

# THE LIGHTFIGHTER

Monterey and San Benito County  
Military & Veterans Affairs Office



Cover Art- "The Hizara Province" by SFC Elzie Ray Golden, US Army Center of Military History, Oil, Afghanistan, 2003  
<https://history.army.mil/art/Golden/Golden.htm>

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## Director's Corner



As we approach the second Anniversary of the implementation of the SFC Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxins act of 2022 (the PACT Act), its all-the-more important to remain connected to your County Veteran Service Office and local VA clinic. Introduced as one of the largest VA benefits expansions ever, the PACT Act continues to grow. March of this year the **VA expanded healthcare eligibility** to include many war-time Veterans and those exposed to toxins at home and abroad **without first applying for VA benefits**. More recently, in June, the VA again expanded the PACT Act by adding **three new presumptive cancers** to the list of presumptive conditions derived from toxic exposure. Therein lies the importance of staying connected to our office and the VA- benefit changes and improvements are constantly happening! Despite tremendous outreach efforts, VA Palo Alto estimates there are over 3,000 PACT Act-eligible Veterans in Monterey County who have yet to connect with the VA for a toxic exposure screening. To that end, from 10am-3pm on Saturday, August 24 we will be participating in a PACT Act Outreach event at the MG Gourley Clinic in Marina to educate and serve any Veteran who believes they were exposed to or are suffering from a toxic contact. Help us get the word out!

We're also excited to share a unique local resource for Veterans who are interested in an alternative to a skilled nursing home- VA Palo Alto's **Medical Foster Home program**. Available only in Monterey and Santa Cruz counties, Medical Foster Homes provide VA-supervised long-term care in a private home close to the community in which the Veteran or their family resides.

Lastly, I'd like to humbly express my **gratitude** to the Veteran community for their trust, support, and confidence towards being appointed as your County Veteran Services Officer. I look forward to continuing to work on behalf of Veterans and their families, and honoring the sacrifices made to serve and protect our country!

Jack Murphy,

County Veteran Services Officer and Director, Military and Veterans Affairs Office

### Office Locations and Hours

Peninsula County of Monterey Coastal Offices	Salinas County of Monterey One Stop Community Center	Marina MG Gourley VA Outpatient Clinic	Hollister County of San Benito Veterans Memorial Bldg.
2620 1 <sup>st</sup> Ave. Marina, CA 93933  (831) 647-7613	730 La Guardia St., Ste 119 Salinas, CA 93901  (831) 647-7613	201 9 <sup>th</sup> St. Marina, CA 93933  (831) 647-7613	649 San Benito St. Hollister, CA 95023  (831) 637-4846
Monday – Thursday 8:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. 1:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.  Appointments Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday	Monday - Thursday 8:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. 1:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.  Appointments Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday	Monday - Thursday 8:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. 1:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.  Appointments Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday	Monday - Thursday 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. 1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
<b>Expanded Walk-In Services Monday - Wednesday</b>	<b>Walk-In Services on Wednesday</b>	<b>Walk-In Services on Wednesday</b>	<b>Please Call for an Appointment</b>
Closed on Friday	Closed on Friday	Closed on Friday	Closed on Friday

**Temporarily Closed**



## The PACT Act’s Historic Expansion of VA Healthcare Eligibility

In one of the largest-ever expansions of Veteran health care, all Veterans exposed to toxins and other hazards during military service—at home or abroad—are now eligible for VA health care.

Effective March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024, at the direction of President Biden, the VA expanded health care eligibility to millions of Veterans, including all Veterans who served in the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan or any other combat zone after 9/11. These Veterans are now eligible to enroll directly in VA health care without first applying for VA benefits. Additionally, Veterans who never deployed but were exposed to toxins or hazards while training or on active duty in the United States are also be eligible to enroll.

VA encourages all eligible Veterans to visit the [Pact Act website](#) or call 1-800-MYVA411 to learn more and apply for VA health care. You can also contact our office at [www.mvao.org](http://www.mvao.org) or 831-647-7613. Since President Biden signed the PACT Act into law on Aug. 10, 2022, more than 500,000 Veterans have enrolled in VA health care. VA Under Secretary for Health Dr. Shereef Elnahal emphasized “With this expansion, VA can care for all Veterans who served in the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Global War on Terror or any other combat zone after 9/11. We can also care for Veterans who never deployed but were exposed to toxins or hazards while training or on active duty here at home while working with chemicals, pesticides, lead, asbestos, certain paints, nuclear weapons, x-rays and more. We want to bring all of these Veterans to VA for the care they’ve earned and deserve.”

In addition to expanding access to VA care, this decision makes it quicker and easier for millions of Veterans to enroll. Many Veterans believe they must apply to receive VA disability compensation benefits to become eligible for VA health care, but this isn’t correct. With this expansion and other authorities, millions of eligible Veterans can enroll directly in VA care without any need to first apply for VA benefits.

This is a critical step forward because Veterans who are enrolled in VA health care are proven to have better health outcomes than non-enrolled Veterans, and VA hospitals have dramatically outperformed non-VA hospitals in overall quality ratings and patient satisfaction ratings. And VA health care is often more affordable than non-VA health care for Veterans.

Veterans can enroll online at [VA.gov/PACT](http://VA.gov/PACT) or by contacting us at [mvao.org](http://mvao.org). The VA will use available information in military records, including service dates and locations, to confirm eligibility. A Veteran must prove service in a specified location, military operation, or participation in one of the toxic exposure activities. Exposures span chemicals, radiation, air pollutants, nerve agents and other harmful substances. Veterans who were never deployed but were exposed to hazardous substances while training or on active duty in the U.S. will also be eligible to enroll. Veterans will not be required to first prove through medical claims that they have a diagnosed medical condition related to the toxic exposure. The expansion is for health care enrollment and not for monthly disability compensation.

If you have questions about the PACT Act, VA benefits, or need assistance filing for a service-connected disability or monthly compensation, please contact our office at 831-647-7613 or [www.MVAO.org](http://www.MVAO.org)





# What is a “Presumptive” Condition??

Due to the unique circumstances of a specific Veteran’s military service or experience, at times the VA can automatically presume that a certain chronic disability was caused by military service. If a presumed condition is diagnosed in a Veteran within a certain group, they can be awarded disability compensation solely based on military service.

Known as **presumptive disabilities**, these conditions may not have arisen in service but can be granted as **service-connected** because the occurrence can be **directly linked** to military service. VA recently added new medical conditions to a growing [list of presumptive disabilities](#)- conditions which can be presumed to have occurred because of an exposure to Vietnam war toxins, ionizing radiation, or service in the Gulf War, to include Post-9/11 service.

**If you need assistance filing a claim for a presumptive condition, please contact our office at (831) 647-7613 or [www.mvao.org](http://www.mvao.org)**

Former Prisoners of War	Vietnam Veterans (Exposed to Agent Orange)	Atomic Veterans (Exposed to Ionizing Radiation)	Gulf War Veterans (Undiagnosed Illness)
<p>1) Imprisoned for any period, and at least 10% disabling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Psychosis</li> <li>Any of the anxiety states</li> <li>Dysthymic disorder</li> <li>Organic residuals of frostbite</li> <li>Post-traumatic osteoarthritis</li> <li>Heart disease or hypertensive vascular disease and their complications</li> <li>Stroke and its residuals</li> </ul> <p>2) Imprisoned for at least 30 days, and disability at least 10% disabling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Avitaminosis beriberi</li> <li>Chronic dysentery</li> <li>Helminthiasis</li> <li>Malnutrition (including optic atrophy)</li> <li>Pellagra</li> <li>Any other nutritional deficiency</li> <li>Irritable bowel syndrome</li> <li>Peptic ulcer disease</li> <li>Peripheral neuropathy</li> <li>Cirrhosis of the liver</li> </ul>	<p><i>Served in the Republic of Vietnam between 1/9/62 and 5/7/75:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acute or subacute peripheral neuropathy*</li> <li>AL amyloidosis</li> <li>B-cell leukemias</li> <li>Chloracne or other acneform disease like chloracne*</li> <li>Chronic lymphocytic Leukemia</li> <li>Diabetes type 2</li> <li>Hodgkin's disease</li> <li>Ischemic heart disease</li> <li>Multiple myeloma</li> <li>Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma</li> <li>Parkinson's disease</li> <li>Porphyria cutanea tarda*</li> <li>Prostate cancer</li> <li>Respiratory cancers (lung, bronchus, larynx, trachea)</li> <li>Soft-tissue sarcoma (other than osteosarcoma, chondrosarcoma, Kaposi's sarcoma or mesothelioma)</li> </ul> <p>*Must be at least 10% disabling</p>	<p>Participated in atmospheric nuclear testing; occupied or was a POW in Hiroshima or Nagasaki; service before 2/1/92 at a diffusion plant in Paducah, KY, Portsmouth, OH, or Oak Ridge, TN; or service before 1/1/74 at Amchitka Island, AK:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All forms of leukemia (except for chronic lymphocytic leukemia)</li> <li>Cancer of the thyroid, breast, pharynx, esophagus, stomach, small intestine, pancreas, bile ducts, gall bladder, salivary gland, urinary tract (kidneys, renal pelves, ureters, urinary bladder and urethra), brain, bone, lung, colon, ovary</li> <li>Bronchiolo-alveolar carcinoma</li> <li>Multiple myeloma</li> <li>Lymphomas (other than Hodgkin's disease)</li> <li>Primary liver cancer (except if cirrhosis or hepatitis B is indicated)</li> </ul>	<p>Served in the Southwest Asia Theater of Operations during the Gulf War with condition at least 10 percent disabling by 12/31/11. Included are medically unexplained chronic multi-symptom illnesses (MUCMI) defined by a cluster of signs or symptoms that have existed for six months or more, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chronic fatigue syndrome</li> <li>Fibromyalgia</li> <li>Irritable bowel syndrome</li> <li>Any diagnosed or undiagnosed illness that the VA determines warrants a presumption of service connection</li> </ul> <p>Signs or symptoms of MUCMI include:</p> <p>fatigue, skin symptoms, headaches, muscle pain, joint pain, neurological symptoms, respiratory symptoms, sleep disturbance, GI symptoms, cardiovascular symptoms, weight loss, menstrual disorders</p>



## Expanded PACT Act Eligibility and Presumptive Conditions

The SFC Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxins (PACT) Act was enacted on August 10, 2022, to expand VA health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange, and other toxic substances. Under the March 05, 2024, expansion **ALL Veterans who were exposed to toxins and other hazards while serving in the military – at home or abroad – are eligible to enroll directly in VA health care.**

PACT Act Presumptive eligibility includes:

- **ALL Veterans who served in the Vietnam War or the Gulf War (Desert Storm / Desert Shield)**
- **Veterans who were assigned to a duty station in (including airspace above) certain locations during specific periods of time:**
  - ❑ On or after August 2, 1990, in the following countries: Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, or the United Arab Emirates
  - ❑ On or after September 11, 2001, in the following countries: Afghanistan, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Uzbekistan, or any other country determined relevant by VA.
  - ❑ Veterans who were deployed in support of the Global War on Terror (Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Freedom’s Sentinel, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn, Operation Inherent Resolve, and Resolute Support Mission)
- **Veterans who participated in a toxic exposure risk activity (TERA), as defined by law, while serving on active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training regardless of geographic location- to include the continental United States.**

**PACT Act Presumptive conditions, expanded on June 14, 2024, include the following conditions:**

### **Cancers-**

Brain, Gastrointestinal, Head, Kidney, Lymphatic, Lymphoma, Melanoma, Neck, Pancreatic, Reproductive System, **Male Breast\*, Urethral\*, and Paraurethral Cancers\* (\*Added June 14, 2024)**

### **Chronic Illnesses-**

Asthma, Chronic Bronchitis, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), Chronic Rhinitis, Chronic Sinusitis, Constrictive or Obliterative Bronchiolitis, Emphysema, Granulomatous Disease, Interstitial Lung Disease (ILD), Pleuritis, and Pulmonary Fibrosis, Sarcoidosis

**Veterans interested in signing up for VA health care can contact the [VA Palo Alto Medical Center](#) or contact our office at [www.mvao.org](http://www.mvao.org) or 831-647-7613**



## **VA Palo Alto Medical Foster Home Program**

Are you looking for long-term care but want to stay in a home setting? Then VA Palo Alto’s Medical Foster Home program might be a good fit for you! It’s completely voluntary and lets Veterans live in a regular house with an on-site caregiver who provides the care they need.

### **What is a Medical Foster Home?**

Medical Foster Homes are private homes in Monterey or Santa Cruz County in which a trained caregiver provides services to a few individuals. Some, but not all, residents are Veterans. A Medical Foster Home can serve as an alternative to a nursing home. It may be appropriate for Veterans who require nursing home care but prefer a non-institutional setting with fewer residents.

Medical Foster Homes are private residences where the caregiver and relief caregivers provide care and supervision 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This caregiver can help the Veteran carry out activities of daily living, such as bathing and getting dressed. VA ensures that the caregiver is well trained to provide VA planned care.

While living in a Medical Foster Home, Veterans receive Home Based Primary Care.

**Think of it as an alternative to a nursing home, but with a more comfortable, home-like feel.**

Most people would rather stay at home than move to a nursing home, and the Medical Foster Home program lets Veterans do just that.

### **Who is eligible for a VA Medical Foster Home?**

- ✓ Veterans enrolled in VA health care
- ✓ Veterans with chronic health problems needing ongoing care
- ✓ Veterans who have trouble getting to VA appointments on their own
- ✓ Veterans who participated in the VA’s Home Based Primary Care (HBPC) or Spinal Cord Injury Home Care programs

### **How much does it cost?**

While Medical Foster Home stays are generally half the cost of a nursing home, Veterans pay for it themselves each month. There are some exceptions:

- ✓ Some Veterans qualify for a special monthly pension that can help cover the cost.
- ✓ Veterans in the Housing and Urban Development – VA Supported Housing (HUD-VASH) program might be able to use their housing voucher to help cover a portion of the cost.

### **Who do I contact?**

If you are interested in enrolling in, or being Medical Foster Home provider, please contact Rosanna Erbe at 831-884-1000 ext 42052 or [Rosanna.Erbe@va.gov](mailto:Rosanna.Erbe@va.gov)



## VA Palo Alto PACT Act Outreach Event

VA Palo Alto is hosting a PACT Act outreach event at from **10am-3pm on Saturday August 24, 2024, at the MG Gourley VA Clinic in Marina**. This event aims to **enroll and register for a future Toxic Exposure Screening (TES)**. Eligible Veterans can choose to **file a presumptive claim related to toxic exposure screening on-site** through MVAOs on-site representatives.

The events will feature Veterans, Veteran families and survivors, VA leaders, local elected officials, Veterans Service Organizations, state directors of Veterans Affairs and more — all of whom are working together to spread awareness about the new health care and benefits available to Veterans and survivors.

"There are millions of Veterans and survivors across America who are eligible for new health care and benefits, and we will not rest until every one of them gets what they've earned," said **Denis McDonough, Secretary of Veterans Affairs**. "That's what this PACT Act Week of Action is all about: educating Veterans, their families and survivors — and encouraging them to apply today."

If you need assistance with applying for any PACT Act benefits, please contact our office at **831-647-7613** or [www.MVAO.org](http://www.MVAO.org)

## CalVet College Tuition Fee Waiver Programs

California offers many benefits to dependents of disabled Veterans. Eligibility requirements differ by program; some require a service-connected (S/C) disability rating, while others don't. One of the most used benefits is the **California College Tuition Fee Waiver Program**.



The California College Tuition Fee Waiver Program benefits the dependents of Veterans. Students meeting the eligibility criteria may get their **college tuition fees waived if they attend a California Community College, a California State University, or University of California campus**. This benefit can be used in conjunction with other available grants, scholarships, student loans, etc.

To be eligible for the most widely used program, **Plan B**, a dependent must have a parent who is deceased from a S/C disability **or is a disabled Veteran (0% or more S/C disabled)**. **The income limit for Academic Year 24-25 increased to \$21,561 per year** (this limit is **student income combined with parental support**). Applicants to the program must submit proof of income, such as a tax return from the previous year. If the student had no income, a statement to that effect can be obtained from either the Franchise Tax Board at 800-852-5711, or the IRS at 800-829-1040. There is **NO age limit for this plan!**

Alternatively, if the **Veteran is S/C deceased or rated 100% S/C disabled** the spouse or dependent child (up to age 27) may be eligible under CalVet's **Plan A, which does not have an income limit**

**Please email your questions or completed College Tuition Fee Waiver application to [CTFW@co.monterey.ca.us](mailto:CTFW@co.monterey.ca.us)**

There are many other state and federal benefits and programs available to Veterans and their dependents. To find out if you are eligible for any of these benefits, visit or call our office at **(831) 647-7613** or [www.mvao.org](http://www.mvao.org).





## Honor and Congratulate the 2024 Veterans of the Year!

The County of Monterey’s Military and Veterans Affairs Advisory Commission (MVAAC) established the Veterans of the Year Program in 1991 to honor and recognize Veterans who distinguish themselves through dedicated volunteer service to the citizens of the County’s Supervisorial Districts. The 2024

Awardees are:

### District 1

- John Murray
- John Pinedo

### District 2

- Mike Cabael
- Sherman Twisselman

### District 3

- Daniel Ferguson
- Art Perez

### District 4

- Rick Johnson
- Robert Kramer

### District 5

- James Cullem
- Mary Hostetler

### At-Large

- William Breen
- Paul Sullivan

The awards dinner will be at 6:00pm, Friday November 1st in the Seaside Room Monterey County Fairgrounds

Tickets are \$65 and are available at the MVAO, 2620 1st Ave, Marina CA 93933



## Nourish All in Need through Meals on Wheels of the Monterey Peninsula!

The mission of Meals on Wheels is to empower seniors, disabled adults, Veterans, and other underserved populations to remain independent by nourishing their bodies, minds, and spirits, and drive out hunger and isolation in our region.



## Volunteers Make Our Wheels Turn

Volunteers are essential to MOWMP. Throughout the day, volunteers make sandwiches, answer calls, conduct classes and activities, decorate for holidays and parties, greet at the front desk and so much more. Become a volunteer in one of a variety of our fulfilling & flexible positions today.



WATCH VIDEO

'21 '22 '23 Voted best place to volunteer.

[mowmp.org/volunteer](http://mowmp.org/volunteer)

Contact Susan Elwood, Volunteer & Outreach Manager, for individual, group, and corporate volunteer inquiries at [selwood@mowmp.org](mailto:selwood@mowmp.org) or by calling 831-375-4454.





## Support the United Veterans Council and Have Fun while Helping Local Veterans in Need!

The United Veterans Council is hosting the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Heroes Open Golf Fundraiser to help local Veterans and families on Saturday, October 26<sup>th</sup> at Bayonet-Black Horse. UVC is a 501c19 non-profit and all proceeds support Veterans and Veteran organizations in Monterey County! Register at [www.uvc-mc.com](http://www.uvc-mc.com) or call Shane Strong at

831-402-0167

**14<sup>th</sup> Annual HEROES' OPEN**

**★ BAYONET GOLF COURSE ★ FORT ORD ★**

**SATURDAY ★ OCTOBER 26, 2024**

*Supporting*  
**Local Veterans in Crisis**

**Play for just \$190 per Person**  
**Sign Up by October 19th**

★ Breakfast ★  
★ Golf ★ Cart ★

If you want to know more,  
call Shane Strong at (831) 402-0167

★ Dinner ★  
★ Prizes ★

[www.uvc-mc.com](http://www.uvc-mc.com)



Our Staff and Veteran Service Representatives are proud to share last Quarter's Activity Report showing the number and value of claims, benefits, and services provided to Monterey and San Benito County Veterans and Families!

# Monterey and San Benito County



## Quarterly Activity Report



### April – June 2024

**1,645**

Incoming Phone  
Calls / Email  
Requests



**1,202**

Vet Rep Appointments



**78**

College Tuition  
Waivers

**\$547,050**

**1,646** Claims Actions

**841** Unique Veterans

**538** New VA Compensation Awards



### New VA Disability Compensation Awards Earned this Quarter

**\$1,902,349**

Retroactive Payments

**\$352,987**

Recurring Monthly Payments

