



VETERANS VOICE

Winnebago County Department of Veterans Services Newsletter

December 2021

New “Ask VA” Portal Allows Anyone To Contact VA Securely

Do you want to find more information on VA benefits and services? Do you have a question, concern, recommendation, or complaint for VA? Then use the new “Ask VA” portal!

What is Ask VA?

The Ask VA online question portal, launched on October 18, 2021, was created to provide the Veteran community with an easier, faster and more convenient way to get their questions answered. It replaces VA’s outdated Inquiry Routing & Information System (IRIS) and the GI Bill Help Portal.

Who Can Access Ask VA?

Anyone can access Ask VA to submit a question at any time. Veterans, their families, caregivers, beneficiaries, dependents, or the general public can use Ask VA for specific or broad information on VA benefits and services. Veterans do not have to be enrolled in VA to submit a question. In fact, Ask VA can provide helpful information for Veterans to enroll and begin their VA journey!

How does Ask VA Work?

After a question or comment is submitted, Ask VA routes it to the best subject matter expert to respond. Users can search for answers by category or specific topics, write their specific question in a free-text box, and indicate how they want to be contacted for an answer - via email, phone or secure VA.gov account.

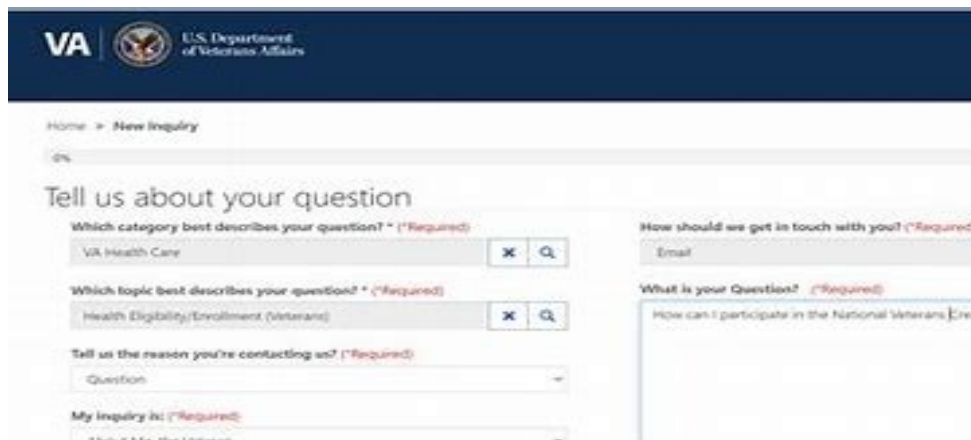
Continued on Page 2..

“The pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity. The optimist sees opportunity in every difficulty.”

- Winston Churchill

In This Issue

- New “Ask VA” Portal Allows Anyone To Contact VA Securely
- National Stress-Free Family Holidays Month
- Review of PCAFC Decisions
- Upcoming Event



Continued...

Since its launch, customers have used Ask VA to ask about their VA claim or appeal status and to send in documentation for their GI Bill benefit.

Use a Secure VA.gov Account to Access all Ask VA Features

Anyone can submit a question as a general user with Ask VA and receive a timely email response. Users also have the option to create or log in to an existing VA.gov account to experience all of Ask VA's features.

Logging in to VA.gov through a secure authentication process allows our Veteran community to safeguard their personal information, send and receive sensitive information, and easily track their questions and answers. Using Ask VA through a secure VA.gov account includes additional benefits, like:

- Identifying information will be automatically filled in, saving time;
- Work in progress can be saved to come back to later;
- Users can add more information to a question they've already submitted or ask a follow-up question to receive information specific to an existing question;
- Users can receive answers based on preferred method of communication - via email, phone, or secure VA.gov account;
- Users can track the status, history and answers to previous questions or conversations.

Using Ask VA by logging in to a secure VA.gov account allows the user to see the history of messages to VA and VA's answers. This allows the user to refer back to helpful information at any time in a single location, and eliminates the hassle of searching through emails or letters or phone messages to find what they need. And users can be updated via email when VA posts new messages to Ask VA.

How To Get A Verified VA.gov Account

To learn more about creating a verified ID.me account, a Premium My HealtheVet account, or a Premium DS Logon account to be able to access all Ask VA's features, click on the links below:

- [Learn about verifying your identity and creating an ID.me account](#)
- [Find out how to get a Premium My HealtheVet account](#)
- [Find out how to get a Premium DS Logon account](#)

Veterans asked for a simple, intuitive way to interact with VA, and Ask VA was carefully designed to provide that. VA worked with Veterans over several months to refine the Ask VA online experience. VA's goal is to ensure Ask VA continues to lead the way in modernizing customers' VA experience, incorporating our Veteran community's feedback to best meet their needs and preferences. [Click here to access Ask VA and submit your question online.](#)



National Stress-Free Family Holidays Month

The "most wonderful time of the year" can quickly turn into the most stressful time of the year for many. When compounded by a mental illness, common holiday pressures can create a perfect storm of exacerbated stressors, symptoms and setbacks if not proactively addressed.

The reality is that potential hazards exist at every turn during the holidays. These situations can trigger heightened difficulties for people suffering from depression, anxiety, PTSD and other mental illnesses. The holidays can also introduce additional stressors such as complicated relationship dynamics at family gatherings, grief over losing a loved one or simply trying to live up to the unattainable expectations of the "perfect holiday."

While it's important that all people consider the impact of the holidays on emotional well-being, it is crucial that those with mental illness consider tactics for avoiding pitfalls. Of all the things on your holiday preparation to-do list, the most critical one is maintaining your mental health and practicing self-care.

The following are a few key tips for avoiding the stress of the holidays:

- Make a budget
- Come up with a plan
- Find the best time to shop
- Be kind to yourself

The holidays bring joy and happiness as well as frustration and stress. This holiday season the most important thing to take care of is yourself.

Review of PCAFC Decisions

Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) decision letters issued as of September 28, 2021, include a notice of updated review and appeal rights: [VA Form 10-305: Your Rights to Seek Further Review of Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers \(PCAFC\) Decisions](#). If you received a PCAFC decision prior to September 28, 2021, VA will be mailing a letter notifying you of your Board appeal rights. These notices will be issued in phases.

How Veterans and caregivers appeal or ask for a review of PCAFC decisions

Your options depend on the date VA issued your PCAFC decision. If you disagree with a PCAFC decision issued before February 19, 2019, you can now appeal to the Board of Veterans' Appeals (Board). You can also seek review through the VHS Clinical Review Process (also known as the VHA Clinical Appeals Process).

If you disagree with a PCAFC issued on or after February 19, 2019, you can utilize the following options: Supplemental Claim, Higher-Level Review or appeal to the Board. You can also seek review through the VHA Clinical Review Process.

How to get help

If you have questions about forms to request review of or appeal a PCAFC decision, you can call VA's Caregiver Support Line (CSL) at 1-855-260-3274. An accredited representative, attorney or claims agent can also help you.

Review options for decisions issued prior to February 19, 2019

If you disagree with a PCAFC decision issued before February 19, 2019, you can now appeal to the Board. You will need to submit a completed [VA Form 10-307 Program of Comprehensive Assistance For Family Caregivers \(PCAFC\) Notice of Disagreement \(NOD\)](#) to:

Veterans Affairs Evidence Intake Center
P.O. Box 5154
Janesville, WI 53547

You can also seek review through the VHA Clinical Review Process. Please contact the Patient Advocate at your local VA medical facility for more information on the Clinical Review Process.

Review options for decisions issued on or after February 19, 2019

If you disagree with a PCAFC decision issued on or after February 19, 2019, you can utilize the following options:

Supplemental Claim - If you have new and relevant evidence that was not of record when VA made its PCAFC decision, you can file:

[VA Form 20-0995 Decision Review Request: Supplement Claim](#)

Higher-Level Review - If you want your decision reviewed by a higher-level decision maker within the Caregiver Support Program and do not have additional evidence you want considered, you can request a Higher-Level Review using:

[VA Form 20-0996 Decision Review Request: Higher-Level Review](#)

Submit your completed VA Form 20-0995 (Supplemental Claim) or VA Form 20-0996 (Higher-Level Review) to:

Veterans Affairs Evidence Intake Center
P.O. Box 5154
Janesville, WI 53547

Appeal to the Board

To appeal a PCAFC decision to the Board issued on or after February 19, 2019, you will need to submit a completed:

[VA Form 10182 Decision Review Request: Board Appeal \(Notice of Disagreement\) to:](#)

Board of Veterans' Appeals
P.O. Box 27063
Washington, DC 20038
Fax: 844-678-8979

If you have questions about PCAFC, the Caregiver Support Line is available to assist toll-free at 1-855-260-3274. Please visit: www.caregiver.va.gov for more information on the Caregiver Support Program and any updates.

Upcoming Event



Operation Waverly Programs at the Oshkosh Public Museum

Operation Waverly, is a component of *White Christmas: The Exhibition*.

These programs will educate and compliment our veterans.

Program admission: Adults \$12, Senior 62+/College \$10, Children \$8, Veterans \$6 Children 5 and under are free. We are teaming up with **DAV Auxiliary** and **Eve Vanden Heuvel, Miss Teen Outstanding** to offer these programs



December 18, 1 pm: *Holiday Letters* - Listen as letters are read from various wars written by our military soldiers during the holidays. Some letters go back to the Civil War!

January 8, 1 pm: *The Thirteen Folds* - Learn why the American Flag is folded 13 times. Enjoy as you watch the Color Guard fold the flag.

January 9, 1-3 pm: Thank you letters to our current military deployed and veterans in the hospital.

Purchase tickets online at oshkoshmuseum.org

Oshkosh Public Museum, 1331 Algoma Blvd, Oshkosh 920-236-5799

CONTACT US

**Winnebago County
Veterans Service Office**

Oshkosh Location
112 Otter St.
Oshkosh, WI 54901
(920) 232-3400

Neenah Location
211 N. Commercial
Neenah, WI 54956
(920) 729-4820

**Stay informed about benefits; join our e-mail list.
Send a request to:**

CVSO@co.winnebago.wi.us

Visit us on the web at:

[www.co.winnebago.wi.us/
veterans](http://www.co.winnebago.wi.us/veterans)



[www.facebook.com/
WinnebagoCVSO](http://www.facebook.com/WinnebagoCVSO)

**For a list of more events,
check out our calendar!**