVSO Ted Puntillo, President)



Strategic Planning Meeting with CalVet

November 8, 2016

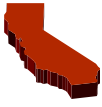
All,

Here are the results of the strategic planning meeting with CalVet. It was a very cooperative meeting and we resolved every issue.

- Report to the Legislature: It will continue to be done on October 1 and the same format and statistic calculations will be used.
- Improved sign in process at conferences: Our organization will continue to explore an easier way to record attendance at the beginning and end of sessions. Our attendance is much improved given the hard work of Terri Lopez, Rhonda Murphy and Alice Watkins.
- Record training modules at conferences and put on internet so all can see them: CalVet is working to purchase video equipment and will hopefully start to record sessions in February. The question on whether the VA staff is allowed to be recorded came up and CalVet will inquire with the VA.

STRATEGIC PLANNING MEETING W/CALVET cont. on Page 3





TIME & PLACE COMMITTEE

(Kern County—CVSO Dick Taylor, Chair)

Dates & Locations of Upcoming Conferences



February 26—March 3, 2017
Holiday Inn, Sacramento CA



June 11—16, 2017
Town & Country Resort & Convention Ctr.
San Diego, CA



October 8—13, 2017
Marriott Convention Center—Riverside, CA

NewsLetter DEADLINE

**Last Thursday of the Month
Unless Notified Otherwise!**

OUT OF THE NORM—ISSUE # 216

(A feature of the Education Committee by Mr. Norm Gillett, CACVSO Training Consultant)

Periodically the question is raised as to whether the additional allowance for aid and attendance may be authorized when the basis for the claim is a mental disability, such as dementia. All too often, folks seem to fixate on the idea that to qualify for the A & A allowance the claimant must be *physically* unable to perform one or more routine self-care activities of daily living, such as getting in or out of bed unassisted, feeding oneself, dressing oneself, bathing oneself, attending to wants of nature unassisted, or keeping oneself ordinarily neat and clean. They would deny the A & A allowance to claimants with dementia or other severe mental disability, even if the claimant is rated as incompetent for VA purposes and/or is under guardianship or conservatorship.

The answer is, of course, emphatically and unequivocally: “Yes, A & A can be awarded for a *mental disability*.” To repeat, a mental disability may be a proper basis for awarding the A & A allowance. The regulation which says so is 38 CFR 3.352(a), **Criteria for determining need for aid and attendance**. After listing the kinds of physical incapacities that would warrant a finding of need for A & A, the regulation then goes on to state a general, non-specific basis for the benefit: “... incapacity, *physical or mental*, which requires care or assistance on a regular basis to protect the claimant from the hazards or dangers incident to his or her daily environment.” (my emphasis) This specifically establishes that a mental disability is a proper basis for awarding A & A.

A diagnosis of severe mental illness or dementia always raises the question of whether the claimant *needs the assistance of another person* to manage his or her affairs, to include disbursement of (VA) funds without limitation? If the answer is “yes,” then the basic requirement for needing A & A has been established, even if the claimant is able to perform all the ordinary (physical) self-care activities of daily living. Evidence that the claimant is under guardianship or conservatorship is virtually presumptive evidence of need for A & A, even though a rating decision is necessary to authorize it, since a court of competent jurisdiction has placed the claimant under a legal disability and made a determination that the claimant requires the regular assistance of another person (guardian or conservator) to protect the claimant against the hazards or dangers incident to his or her daily environment.

In short, to deny the additional amount for aid and attendance on the grounds that the claimant’s physical disabilities alone are not so severe as to require A & A is a clear and unmistakable error (CUE) for mis-application of the pertinent regulation, and especially so when the basis for claiming the allowance was a mental disability. It is both inconsistent and contradictory to hold that a claimant requires protection and assistance with managing his or her personal affairs insofar as handling funds is concerned, but does *not* require protection and assistance with managing his or her personal affairs on the same basis for purposes of the aid and attendance allowance.

The above reasoning applies to veterans and surviving spouses for disability and death pension; surviving spouses and parents of veterans for DIC; and the spouses of veterans entitled to compensation (except for the part about handling VA funds). The same logic would also apply to veterans entitled to compensation, but remember that for compensation claims there is also an additional requirement: namely, the disability or disabilities that causes the veteran to be rated incompetent and in need of A & A *must* be service-connected or compensable under 38 USC 1151.

This Month’s Featured County

Imperial County is a county in the U.S. state of California. As of the 2010 census, the population was 174,528. The county seat is El Centro. Established in 1907, it was the last county to be formed in California. Imperial County comprises the El Centro, CA Metropolitan Statistical Area. It is also part of the Southern California border region, the smallest but most economically diverse region in the state. It is located in the Imperial Valley, in the far southeast of California.



Strategic Planning Meeting with CalVet (Cont.)

(Solano CVSOS Ted Puntillo, President)

- Explanation of Cal Tap process and how it will dove-tail into what we do: Cal Tap is still in the development stage, but it will involve personnel working out of the CalVet HQs and providing a link between both the discharging veteran and veterans of all eras with the Housing, Education, Healthcare & Employment benefits that they have earned. These Cal Tap personnel will be a referral source for us as they will refer veterans to the CVSOS for claim filing activities.
- Sanctions for late reporting of subvention reports: It was agreed that counties that are 15 days late in reporting will have a letter sent from our executive director Tom Splitgerber to the Chair of the Board of Supervisors letting them know that this county is late and in jeopardy of losing subvention funding. If the county is 30 days late the California Secretary of Veteran Affairs will write to the Chair of the Board of that county letting them know that subvention would be eliminated at a percentage yet to be determined for that accounting period if the reports are not received within 15 days.
- CalVet CEU requirements on line: CalVet is still working with this process and will dove-tail the on line video training into this process. It may be up and running next year.
- MOU between NACVSO and CalVet for training and accreditation purposes: Keith Boylan and the NACVSO will continue to work towards where cross accreditation and training will be achieved. CVSOS's must still be accredited by CalVet.
- Future of Prop63: Prop 63 will remain the same with the focus and format.
- VSOF use to fund the 1-800 number in the future: CalVet is supportive of this and we will continue to work together to make it happen.
- Update Valor Guide for legal help for vets: CalVet will look into getting some entity to update this guide for Pro Bono legal services for veterans.
- Process for DV Plates: CalVet is working with DMV to iron out this process and we should have a solution in the next month.
- National Convention June 2017: CalVet will sanction training in both San Diego in 2017 and Reno in 2018.
- Mentor Program: CalVet is very supportive of this and we will continue to work together to make this happen in 2017.
- Modification of VBMS for bookmarking: CalVet is completely supportive and now working with the VA to get this done. We will have an up-date next year.
- Process for getting benefit letters for 100% vets: CVSOSs can send requests for these letters to the District Office in their region. The District Offices walk the request to the VARO public contact unit and the letters are sent to the veterans within 10 days.
- DPRIS Access: CalVet is working to get DPRIS access for up to two employees in each office (preferably on in the smaller counties). This should happen by early next year. Requirements include: CalVet accreditation, current VA systems access or PIV card, and signed CalVet form.



LEGISLATIVE ADVOCATE REPORT

(By Pete Conaty and Dana Nichol, Legislative Advocates)

COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS BRING IN OVER \$487 MILLION IN NEW FEDERAL VETERANS BENEFITS TO CALIFORNIA!

The California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO) announced today that during fiscal year 2015-16, they assisted California's veterans in filing claims with the federal government which resulted in a minimum in payments of \$487,150,998 according to recently released figures from the California Department of Veterans Affairs.

Many of California's 1.8 million veterans are eligible for benefits from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). However, determining which benefits and programs they may be eligible for, as well as applying and qualifying for these benefits can be very complicated. County Veterans Service Officers (CVSO's) are county employees whose job is to assist the veterans in their county in obtaining their earned federal benefits. The services CVSO's provide are 100% free to veterans and their families. The majority of CVSO funding is provided by the counties (76%); while the remainder comes from the state's General Fund (18%) and various state budgetary pass-throughs from other funds (6%). These pass-throughs are because of the work CVSO's do to help veterans with mental health services, MediCal cost avoidance, etc.

Local governments and the State of California have long realized that assisting veterans in obtaining the federal benefits they earned as a result of their military service reduces the pressures on already impacted local and state social service programs. Also, since these federal veterans benefits go directly from the VA to the veteran, these new federal monies are also a boon to the local economies, as well as helping veterans.

The cost of operating the CVSO's is about \$31.2 million and CVSO's are responsible for bringing in over \$487 million in new federal monies for California's veterans. Therefore, CVSO's are guiding the state's veterans to the appropriate benefits, saving the state money by lessening cost pressures on state and local programs, AND getting over a 15-fold return on investment! This does not take into account the economic multiplier effect of an added \$487 million in federal monies going into the state's local economies, as the veterans who are the direct beneficiaries of these monetary benefits, spend it in on everyday items like rent, food, medicine, etc.

According to CACVSO President Ted Puntillo "Our motto for 2016 was "Boots on the Ground. This strategy of outreach into the community in search of eligible veterans as well as the successful implementation of the VETERAN designation on the driver's license, which brought new veterans into our offices for verification, allowed us to serve more veterans than ever and bring in \$107 million more than last year in federal benefits paid directly to the veteran".

"The CACVSO would like to thank the State Legislature and their dedicated staff who had the foresight to give us the tools we need to 'Serve Those Who Have Served Us'" noted Scott Holwell, CACVSO Legislative Chair.

ABOUT THE CACVSO

The California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO) is a professional training and legislative organization comprising the 56 counties, which have established 54 County Veterans Service Officers throughout the state dedicated to serving California's 1.84 million veterans as well as their dependents and survivors.



JOB POSTING



County Veterans Service Officer

Exam # 29574-16-O

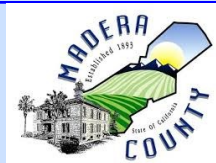
Approximate Monthly Salary: \$7,958.76 - \$9,674.40

DESCRIPTION

Under general direction, directs, manages, supervises, and coordinates the activities and operations of the County Veterans Service Office to assist veterans and/or their dependents by advising them of the rights and benefits to which they are entitled by law, and maintains relationships with veterans organizations, related agencies and other groups.

Filing Deadline: 5:00 PM on December 23, 2016

Please see job announcement for important testing information, including tentative test dates. This communication is a courtesy announcement only and is not meant to replace the full job announcement. Please view the official job announcement for all requirements and testing information. The full job announcement and online application is available for viewing on our website at www.saccountyjobs.net



The County of Madera is seeking an experienced individual to become the County's next **Veterans Service Officer**.

Opening Date / Time: Mon. 11/07/16 12:00 a.m. Pacific Time

Closing Date / Time: Fri. 12/09/16 5:00 p.m. Pacific Time

Monthly Salary: Up to \$6456/month - Plus an Excellent Benefits Package

SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED. This position plans, directs, manages, and oversees the programs associated with Veterans' benefits as provided by Federal, State, and local agency regulations and participates in and oversees the process by which rights and benefits are secured for veterans and their dependents and beneficiaries.

The Veterans Service Officer is a Department Head position that is appointed by and serves at the pleasure of the Board of Supervisors.

To Apply:

An official Madera County application, a current resume, proof of required documentation, and responses to the supplemental questions must be submitted online or directly to the Human Resources/Operations Division, Attn: Susan Carter, Senior Personnel Analyst, **by 5:00 P.M. on Friday, December 9, 2016.** (Resumes will not be accepted in lieu of the official application).

VA and Social Security Partner to Speed Up Disability Decisions for Veterans

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Social Security Administration (SSA) launched a new Health IT initiative that enables VA to share medical records electronically with social security disability processors. This secure process will save time and money resulting in better service for Veterans and dependents who apply for social security disability benefits. The SSA requests nearly 15 million medical records from health care organizations yearly to make medical decisions on about three million disability claims. For decades, SSA obtained medical records through a manual process. This new national initiative puts in place an automated process to obtain Veterans' medical records entirely electronically.

“VA's partnership with Social Security will ultimately improve the quality of life for Veterans and their dependents by enabling Veterans to share their health information within a safe and secure health-related consumer application,” said Dr. David Shulkin, VA's Under Secretary for Health.

The joint venture is expected to significantly speed up social security disability decisions, utilizing VA's VLER Health Exchange under the Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record (VLER) Program. The VLER Health Exchange gives VA and participating community providers the ability to retrieve Veterans' health information from each other for the purpose of treatment. Currently, VLER Health Exchange shares health data with over 79 community health care partners, representing 775 Hospitals, 427 Federally Qualified Health Centers, 142 Nursing Homes, 8441 Pharmacies and over 11,969 Clinics. The SSA now has access for the purpose of processing benefits for Veterans and their dependents.

“This SSA-VA partnership is another example of VA's leadership in interoperability efforts among federal partners,” said VA Secretary, Robert McDonald. “Increasing federal partnerships to improve operation and resource coordination across agencies is among VA's 12 Breakthrough Priorities for 2016.”

VA has partnership agreements with Health and Human Services (HHS), Department of Defense (DOD), Department of Treasury (DOT) among many others.

CVSO & DMV

Veteran Designation on Driver's Licenses and IDs



"Honoring Veterans" license plates make the perfect holiday gift! The plates are available to all California motorists and are customized with the distinctive military branch or veteran service organization logo of choice. As you already know, proceeds from the sale of these plates support efforts of the CalVet and our 56 County Veteran Services Offices to connect veterans and their families with the benefits they've earned through military service.

To purchase your veteran license plate, go to www.cacvso.org. Click on "Veteran License Plates" to view available logos. Then, go to www.dmv.ca.gov. Click on "Vehicle Registration," click on "License Plates," then click on "California Special Interest License Plates" to complete the online application. Sequential plates can take up to 6 weeks and personalized plates can take up to 12 weeks to receive, so order early.

**FOR CURRENT FEES
CONTACT DMV**



Veteran Driver License and ID Available

HAVE YOU EVER SERVED IN THE U.S. MILITARY? YOU MAY QUALIFY TO PROUDLY DISPLAY VETERAN ON YOUR DRIVER LICENSE OR IDENTIFICATION CARD.

IT'S AS EASY AS 1, 2, 3!

- 1** Find your military discharge certificate (DD214). If you need assistance obtaining your military records, then contact your County Veteran Service Officer (CVSO).
- 2** Take your DD214 and government identification to your CVSO to obtain your Veteran Status Verification Form.
- 3** Go on-line or call DMV for an appointment. Then bring your Veteran Status Verification Form to DMV. Complete your application, pay any application fees plus a \$5.00 fee for your Veteran designation. You must complete all applicable application and testing requirements.

For faster CVSO service, schedule an appointment by visiting www.calvet.ca.gov or call **1-844-SERV-VET**.



To schedule an appointment at a DMV, visit www.dmv.ca.gov or call **1-800-777-0133**.



VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

News Release

Office of Public Affairs
Media Relations

Washington, DC 20420
(202) 461-7600
www.va.gov

VA EXPANDS NEW INNOVATORS NETWORK PROGRAM

WASHINGTON –The Department of Veterans Affairs Center for Innovation (VACI) is expanding its Innovators Network Program. Fourteen new VA Medical Center innovation sites and one National Cemetery innovation site will join the eight selected last year, for a total of 22 recognized innovation sites across the country. The sites were selected from a highly competitive pool of 44 sites from across the country. The selection was based on a review of 12 parameters, including: proposed Veteran-centered approach; plans to empower and engage employees and collaboration with local infrastructure enablers.

The [VA Center for Innovation](#) identifies, tests and evaluates new approaches to efficiently and effectively meet the current and future needs of Veterans through innovations rooted in data, design-thinking and agile development. Each of the Network sites is focused on [building a culture of innovation](#) to support employees working with input from Veterans to design and develop new innovations to better serve Veterans and their families.

"VA continues to increase its ability to rapidly respond to Veterans' needs and deliver the best possible experience for Veterans. We have invested in creating a culture of innovation which we can constantly find, test and create better ways to deliver services to our Veterans," said [VA Secretary Robert McDonald](#).

The Network began as a pilot in early 2015 and seeks to build and empower a community of VA employees who are actively engaged in innovation. The Network has been a tremendous success in [developing VA's culture of innovation](#), empowering employees to improve the experience and care of our Veterans, and successfully funding transformational innovations that significantly reduce costs and improve the care and services available to Veterans. The Network program and Innovation Specialists – dedicated staff at each innovation site – have trained over 1,300 VA employees on innovation-related competencies to help them first recognize, and then solve problems that are negatively impacting or preventing Veterans from receiving the care and services.

To support initiatives, the VA Innovators Network creates a pathway to accelerate the development of new, reimagined experiences for Veterans and their families. The accelerator has invested in 38 projects across the VA. Two of its biggest, Technology-Based Eye Care Screening from the Atlanta VA and the Care in the Community Tool from the Portland VA project to save over \$20 million over the next five years and improve Veterans access to services and care.

The following sites have been selected as Innovators Network Sites for 2017:

- Albany Stratton VA Medical Center, Albany, N.Y.
- Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center, Cleveland, Ohio
- Grand Junction VA Healthcare System, Grand Junction, Colo.
- Hines VA Medical Center, Chicago, Ill.
- Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center, Richmond, Va.
- Lebanon VA Medical Center, Lebanon Pa.
- Lexington VA Medical Center, Lexington, Ky.
- VA Loma Linda Healthcare System, Loma Linda, Calif.
- New Mexico VA Healthcare System
- Puget Sound VA Healthcare System, Seattle Wash.
- VA San Diego Healthcare System, San Diego, Calif.
- South Texas Healthcare System, San Antonio, Texas
- Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center, Tuscaloosa, Ala.
- White River Junction VA Medical Center, White River Junction, Vt.
- Fort Snelling National Cemetery, Minneapolis, Minn.

DATES OF INTEREST

NOVEMBER 2016

- 11 Veterans Day
- 11 Remembrance Day
- 19 International Men's Day
- 24 Thanksgiving

DECEMBER 2016

- 1 AIDS Awareness Day
- 7 National Pearl Harbor
- 10 Human Rights Day
- 17 Wright Brothers Day
- 17 Pan American Aviation Day
- 21 First Day of Winter
- 22 Forefather's Day
- 25 Christmas Day
- 31 New Year's Eve



**Freedom
isn't Free**



**Support
Our Troops**

