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New London Veterans Affairs

Advisory Committee

Prepared By Al Kinsall

Veterans Update – Issue 11-2021

THIS IS YOUR NOVEMBER NEWSLETTER SITREP 11-2021

We would appreciate your comments so we can better serve your needs.

******* WHO WE ARE *******

Alvin G. Kinsall	Chairman/NL VA Office
Ron Burdick	Vice Chairman
Steve Ricard	2022 Walk of Honor coordinator
Bruce Skinner	2022 Volunteer of the Year coordinator
Stephen Spillane	2022 Military Appr Day coordinator/NL VA Office
Members: John Russell, Hughroy Scott	
Walter Williams	Associate Member (Veteran Memorial Coordinator)
Harold Hanson	Associate Member (Waterford Representative)
Micra Reyes	Associate Member (Town of Groton Representative)
TBD	Associate Member (City of Groton Representative)
TBD	Associate Member (Town of Montville Representative)
TBD	Associate Member (Town of East Lyme representative)

**Office hours - 10:00am to 1:00pm Tuesdays and Thursdays
Or by appointment**

QUICK NOTABLES

- ◆ New London Veterans Coffee House is Friday November 5 and 19 from 0900-1100. Come share you service experiences over a cup of coffee and some pastry. Hope to see you there.
- ◆ Veterans Day Remembrance ceremony—New London Senior Center Thursday, 11 November at 3:00pm. Doors open at 2:30pm. Lite Refreshments.
- ◆ NLVAC Meeting Thursday 18 November 7:00pm NL Senior Center—Stop by and find out what's going on at CTDVA and NLVA.
- ◆ Thursday 25 November NLVA office is closed in observance of Thanksgiving holiday

FEATURE ARTICLE

Caregivers have been overlooked by VA over the years, but those days are over, VA Secretary Denis McDonough said Oct. 29.

Speaking at the Elizabeth Dole Foundation's Sixth Annual National Convening, McDonough said one of VA's most important jobs is to support caregivers.

"Our job at VA and EDF is to help those caregivers to find ways to make their lives easier – both because that's the right thing to do, and because supporting caregivers improves outcomes for Veterans," he said.

VA will continue to focus on four pillars: advocacy, access, outcomes and excellence. Focusing on those four is critical, as the stress of managing a household and Veteran's medical conditions during a pandemic is hard.

"This is the type of stress that leads caregivers to suffer from anxiety, depression and health issues more often than most Americans," McDonough said. "And it means that our shared mission to care for those caregivers has never been more important than it is right now."

During the pandemic, the Elizabeth Dole Foundation partnered with VA to provide more than \$500,000-worth of free, professional [respite services](#) to caregivers who needed it. On top of that, VA has vaccinated more than 85,000 caregivers and given personal protective equipment, all while delivering more care and benefits than ever before.

McDonough said VA will continue the close collaboration with the [Veterans' Family, Caregiver, and Survivor Advisory committee](#) – which is chaired by Senator Elizabeth Dole. VA's dedication to caregivers shows, with its first ever senior advisor for caregivers: Meg Kabat advises the secretary on families, caregivers and survivors.

"We'll move heaven and earth to get caregivers timely access to their VA resources," he said.

Ensuring that caregivers who help Veterans with assisted daily living get those resources, McDonough noted that the [Program of Comprehensive Assistance](#) will soon expand to cover all generations of caregivers. PCAFC was previously expanded in October 2020 to eligible Veterans who incurred or aggravated a serious injury in the line of duty in the active military, naval or air service on or before May 7, 1975. Soon, access to PCAFC will include eligible Veterans from all eras who have a serious injury – incurred or aggravated in the line of duty in the active military, naval or air service.

VA [announced in September](#) that its [Caregiver Support Program](#) is extending eligibility through Sept. 30, 2022, for Veterans who are [legacy participants](#); it additionally extends to [legacy applicants](#) and their family caregivers who participate in the [Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers](#).

This extension applies to Veterans who were participating in PCAFC before Oct. 1, 2020, and to individuals who applied for PCAFC before Oct. 1, 2020. It also applies to those who were accepted into the program after Oct. 1, 2020.

The secretary highlighted other programs, too, including the [Program of General Caregiver Support Services](#). Dedicated staff at every VA medical center meet with caregivers, help identify their Veterans' needs, and come up with a plan to address them. VA's "vitaly important" [Peer Support Program for caregivers](#) strengthens relationships between caregivers, providing an opportunity for networking and empowering caregivers to help one another.

"Because as you know, the health and happiness of caregivers is inextricably tied to the health and happiness of the Veterans they serve," McDonough said. "In other words, by improving caregiver outcomes, we improve Veteran outcomes – and we at VA are going to stop at nothing to do both."

The secretary then cited a story of a Veteran who is a quadruple amputee and whose wife is his primary caregiver. He said the Veteran needs daily help, ranging from brushing his teeth to putting on his prosthetics in the morning. The Veteran appreciates when people come up to him and thank him for his service, but noted that nobody comes up to his wife to thank her for the service she's given to the country by being a caregiver. The secretary said that's wrong and he's out to fix it.

"I know that at times, throughout VA's history, caregivers have been overlooked," he said. "Or not included. Or not appreciated for the back-breaking work they do, and the incredible service that they provide. But I'm here today to say, to any caregiver watching, that those days are over. Let me repeat: those days are over." ■



VA releases cybersecurity strategy to secure Veteran information and privacy

Strategy outlines how VA will safeguard critical infrastructure systems

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs publishes new cybersecurity [strategy](#), Nov. 4, to protect against exposure of Veterans’ personal information or the corruption of critical data.

Veteran data is of great interest to [adversaries](#) who seek financial gain and other types of exploitation.

Loss or compromise of information can place Veterans and the department’s mission at risk. To safeguard against fraudulent activities VA developed a strategy outlining a measurable and effective framework enabling the protection and resilience of VA’s most critical business functions and assets.

“As we continue to rapidly advance technology across VA, this strategy provides an agile framework to address the challenges of today and adapt to the technologies and threats of tomorrow,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough. “This comprehensive approach practices accountability and transparency, while remaining hypervigilant of cyber threats — charting a course for success at the individual and enterprise levels.”

The strategy outlines five goals focused on maintaining a robust and resilient technology environment that advances VA’s mission, including:

- Secure and protect VA and Veteran information;
- Protect information systems and assets;
- Leverage innovation to strengthen cybersecurity;
- Enhance cybersecurity through partnerships and information sharing;
- Empower VA mission through cybersecurity risk management.

The Cybersecurity Strategy aligns to and enables the [FY18-24 VA Strategic Plan](#). It takes into consideration existing and new Federal cybersecurity requirements, Executive Orders, technological advancements, innovations and world events that have impacted the way VA delivers services. VA’s Cybersecurity Strategy can be found [here](#) . ■

SSA 2021

Update 01: 5.9% for 2022 Insufficient to Restore Senior’s Buying Power

Soaring inflation has deeply weakened the purchasing power of Social Security benefits in 2021, according to TSCL’s latest update on rising senior costs. The study, which compares the growth in the Social Security cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) with increases in the costs of goods and services typically used by retirees, found that Social Security benefits have lost 32 percent (nearly one third of buying power) since 2000. During that period, data indicate that, while COLAs have increased Social Security benefits by 55%, typical senior expenses over the same period grew by 104.9%.

The Senior Citizens League has been conducting this study for 12 years. The study typically looks at data from the 12-month period of January of the previous year to January of the current year. But with record - setting inflation in 2021, COLA researcher Mary Johnson has updated the survey this year in order to help the public and Members of Congress understand the impact that high inflation could have on Social Security buying power.

Would a 5.9% COLA restore buying power of benefits in 2022? Not completely. This is especially the case for older retirees, anyone retired prior to 2000. The average Social Security benefit in 2000 was \$816 per month. That benefit grew to \$1,262.40 by 2021 due to COLA increases. However, because retiree costs are rising at a far more rapid pace than the COLA, this study found that a Social Security benefit of \$1,671.70 per month — an extra \$409.30 per month more — would be required, just to maintain the same level of buying power as in 2000. A 5.9% COLA would increase \$1,262.40 by about \$74.50 per month before deductions for Medicare premiums. That is substantially higher than any COLA in recent years, but still not enough (by a long shot) to completely restore buying power for people have been retired for the past 20 years. [Source: The Senior Citizens League | The Advisor | October 20, 2021 ++ ■



TRICARE Pharmacy Network Walmart Out, CVS In

After three years, Walmart is leaving Tricare's pharmacy network -- a departure that pharmacy benefit manager Express Scripts says is a result of the retail giant's reluctance to offer "more highly competitive discounts" to military health beneficiaries. At the same time CVS Pharmacy will return to the Tricare network after a five-year hiatus, a change Express Scripts spokeswoman Jennifer Luddy said 20 OCT would expand choice within the network.

Effective Dec. 15, 2021, Walmart and Sam's Club will no longer be a part of the Tricare pharmacy network, and CVS will be included among the list of network retail pharmacies where Tricare users can fill their prescriptions. "This change provides more competitive rates for the Tricare pharmacy benefit and expands quality, convenient pharmacy choices nationwide," Luddy said in a statement to Military.com. Walmart and Sam's Club have more than 5,300 locations nationwide, according to Walmart's website.

Walmart joined the Express Scripts network in 2018, signing a three-year contract to provide prescription services to the pharmacy benefit management company's clients, including Tricare and the Defense Health Agency. The contract expires in December and Walmart and Sam's Club will be removed from the network, Luddy said. Walmart did not return a request for comment by publication. Meanwhile, CVS, a company that left the Tricare network in 2016, also after negotiations failed, will return to the network, giving beneficiaries access to its nearly 10,000 pharmacy locations, including inside many Target stores.

Under the agreement, as of 15 DEC, all prescriptions filled at a Walmart will be considered non-network. Beneficiaries will have to pay the full cost of their medication up front and file a claim with Tricare for partial reimbursement. Having access to Walmart pharmacies has been especially convenient to military families who live in rural or remote areas that may lack a chain pharmacy. But Luddy said Walmart "declined several opportunities to offer more highly competitive discounts to continue to serve Tricare beneficiaries."

As a pharmacy benefit manager, Express Scripts serves as somewhat of a middleman, overseeing the Defense Health Agency's pharmacy program, determining the reimbursement rates to retail pharmacies that fill patient prescriptions, and billing the government in turn. It also is responsible for transactions involving the government purchase of medicines for military installations and provides the Tricare mail-order pharmacy program. In the past decade, the Defense Health Agency has increasingly encouraged -- and in some cases, required -- beneficiaries to fill their prescriptions at no cost at military pharmacies or use the mail-order system to fill long-term prescriptions at lower cost.

Pharmacy copays have risen substantially over the past 10 years, in large part due to cost but also as required by Congress as part of a cost-cutting measure to the defense medical budget. In 2011, 30-day prescriptions of generic medications and brand-name drugs could be purchased at a network pharmacy for \$3 and \$9 copayments, respectively, while medications not in Tricare's formulary cost \$22. The mail-order system offered generic medications at no cost and brand-name formulary drugs for a \$9 copayment for 90-day prescriptions. This year, Tricare beneficiaries pay \$11 for a 30-day supply for a generic drug and \$33 for a brand-name medication at retail pharmacies. Non-formulary drugs not listed in Tricare's list of covered medications cost \$60. Copayments for the mail-order pharmacy run \$10 for a generic prescription and \$29 a brand-name drug for a 90-day script. And the rates are expected to rise next year.

Luddy said that Express Scripts will be reaching out to patients who take specialty medications to help them transfer their prescriptions without a gap in coverage. According to Express Scripts, the Tricare pharmacy network covers 56,000 stores, including chains such as Walgreens and Rite Aid and supermarkets like Kroger and Publix. Tricare provides coverage to 9.6 million beneficiaries worldwide. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | October 20, 2021. ■





CTMOM

Free Dental Office Clinic

*New this Year - Patients Must Attend Screening on Friday, November 12th
In Order to Receive Treatment on Saturday, November 13th

PATIENT REGISTRATION AND EXAMS ON THIS DAY
FRIDAY NOVEMBER 12, 2021

SAINT SOPHIA'S GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH
200 Hempstead St. New London, CT 06320

Medical/ Dental Screening and X-rays will be provided. Appointment will be given for treatment in a Private Dental Office for Saturday November 13th, 2021

(When appointment is made, you will be given the address to the private dental office for the next day)

TREATMENT DAY IN PRIVATE DENTAL OFFICE
SATURDAY NOVEMBER 13, 2021

Treatment will **ONLY** be provided to patients who were given an appointment at Medical and Dental Screening the day before (Friday, November 12th, 2021)

Services Include:

- Cleanings
- Exams
- Extractions
- Fillings
- X-rays

Doors open
Friday November 12th
@ 10AM

- *For Dental and Medical Screening
- *We will close when appointment slots are filled

Connecticut
Mission of Mercy
Free Dental Clinic



Making CT Smiles Healthier