

**TDVS Benefits Bulletin**  
**24-7**

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*This month's bulletin is 1,781 words and will take just over 7 minutes of your time.*

**1 big thing: It's Launched - Tennessee Veteran Ready Business Recognition Program**

**Recognizing businesses in Tennessee** that go above and beyond to 'Recruit', 'Hire', and 'Retain' service members, Veterans, and their families. Together, we can assist 'Veteran Friendly' businesses to becoming 'Veteran Ready'!

*"As our nation's Independence Day approaches, I am filled with immense pride as I introduce the Tennessee Veteran Ready Business Recognition Program. The program's primary focus is to recognize Tennessee businesses that go above and beyond in their efforts to Recruit, Hire, and Retain service members, Veterans, and their families. Additionally, it encourages businesses to continue honoring the invaluable service and sacrifices made by our service member community." - Commissioner Tommy Baker*

 **State-wide launch was on July 1, 2024.**

 **Visit the [TDVS website](#) to learn more or to apply.**

**TDVS Updates**

**Claims Management System – Request for Proposals**

**On May 28<sup>th</sup>, TDVS released a Request for Proposals (RFP)** to solicit a potential replacement for VetraSpec, the current claims management system.

**Why it matters:** The decision to replace VetraSpec follows a review process started in April 2022, led by a working group of State and County Veteran Service Officers. Their recommendations have shaped the criteria for the RFP.

**What's new:** The vendor response deadline has been extended to July 12, 2024.

**I need more:**

- [Benefits Bulletin 23-7](#) contained an update of the group’s work.
- [Commissioner Baker’s Letter](#) to County Mayors and Executives
- [Stakeholder Engagement Portal](#)
  - FAQs
  - Got a Question – [Ask It Here](#)

Annual Conference 2024  
“Leading the Nation – Tennessee Veteran Advocacy”

**[Registration is open for TDVS’s Annual Conference 2024.](#)** It will be held September 30<sup>th</sup> – October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024 at the Chattanooga Convention Center & Chattanooga Marriott Downtown, 1 Carter Street, Chattanooga, TN.

**What’s new:**

- [2024 Fall-Winter Chattanooga Travel Inspiration Magazine](#) was added to 2024 Annual Training Conference webpage>Things to Do in Chattanooga
- [Welcome to Chattanooga Tri-Fold Flyer](#) was added to 2024 Annual Training Conference webpage>Things to Do in Chattanooga
- [REGISTER NOW!! Medal of Honor Heritage Center \(Museum\)](#) was recently added to 2024 Annual Training Conference webpage>Things to Do in Chattanooga

**Don’t forget:** Tickets are now available for the [Coolidge National Medal of Honor Heritage Center](#). The Center will be providing a unique opportunity for conference attendees to visit on Monday, September 30, 2024 from 5 – 8 p.m. EST.

Get your [tickets](#) now. *This is an optional opportunity and not a required portion of the TDVS training conference.*

**Here’s your [one-stop shop](#)** for all things Annual Conference. Check out --

- Information on Parking & Venue
- Things To Do in Chattanooga
- And More Coming Soon

 **Save the Date** – [TDVS Lunch & Learn](#) September 11th, 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. CST – 2024 Annual Training Conference Update

 [TDVS’ Knowledge Library](#)

- Added [Benefits Bulletin 24-6](#) in *VSO Tools – Benefits Bulletin – 2024*
- Added [VA Press Release](#) – *VA Extends Presumption of Service Connection – TDVS Honoring Our PACT Act Toolbox – Press Releases*
- Added [Updated Guidance](#) on Processing Claims Involving Public Law 117 – *TDVS Honoring Our PACT Act Toolbox*
- Added VBA VSO Quarterly [Slide Deck](#) – *VSO Tools – VBA VSO Quarterly Meeting – FY24*
- Added Other Than Honorable (OTH) Discharge Policy Update [Slide Deck](#) – *VSO Tools – Job Aids – Discharge Upgrades*
- Added [06.29.2024 Tennessee CSO Contact Roster](#) – *VSO Tools - Organizations*

### Training Updates

**What's next:** Here's the training schedule for the remainder of the calendar year:

- July Quarterly Accreditation Training – Available 24/7, Monday, July 8 – Friday, July 12 – Virtual
- July Initial Accreditation Training, Monday, July 22 – Friday, July 26
- August – [Lunch & Learn](#), Wednesday, August 14<sup>th</sup>, 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. CST – TBD
- September – [Lunch & Learn](#), Wednesday, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. CST – 2024 Annual Training Conference Update
- Annual Conference / Awards Banquet / Advocacy Summit – Monday, September 30 - Wednesday, October 2
- October Initial Accreditation Training, Monday, October 21, 2024 – Friday, October 25, 2024
- Annual Examination – Friday, November 15<sup>th</sup> **OR** Monday, November 18<sup>th</sup> - Virtual
- [2024 Training Schedule](#)

### **VA and Veteran Benefit Updates**

#### VA Adds Three New Cancer Types as Presumptives for Gulf War and Post-9/11 Veterans

Three cancer types have been included in the list of presumptive diseases through a sub-regulatory policy letter published to the [Federal Register](#).

- Male Breast Cancer
- Urethral Cancer
- Cancer of the Paraurethral Gland

**Why it matters:** This policy establishes presumptions of service connection for eligible Gulf War and post-9/11 Veterans who deployed to Afghanistan, Somalia, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan,

Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Uzbekistan, and the entire [Southwest Asia theater of operations](#), which includes Iraq.

VA is currently drafting regulations to implement the PACT Act. Due to the time required to promulgate regulations, VA implemented the law and began processing PACT Act-related claims on January 1, 2023, based on the sub-regulatory guidance contained in the Policy Letter issued in December 2022. This sub-regulatory guidance replaces the December 2022 Policy Letter and makes other clarifying changes.

### I need more:

- [Federal Register](#)
- [Sub-Regulatory Policy Letter](#)
- [VA Press Release](#)

### VBA VSO Quarterly Updates

**Among other updates, VA shared MST claims processing updates to comply with two Public Laws.** VA is providing an option for a Veteran to elect to be referred to a VHA MST coordinator or have VBA automatically notify VHA at certain times in the claims process.

**Dig deeper:** VA will implement these changes, in part, through updated forms (VA Forms 21-0781 and 20-0995) that include a consent option.

- The new version of VA Form 21-0781, dated March 2024, [released on June 28, 2024](#). All mental health disorders – not just PTSD – are now included and the VA Form 21-0781a will be discontinued. The substantive edits to the form, include:
  - New sections that help the claimant complete the form with their type of in-service traumatic event(s),
  - Guidance with examples for describing the traumatic event(s),
  - Expanding the behavioral changes question; including if a report was filed and/or if another source can be used for evidentiary purposes,
  - New section requesting treatment information and locations, and
  - New signature sections allowing witnesses, a POA, or an alternate signer to sign on behalf of the claimant.
- The new version of VA Form 20-0995, dated May 2024, [released on June 28, 2024](#). The substantive edits to the form, include:
  - New question identifying the benefit type the claimant is requesting,
  - New claimant's section,
  - New homeless section,

- Treatment information and location section edited to match other forms in inventory, and
- Additional signature sections allowing witnesses, a POA, or an alternate signer to sign on behalf of claimant.

VetraSpec is aware of the form updates and working to incorporate into Tennessee's forms library. The previous versions can still be used as described in M21-1, Part II, Subpart i, 2.B.4. (Handling Outdated or Discontinued Forms).

**I need more:**

- [VBA VSO Quarterly Slide Deck](#)
- [VA Form 20-0995](#)
- [VA Form 21-0781](#)

No Copays for First Three Outpatient Mental Health Visits Each Year Through 2027

 **Veterans no longer need to pay copays for their first three outpatient mental health care and substance use disorder visits** of each calendar year through 2027.

**Why it matters:** This benefit expands Veterans' access to mental health services and lowers their out-of-pocket costs.

**Dig deeper:** This copayment exemption benefits dates to June 27, 2023, and – by law – will end on December 29, 2027. To be eligible for this exemption, the outpatient visit must be with a qualified mental health professional at VA or provided through VA's network of community care providers. VA will automatically refund Veterans for any copays paid to VA on or after June 27, 2023, for these appointments, with no further action required by those Veterans.

**I need more:**

- [VA Press Release](#)

**Practice Like a Pro**

VetraSpec Update 24-1 - New Functionality

 **Tennessee VetraSpec Users received the VetraSpec 24.1 update** Saturday, May 11<sup>th</sup>.

**What do I need to do:**

1 – If you haven’t already, clear your browser cache. *This is a very important step; many of the post-update issues that users experience result from failure to clear the cache.*

- [Instructions for Firefox users](#) (Check "Cached Web Content")
- [Instructions for Chrome users](#) (Choose "All Time" and check "Cached images and files")

2 – If you haven’t already, please use the control panel to set up multi-factor authentication for your account.

- Select “Control Panel” from the left-hand side of the VetraSpec Home screen.
- Select “Multi Factor Authentication” from the top VetraSpec menu.
- Set up multi-factor authentication using either email or authenticator app.

3 – Establish a VA authentication method to prepare to take advantage of the new Benefits Claims functionality.

- Instructions for [ID.me](#)
- Instructions for [Login.gov](#) (Validates with PIV)

4 – If you have filing capability, start using the VBMS tab to view information from VBMS (POA, ITF) for your Veterans.



5 – Keep an eye out for future bulletins that will provide details on using the Benefits Claims filing capability. Thank you to State and County users for supporting ongoing validation testing!

**I need more:** Here’s your [one-stop shop](#) for all things VetraSpec Release 24-1. Check out --

- Release Notes Detailing Changes and New Features
- VA's Official communication Regarding the Move from D2D to Benefits Claims
- User Guide for Benefits Claims - Available to Users Who Currently Have D2D Access
- Instructions for Clearing Browser Cache

## Advocate Spotlight

### National Veterans Legal Services (NVLSP) Advocacy Update

**All but one of the appeals that have reached a conclusion at the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (CAVC)** have been resolved in the Veteran or appellant's favor.

**By the numbers:** TDVS established an advocacy partnership with NVLSP in July of 2019. Since that time, TDVS has sent over 1,300 Board of Veterans' Appeals denials to NVLSP for review. NVLSP has offered appellate representation at the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (CAVC) to approximately 24% of these claimants.

#### **I need more:**

- Offers to discuss NVLSP representing a client before CAVC are sent via letter along with an [introductory letter from Commission Baker](#).
- [TDVS Fact Sheet](#) – TDVS Partnership with NVLSP

**State of play:** Don't forget, TDVS is also partnering with NVLSP's Lawyers Serving Warriors® program to help in some discharge upgrades. Tennessee has referred nearly a dozen Veterans since announcing this advocacy partnership in April. Just follow the three simple steps in this [TDVS Fact Sheet - Complex Claims Assistance Program – Discharge Upgrades](#) to take advantage of this opportunity for your clients.

*Do you have an advocacy success story or something you'd like to see included in an upcoming bulletin? If so, [share](#) for a future bulletin.*

*TDVS Benefits Bulletins Can Be Found on the [VSO Tools](#) Portion of TDVS's Website*

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