



# AGENT ORANGE NEWSLETTER 2026

INFORMATION FOR VIETNAM ERA VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES

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## AGENT ORANGE NEWSLETTER TO BE AVAILABLE ONLINE ONLY

Beginning with the next annual *Agent Orange Newsletter*, copies will no longer be mailed to Veterans' homes. The newsletter will be available online only at <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/PUBLICHEALTH/exposures/agentorange/publications/index.asp>.



To get notified when a new issue is available, you can sign up to receive email announcements at <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USVHA/subscriber/new/>. Select the topic 'Agent Orange' listed under the Public Health Issues section. You will be notified when a new issue is released and receive other announcements from VA for Vietnam Veterans.

## AGENT ORANGE VETERAN CLASS



Do you have questions or concerns about Agent Orange and your health? We're committed to helping Vietnam Veterans access

clear, reliable, and up-to-date information.

*Agent Orange 101: An Introduction for Vietnam Era Veterans* is a virtual class to help you better understand possible exposure, health effects, and available VA resources. Veterans can join from anywhere using a personal computer, smartphone, or tablet.

Topics include:

- A brief overview of the Vietnam War and the use of Agent Orange
- VA's presumption of exposure and related health conditions
- Eligibility for the Agent Orange Registry
- Understanding PACT Act benefits and how they may apply to you

This class is typically offered once a year. For the most current class schedule and additional details, please visit:

<https://www.warrelatedillness.va.gov/WARRELATEDILLNESS/education/VeteranEducationClasses.asp>.

## APPEALS MODERNIZATION SIMPLIFIES COMPLEX PROCESS

On Feb. 19, 2019, VA implemented the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017 (AMA), transforming a historically complex appeals process into one that is simple, timely, and offers Veterans choice and control.

If you disagree with an initial claim decision you received after Feb. 19, 2019, you can now choose from one of three lanes to have the decision reviewed: (1) higher-level review (2) supplemental claim, or (3) appeal to the Board of Veterans' Appeals (Board).

### What are the three lanes?

- Choose the **higher-level review** option if you don't want to submit new evidence, but you think a mistake was made. A senior claims adjudicator will review your claim in an average of 125 days.
- Choose the **supplemental claim** option if you want to submit new and relevant evidence. VA will assist you in gathering the evidence you identify. This option will take an average of 125 days.
- Choose the **Board appeal** option if you want the Board to review your case.
- Choose the **direct review** option if you don't want to submit new evidence or have a hearing. The Board will review only the evidence the local VA office considered. The Board will complete these cases in an average of 365 days.
- Choose the **evidence submission** option if you want to submit additional evidence, but you don't want a hearing. The Board will review the evidence the local VA office considered and any additional evidence that you submit within 90 days after VA's receipt of your notice of disagreement. This option will take longer than one year.
- Choose the **hearing request** option if you want a hearing with a Veterans Law Judge. After the hearing, the Veterans Law Judge will review the evidence the local VA office considered, as well as your hearing testimony and any additional evidence you submit the day of or within 90 days **after** your hearing. This option will take longer than one year.

### Appealing to the Board

If you appeal to the Board, you will then choose one of three dockets: (1) direct review, (2) evidence submission, or (3) hearing request.

For more information, please visit the Board's website. <https://department.va.gov/board-of-veterans-appeals/>

A summary of the appeals process, originally printed on VA News:

<https://news.va.gov/59396/appeals-modernization-simplifies-complex-process-veterans-can-choose-one-of-three-lanes/>



## WHOLE HEALTH CHANGED THEIR LIVES. IT COULD CHANGE YOURS, TOO.

For many Vietnam Veterans, the battles didn't end when the war did. Decades later, the wounds — physical, mental, and spiritual — can still feel overwhelming. But across the country, VA's Whole Health program is helping Veterans not just survive, but truly live. Here are four of their stories.



**Jim Branham** never imagined that at 69, he would arrive at the Mountain Home Tennessee VA Medical Center lying flat in the back of a station wagon, unable to walk or think clearly. The Army officer and Vietnam Veteran had faced adversity before — but years of worsening pain had finally broken him in body, mind, and spirit.

VA clinicians quickly uncovered a long list of serious conditions: congestive heart failure, diabetes,

prostate and bladder issues, liver trouble, and a failing hip. Specialists across multiple disciplines began stabilizing his health — but Jim knew something was still missing. He was alive, but not truly living.

That changed when he was introduced to Whole Health. Through mindfulness, pain management, tai chi, yoga, acupuncture, and health coaching, Jim began reclaiming control. He learned to see pain as something he could influence rather than fear. Spiritual care classes helped him reconnect with purpose. Even through a hip replacement, a stroke, and a pacemaker, Whole Health gave him the tools to face each challenge with clarity and determination.

Today, Jim and his wife are farming, running businesses, and traveling — living, he says, the best life they've ever had. He measures his recovery at more than double what it would have been without Whole Health, and he lives each day by four words: Acceptance. Appreciation. Gratitude. Determination.

### Read more:

[https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/features/A\\_Journey\\_Rekindled\\_Through\\_Whole\\_Health.asp](https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/features/A_Journey_Rekindled_Through_Whole_Health.asp)



## WHOLE HEALTH CHANGED THEIR LIVES. IT COULD CHANGE YOURS, TOO. (continued)

**Robert GoVan** spent decades as a self-described loner. After moving to Richmond, Virginia, the Vietnam Veteran lost touch with his support network and felt increasingly isolated. When he gave VA's Whole Health program another chance, Health and Wellness Coach Sophie Brown helped him do something he hadn't done in 22 years: pick up a paintbrush. "I didn't study art," GoVan said. "It's just my way of dealing with reality — creating a world where nothing else matters."

With Sophie's encouragement, he set a goal to complete 100 paintings. He participated in Central Virginia VA's Whole Health art exhibition, and the experience was transformative.

Today his work is displayed at a local Richmond gallery, and he's become a vendor at the Richmond VA Medical Center — an unexpected turn that required him to incorporate his own art business.

"Sophie's been like a guardian angel," he said. His message to fellow Veterans? "Talk to someone about it. It doesn't hurt — especially if you're a loner. Whole Health gave me a way back to myself."

**Read more:**

[https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/features/Rediscovering\\_Purpose\\_Through\\_Art\\_A\\_Veteran\\_s\\_Who.asp](https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/features/Rediscovering_Purpose_Through_Art_A_Veteran_s_Who.asp)



## WHOLE HEALTH CHANGED THEIR LIVES. IT COULD CHANGE YOURS, TOO. (continued)

**Walter Hauser** smoked for more than 60 years — starting at age 14 and continuing through his combat service in Vietnam. Despite CT scans showing spots on his lungs and years of failed attempts with patches and cessation classes, nothing worked. Then he was referred to VA Whole Health and Dr. Meghan Cody, a psychologist trained in clinical hypnosis.

Skeptical at first, Hauser agreed to try hypnosis during his very first consultation. Dr. Cody guided him to a peaceful place from his past — a tree-lined riverbank where he used to fish as a boy — and gave him a simple “anchor”: a circle made with his ring finger and thumb.

That same day, he took a few puffs of a cigarette. Then he threw it out. “It just didn’t taste right,” he said. “I knew then that it was for real.”

Months later, passing a storefront advertising cigarettes, Hauser looked through his anchor. He didn’t relapse. He recently celebrated one full year smoke-free.

**Read more:**

[https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/features/Hypnosis\\_helps\\_Veteran\\_nip\\_smoking\\_in\\_the\\_butt.asp](https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/features/Hypnosis_helps_Veteran_nip_smoking_in_the_butt.asp)



## WHOLE HEALTH CHANGED THEIR LIVES. IT COULD CHANGE YOURS, TOO. (continued)



**Richard Fratarelli** was 77 years old when he decided he couldn't wait any longer. The Marine Corps Vietnam Veteran could barely cross a room when he began working with Whole Health Coach Lindsey Higdon at the Port Charlotte VA Outpatient Clinic in Florida. His A1c had spiked, he was on diabetes medication, and his hips ached with every step.

With Lindsey's guidance — small weekly walks, meal planning, SMART goals, and steady encouragement — Richard lost 70 pounds in less than a year. He came off his diabetes medication entirely and reduced his blood pressure medicine. His hip pain is gone. And on Thanksgiving morning, he walked a 5K Turkey Trot — with a walker.

"Next year, I'm going to do it without my walker!" he said. "If I can do this, anyone can do this."

**Read more:**

[https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/features/Small\\_Steps\\_Lead\\_to\\_Big\\_Changes\\_for\\_Senior\\_Veteran.asp](https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/features/Small_Steps_Lead_to_Big_Changes_for_Senior_Veteran.asp)

**These four Veterans started in very different places. But Whole Health met each of them exactly where they were.**

Whether you're struggling with chronic pain, isolation, a habit you can't shake, or a health condition that feels out of control — VA Whole Health offers a partnership built around you: your goals, your values, and what matters most in your life.

To learn more or get started, visit <https://www.va.gov/wholehealth> or ask your VA primary care provider about Whole Health today.

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## VIETNAM VETERAN RECEIVES TOXIC EXPOSURE SCREENING



**Vietnam Veteran George Stevenson** is one of many Veterans at State Veterans Homes who stays on top of his health by receiving a VA Toxic Exposure Screening (TES), [https://www.va.gov/files/2023-06/Toxic%20Exposure%20Screening%20Fast%20Facts\\_508.pdf](https://www.va.gov/files/2023-06/Toxic%20Exposure%20Screening%20Fast%20Facts_508.pdf)

Health care providers from VA's Veterans Exposure Team – Health Outcomes Military Exposures (VET-HOME), <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/PUBLICHEALTH/VET-HOME/index.asp>, are traveling across the country to conduct TES for Veterans in State Veterans Homes. A TES is a short (5-10 minutes) screening to ask you about your potential exposures to toxins during your military service. Every Veteran enrolled at VA is eligible for a TES.

Mr. Stevenson shared his military story during his TES with VET-HOME clinician Lynn Chacko, MD, FAAFP. As a Vietnam Veteran wounded in battle, Mr. Stevenson recalled the time he received the Purple Heart at Camp Frenzell-Jones in Long Binh, Vietnam. He was shirtless and in the middle of shaving when he was told that a general was there to see him. The general saw the shirtless Mr. Stevenson and laughed, asking, "Where do I pin it?"

Upon returning home after the war, Mr. Stevenson went to work as a firefighter. But although he was still in his 20s and in peak physical fitness, he suffered a stroke, which left him with loss of motor function on his right side and a speech disorder. A true fighter, Mr. Stevenson did not let the stroke define him. He went to art school, learned to paint with his left hand, and became a well-known local artist.

Mr. Stevenson now resides at Montrose State Veterans Home, where he holds onto his fighting spirit and shares laughs and stories with fellow residents. Dr. Chacko said, "When I took a photo with him, one of his friends muttered, "We're going to hear about this for the rest of the day!"

Every enrolled Veteran can receive a TES from VA at least once every 5 years. A TES screening starts a conversation about your exposure concerns, so your health care team can consider any future symptoms alongside your exposure history. Afterwards, Veterans have the option to receive a more in-depth military environmental exposures assessment, <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/PUBLICHEALTH/MEEA/index.asp>.

## VA MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

For older Veterans



As an older Veteran, you may be facing new life challenges, like recent medical issues, changes in personal roles and responsibilities, changes in relationships, and other life challenges that can alter your sense of mental well-being. In addition, you may be trying to manage ongoing mental health concerns. VA offers a variety of information and resources to help you, your family members, and friends improve your mental health. Explore these resources below:

- VA has many programs to support older Veterans and their families and caregivers. Visit MentalHealth.va.gov, <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/older-veterans/index.asp>, to access online resources and specialized services to help aging Veterans cope with complex medical, cognitive, and mental health conditions later in life.
- Retirement and aging can be challenging. For those Veterans who have difficulty adjusting, connecting with counseling and therapy can ease this transition. Listen to these Veterans, <https://www.maketheconnection.net/stories/640/>, talk about how they found solutions to live well as they get older, leave jobs, and start their next phase of life. At **MakeTheConnection.net**, you can watch Veterans of all backgrounds share stories and explain how treatment helped them manage their symptoms, reconnect with loved ones, and find new ways to thrive.
- The Start the Conversation video, <https://www.maketheconnection.net/resources/start-the-convo/>, provides supportive tools for family members and friends of Veterans who are struggling with their mental health. These tools include recommendations on conversation starters, links to background information on various mental health conditions, and links to coping resources and programs and services.
- The Older Veteran Behavioral Health Resource Inventory, [https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/MENTALHEALTH/older-veterans/docs/Older\\_Veteran\\_Behavioral\\_Health\\_Resource\\_Inventory.pdf](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/MENTALHEALTH/older-veterans/docs/Older_Veteran_Behavioral_Health_Resource_Inventory.pdf), is intended for health professionals but can also help Veterans, their friends, and family learn about programs and benefits for older Veterans.
- If you are troubled by upsetting memories long after combat, you may want to get help for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Visit the National Center for PTSD website, <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/index.asp>, for more information including the booklet Understanding PTSD and Aging, [https://www.ptsd.va.gov/PTSD/publications/print/understandingptsd\\_aging\\_booklet.pdf](https://www.ptsd.va.gov/PTSD/publications/print/understandingptsd_aging_booklet.pdf), and AboutFace, <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/AboutFace/>, which offers video testimonials of Veterans from all eras talking about how PTSD treatment helped them.

## VA MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

For older Veterans, (continued)

- Social connection can improve well-being. The video You Can Start a Social Group for Veterans, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8EvDzNhv0iM>, can help you build a social group.
- The Preventing Suicide Among Older Veterans brochure, [https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide\\_prevention/docs/Older\\_Veterans\\_Brochure\\_508\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/docs/Older_Veterans_Brochure_508_FINAL.pdf), discusses warning signs; tips for Veterans, families, caregivers, and friends; ways to make the home safe; information about VA S.A.V.E. training, <https://learn.psycharmor.org/courses/va-s-a-v-e>, and links to other resources.
- VA Geriatrics and Extended Care Services, <https://www.va.gov/geriatrics/>, aims to improve the health and well-being of Veterans who have multiple chronic conditions or a disability associated with chronic disease, aging, or injury. Mental health services are a part of many GEC programs.
- Find resources to help you adjust to retirement and aging at the Make the Connection, Retirement & Aging webpage, <https://www.maketheconnection.net/events/retirement-aging/>.
- For overall help as an older Veteran, the VA Resource Navigator <https://www.prevention.va.gov/PREVENTION/PCL/docs/NCP-PCL-Handout-VA-Resource-Navigator-508.pdf> document lists a variety of VA resources including resources to help you with mental health support; managing benefits and payments; managing medical appointments, refilling prescriptions and viewing medical records; finding a VA facility; and more.

Find more resources for older Veterans at: <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/older-veterans/resources.asp>

## ABOUT THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES AND ITS PARTNERSHIP WITH VA

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM), <https://www.nationalacademies.org/>, are independent, non-partisan, non-profit institutions that provide expert scientific advice to inform policy and advance science, engineering, and medicine. Over the years, the National Academies (the name for NASEM as an institution) has provided VA with dozens of reports examining environmental exposures and health outcomes across all eras of conflict as well as peace time. This effort is ongoing, and VA, with help from the National Academies, continues to explore topics of importance to Veterans, following the science as additional information becomes available.

For its consensus studies shared with VA, the National Academies forms multidisciplinary committees of experts from across the United States. VA has relied on these committees to produce unbiased, topic-specific reports that summarize scientific evidence and present conclusions on the strength of that evidence. In addition, when requested by VA, NASEM provides reports with suggestions on research needs and priorities; changes to existing programs or systems; frameworks for new systems or processes; or designs for new research studies.

## ABOUT THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES AND ITS PARTNERSHIP WITH VA (continued)

Over the years, the National Academies has provided VA with reports on a variety of topics on Veterans' health—some Congressionally mandated and others initiated through VA priorities. They have examined:

- Exposures including herbicides, insecticides, solvents, jet and diesel fuels, combustion products, exhaust, vaccines, particulate matter, heavy metals, and radiation
- Health outcomes, including cancer, respiratory health effects, neurologic outcomes, diabetes, traumatic brain injury, and mental health

These reports have included:

- The Veterans and Agent Orange series (11 volumes)
- The Gulf War and Health series (11 volumes)
- The topic of intergenerational effects from exposures, including the reports Veterans and Agent Orange: Update 11 (2018), <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/25137/veterans-and-agent-orange-update-11-2018> and Gulf War and Health, Volume 11: Generational Effects of Serving in the Gulf War (2018), <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/25162/gulf-war-and-health-volume-11-generational-health-effects-of>
- The topic of burn pits and airborne hazards
- The topic of radiation, including the report Evaluation of Manhattan Project Records for Veteran Health and Exposure Assessments, <https://www.nationalacademies.org/projects/HMD-BPH-23-03/publication/28585>

- Reports on other topics of interest to Veterans, including the reports Mental Health Effects of Toxic Exposures Among Veterans, Exploring Military Exposures and Mental, Behavioral, and Neurologic Health Outcomes Among Post-9/11 Veterans, 2025, <https://www.nationalacademies.org/projects/HMD-BPH-23-08>, and Clinical Follow-Up and Care for Those Impacted by the JP-5 Releases at Red Hill, <https://www.nationalacademies.org/projects/HMD-BPH-24-01>.

For Vietnam Veterans, in accordance to PL 102-4, the National Academies were asked to perform a comprehensive evaluation of scientific and medical information regarding the health effects of exposure to Agent Orange, other herbicides used in Vietnam, and the various components of those herbicides. Updated evaluations were conducted every 2 years to review newly available literature and draw conclusions from the overall evidence. The National Academies also examined and published reports about specific Agent Orange-related topics, such as intergenerational effects, exposure to Blue Water Navy personnel, and exposure to reservists using Agent Orange-contaminated C-123 aircraft. The last report in the Veterans and Agent Orange series was published in 2018.

All Veterans and Agent Orange reports are available online and National Academies reports are available online at: <https://www.nationalacademies.org/publications/all>.

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# AGENT ORANGE

## NEWSLETTER

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## HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT VA'S EXPOSURE-INFORMED CARE INITIATIVE?

VA is committed to high-quality, exposure-informed care (EIC). EIC means VA considers how military environmental exposures like Agent Orange or other exposures may impact your health. Your VA care team keeps this in mind because you matter!

Exposure-informed care is a collaborative process between health care professionals and Veterans which includes listening, learning, and working together toward the shared mission of effectively assessing and addressing health concerns potentially related to military environmental exposures.

This initiative ensures VA health care teams are ready to address your concerns. This exposure-informed care approach is built into your care, where your health care team will listen, learn, and work with you to address your exposure concerns. In fact, as a part of the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics PACT Act of 2022 (PACT Act), VA health care professionals are mandated to receive toxic exposure education and training.

### What Exposure-Informed Care Means for Vietnam Veterans

You should always talk with your VA health care team if you have questions or concerns about exposures during your service in Vietnam. You can be confident that exposure-informed care is part of:

- Your VA health care. Your team considers your Vietnam service and possible exposures when talking with you, understanding your health concerns, and planning your care.
- How your team communicates and interacts with you and your family. Your health care team will listen and explain what is known and what is uncertain about Vietnam era exposures.
- Training for your care team. VA team members and care professionals receive ongoing education so they can better understand and consider Vietnam-era exposures as a possible factor in your health, recognizing that exposures may affect many aspects of your health.

A dedicated Veteran webpage is available with links and resources to:

- Information on military exposures
- Educational materials for you and your family
- Links to VA programs and support

Talk to your VA health care team today or learn more by visiting <https://www.warrelatedillness.va.gov/EICforVeterans>.

