

PACT Act Deadline: Health Care for Veterans Who Deployed to Combat Zones

Veterans who deployed to a combat zone, never enrolled in VA health care, and left active duty between September 11, 2001, and October 1, 2013, are now eligible to enroll directly in VA health care during a special enrollment period.

This special enrollment period gives Veterans who served in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other combat zones an opportunity to:

- enroll directly in VA health care without first applying for VA benefits and;
- qualify for enhanced eligibility status, which means being placed in a higher priority group.

These Veterans who left service between September 11, 2001, and October 1, 2013, have until 11:59 p.m. on September 30, 2023, to apply for VA health care.

Other Veterans who deployed to combat zones and left service after October 1, 2013, can get free VA health care for service-related conditions for up to ten years following the latest discharge.

Veterans enrolled in VA health care are proven to have better health outcomes than non-enrolled Veterans, and VA health care is often [more affordable](#) than non-VA health care for Veterans.

You can apply for VA health care now at <https://www.va.gov/health-care/apply/application/introduction>. You can also call the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs for 24/7 assistance at [800-698-2411](tel:800-698-2411) (TTY: 711).

PACT Act Basics:

- ❖ The PACT Act adds new presumptive conditions for radiation, Agent Orange, Gulf War toxins, and burn pit exposures.
- ❖ Eligibility to file claims related to the PACT Act expansion of benefits and relief associated with being granted those benefits went into effect immediately upon President Biden's signing it into law.
- ❖ Eligible veterans and survivors are encouraged to submit claims as soon as possible. Full eligibility information can be found at: <https://www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits/>
- ❖ The new classification of 23 conditions as presumptive will decrease the paperwork, timeline, processing associated with these claims. Veterans can file a new claim online at: <https://www.va.gov/disability/file-disability-claim-form-21-526ez/introduction>
- ❖ Veterans who were previously denied a claim that is now a presumptive condition can file a supplemental claim at: <https://www.va.gov/decision-reviews/supplemental-claim/>
- ❖ If a veteran previously submitted a claim for a condition now considered presumptive and the claim is still pending a decision, no action needs to be taken by the veteran, the review will proceed in accordance with the new eligibility.
- ❖ Claims processing related to PACT Act benefits began in January 2023, and new mechanisms and resources for processing also granted under the PACT Act has increased processing times.
- ❖ PACT Act-related claims that have been submitted by August 9, 2023, will be backdated to the date of the bill signing, meaning claims granted will be paid with an effective date of August 10, 2022.
- ❖ Information on VSOs and other resources available to guide veterans through the general claims process can be found at: <https://www.va.gov/disability/get-help-filing-claim/>

PACT Act Expansion of VA Healthcare:

- ❖ Expands the period for post-9/11 veterans to enroll in VA healthcare from 5 to 10 years for veterans discharged or released after October 1, 2013.
- ❖ Creates a one-year open enrollment period for veterans who already fall outside of the 10-year expanded window (defined as veterans discharged or released before October 1, 2013) from October 1, 2022, to October 1, 2023.