



NEWS RELEASE

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The Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency Continues to Serve Veterans Amid COVID-19 Pandemic

LANSING, MICH. The Director of the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency (MVAA) wants Michigan's 600,000 veterans to know the MVAA continues to connect veterans and their loved ones to the benefits they have earned through their service.

"While these might be trying times, the MVAA is focused on serving as the central coordinating agency to local, state and federal veteran benefits, and connecting those benefits to our deserving veterans," said Zaneta Adams, Army veteran and Director of the MVAA. "We will continue to conduct our outreach efforts while practicing the social distancing guidelines ordered by the Governor."

Key to the MVAA's outreach efforts is the Michigan Veteran Resource Service Center (MVRSC) at 1-800-MICH-VET. This 24-hour call center is staffed by trained technicians who are knowledgeable in all areas concerning veteran benefits and resources. Veterans can call to request copies of their discharge documents, inquire about available benefits including medical, compensation and pension, or to be connected to a VA-certified Veteran Service Officers who can walk them through the claims process.

"I was absolutely down and out," said 54-year-old Army veteran Richard Brooks of Lansing. "My place burned down last year, to the ground. I had to start completely over at 53." Brooks described how depression and lack of income after a serious injury led him to call the MVRSC to see if they could help. The MVAA coordinated efforts with local Veteran Service Officers and soon the American Legion showed up at Brooks' house with a badly needed care package containing food and household products.

"It was phenomenal," Brooks said. "If it wasn't for what they did that day to help me, I don't know if I would've made it."

These types of calls are common and the MVAA aims to offer multiple solutions depending on the veteran's circumstances. The Michigan Veterans Trust Fund (MVTF) is one solution designed for war-time era veterans experiencing unforeseen financial hardship. Together with the MVTF Board of Trustees and local committees, the MVAA oversees this emergency grant program to assist qualifying veterans.

"The MVTF continues to fully operate and take emergency grant applications, even with the state lockdown," said Lindell Holm, Director of the MVTF and Marine Corps veteran. "If a county can't take a veterans application then that veteran should call us at 1-800-MICH-VET so our staff can assist you."

Andrew Sicotte, a 36-year-old veteran of the Michigan Army National Guard, was curious about the benefits he may have earned by serving in Iraq. A mechanic by trade, Sicotte took advantage of one of the MVAA's newest initiatives, the "Check on MIVet" program.

"I heard about the program while at the VA hospital," said Sicotte, a Negaunee native. "I served eight years in the Guard. I didn't know what benefits were still available to me, so I signed up for a check-in. The MVAA got back to me the next day and put me in contact with a local Veteran Service Officer."

Check on MIVet aims to reach veterans who request or who could benefit from a "check-in." Launched in April 2020, the program works to ensure veterans receive the employment, education, healthcare and quality of life benefits and resources they deserve. Check on MIVet is not a mental health line or a "wellness" check; veterans experiencing a crisis should call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255.

Another new initiative is the MVAA's series of virtual Coffee Hours that focus on veteran specific news and information. Past guests have included Maj. Gen. Paul Rogers, the Adjutant General of the Michigan National Guard, Congressman Fred Upton from Michigan's 6th Congressional District, and Stephanie Price, Deputy Director of Operations for the VA Education Service. Virtual topics have included the Michigan National Guard response to the COVID-19 pandemic, issues confronting student veterans, and the impact of Coronavirus on Tribal veterans.

"The MVAA is upholding its commitment to provide exceptional service to Michigan's veteran population and their families, who have stepped up to serve our nation," said Rogers. "If there are barriers veterans face in employment, education, health care, and quality of life, the MVAA is that partner whom veterans can trust to be part of the solution."

The MVAA's advocacy for Michigan's veterans also has a national impact. Adams made recommendations to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Legislature that helped mold the Student Veteran Coronavirus Response Act of 2020. Many student veterans were impacted by college and university emergency closures, and this bill ensures that educational assistance and housing allowances continue until the pandemic is under control.

Additional federal impact came soon after the MVAA pointed out incomplete reporting of the numbers of veterans diagnosed with COVID-19 on a state and national basis. Soon after the MVAA's input, an entirely new web-based reporting system was launched by the VA which includes details on veteran diagnosis down to county level.

Information around this outbreak is changing rapidly. The latest information is available at Michigan.gov/Coronavirus and CDC.gov/Coronavirus.

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About the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency: Created by Executive Order in 2013, MVAA's mission is to be the central coordinating agency, providing support, care, advocacy and service to veterans and their families. The agency works with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, state departments, county agencies, and community and veterans service organizations throughout the state. The agency operates the Michigan Veteran Resource Service Center, a 24/7/365 call center in partnership with Michigan 211. By calling 800-MICH-VET (800-642-4838) veterans, family members and service providers can get information and access a comprehensive network of resources and services. Learn more at MichiganVeterans.com.