Hello Everyone, and welcome to the March 2024 edition of our Regulatory and Governmental Affairs newsletter.

**Rules and Proposed Rules**

**Survivors Benefit Claims.** In this proposed rule the VA is simplifying the application process for survivor benefits for families of deceased veterans. If someone qualifies for dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC), they will not be considered for a survivor's pension. The only exception is for surviving spouses with no dependents, living in a nursing home, and receiving Medicaid, where a survivor's pension might be more helpful. The stated purpose of this change is to speed up claim processing and maximize financial support for veterans’ families. Public comments may be made through May 10 and can be submitted [here](#).

**Reproductive Health.** Final rule effective April 3, 2024. The VA’s medical regulations now permit abortion counseling and grant exceptions to the ban on abortions for veterans and CHAMP-VA beneficiaries in cases where there is a threat to the life or health of the patient and in cases of rape or incest.

**Access to IVF.** Final rule effective March 28, 2024. The VA has expanded IVF benefits to veterans, regardless of marital status or ability to use their own eggs or sperm. This follows a change in DoD policy. To qualify, veterans must still have a service-connected disability that prevents them from having children without fertility treatment.

**Changes to VASRD for Digestive Conditions.** Final rule effective May 19, 2024. The VA is updating its disability rating schedule for digestive conditions. Moving forward, Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) evaluations will use new (Rome IV) criteria, but the maximum rating remains 30%. Crohn’s Disease also has revised criteria to reflect symptom severity and treatment impact. Lastly, Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD) is now assessed by measuring the narrowing of the esophagus.

**Notices**

**Accelerated Enrollment Under the PACT Act.** The VA is accelerating the timeline for healthcare enrollment for toxic-exposed veterans enumerated in the PACT Act. The initial timeline staggered enrollment eligibility, but all of these veterans may now file benefits claims online, by phone, by mail, or in person at a VA medical facility.

**Meetings**

**10 - 11 April - Geriatric and Gerontology Advisory Committee Meeting.** This committee advises the VA on meeting the medical, psychological, and social needs of aging veterans by ensuring that VA facilities and programs are adequately equipped. Attendance details (via WebEx) can be found [here](#).

**01 May - Veterans' Family, Caregiver, and Survivor Advisory Committee Meeting.** The agenda will include remarks from the Executive Director of the Caregiver Support Program, the Survivors’ Assistance and Memorial Support Program (SAMS), the Veterans Health Administration, the Office of Survivor Assistance, the Veterans Benefits Administration, and
briefings from the subcommittee chairs. Attendance details (in-person or via MS Teams) can be found here.

08 - 09 May - Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials Meeting. The Advisory Committee on National Cemeteries will hold a public meeting on May 8th and 9th, 2024. The meeting will include presentations by National Cemetery Administration leadership, briefings on cemetery operations and memorial innovation, and discussions on the status of committee recommendations. There will also be an opportunity for public comments. Attendance details (in-person or via WebEx) can be found here.

**Legislation Placed on the House Calendar**

- **H.R. 4278** Restore VA Accountability Act

**Reported Out of the House**

- **H.R. 6342** MVP Act

**Committee Hearings Held**

- **H.R. 7738** TEF Improvement Act

**Subcommittee Hearings Held**

- **H.R. 7347** Directs the VA to report on whether it will include certain psychedelic drugs in the VA formulary.
- **H.R. 7342** Veterans Accessibility Advisory Committee Act
- **H.R. 6947** Veterans Affairs Centennial and Heritage Act
- **H.R. 6538** VA Correct Compensation Act
- **H.R. 6531** TRAIN VA Employees Act
- **H.R. 6452** Veterans Scam and Fraud Evasion Act
- **H.R. 6373** Veterans STAND Act
- **H.R. 6324** FY 2024 VA Major Medical Facility Authorization Act
- **H.R. 5794** Veterans Affairs Peer Review Neutrality Act
- **H.R. 5530** VA Emergency Transportation Access Act
- **H.R. 5247** Expedited Hiring for VA Trained Psychiatrists Act
- **H.R. 4424** Vietnam Veterans Liver Fluke Cancer Study Act

**H.R. 3649** Veterans National Traumatic Brain Injury Treatment Act

**H.R. 3644** ACT for Veterans Act

**H.R. 3584** Veterans CARE Act

**H.R. 3303** Maternal Health for Veterans Act

**H.R. 3225** BUILD for Veterans Act

**H.R. 7732** ETS Act

**H.R. 7703** Fair Access to Co-ops for Veterans Act

**H.R. 7653** VERY Act

**H.R. 7643** Veterans Congressional Work Study Act

**H.R. 7613** Veterans Flight Training Responsibility Act

**H.R. 7323** Requires the VA to disapprove tuition payments to institutions where they are not charging in-state tuition for veterans using their GI benefits under Title 10.

**H.R. 6656** Stuck On Hold Act

**H.R. 6225** Expanding Home Loans for Guard and Reservists Act

**Referred to Subcommittee**

- **H.R. 7549** Gold Star Family Education Parity Act
- **H.R. 7543** Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity Act
- **H.R. 7514** WAIVER Act
- **H.R. 7504** Rural Veterans Transportation to Care Act
- **H.R. 7464** Sgt. Ted Grubbs Mental Healthcare for Disabled Veterans Act

**Referred to Committee**

- **H.R. 7777/S. 4047** Annual increase in disability and DIC compensation.

**S. 4061** Requires the VA to maintain a toll-free helpline for veterans to obtain information about VA benefits and services.

**S. 4046** Modifies collective bargaining authorities for VHA employees

**S. 4009** Requires the VA to offer annual health evaluations for veterans with spinal cord injuries or disorders, and
increases access to assistive technologies.

**S. 3979** Codifies and makes permanent the pilot program using contract physicians for C&P examinations

**S. 3970** Requires the VA to repay service members for certain contributions they have made toward Post-9/11 educational assistance.

**S. 3958** Molly R. Loomis Research for Descendants of Toxic Exposed Veterans Act

**S. 3938** Designates the VA CBOC in Lynchburg, Virginia the "Private First Class Desmond T. Doss VA Clinic".

**S. 3911** Improves VA oversight of certain educational institutions

**S. 3886** WAIVER Act

**S. 3885** Veteran Caregiver Reeducation, Reemployment, and Retirement Act

**S. 3873** Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity Act

**H.R. 7816** Requires the VA to assess the quality and content of benefits claim notice letters with a federally funded R&D center.

**H.R. 7793** Provides more appellate options to individuals with VA benefits claims.

**H.R. 7773** Provides additional assistance to veterans and service members using Post-9/11 benefits where they need extra time to complete remedial and deficiency courses.

**H.R. 7765** Directs the VA to execute a pilot program for weapons screening technology at VA medical centers.

**H.R. 7734** Requires a notation in the personnel record file of certain VA employees who resign from Government employment under certain circumstances.

**H.R. 7729** Dennis and Lois Krisfalusy Act

**H.R. 7713** VA Political Performance Disclosure Act

**H.R. 7674** Establishes a VA Advisory Committee on LGBTQ Veterans

**H.R. 7657** Healthcare Freedom for VHA Volunteer Drivers Act

**H.R. 7654** Rural Veterans Transportation to Care Act

**H.R. 7596** Servicewomen and Veterans Menopause Research Act

**H.R. 7591** National Patient Safety Board Act

**H.R. 7559** Military Family Leave Act