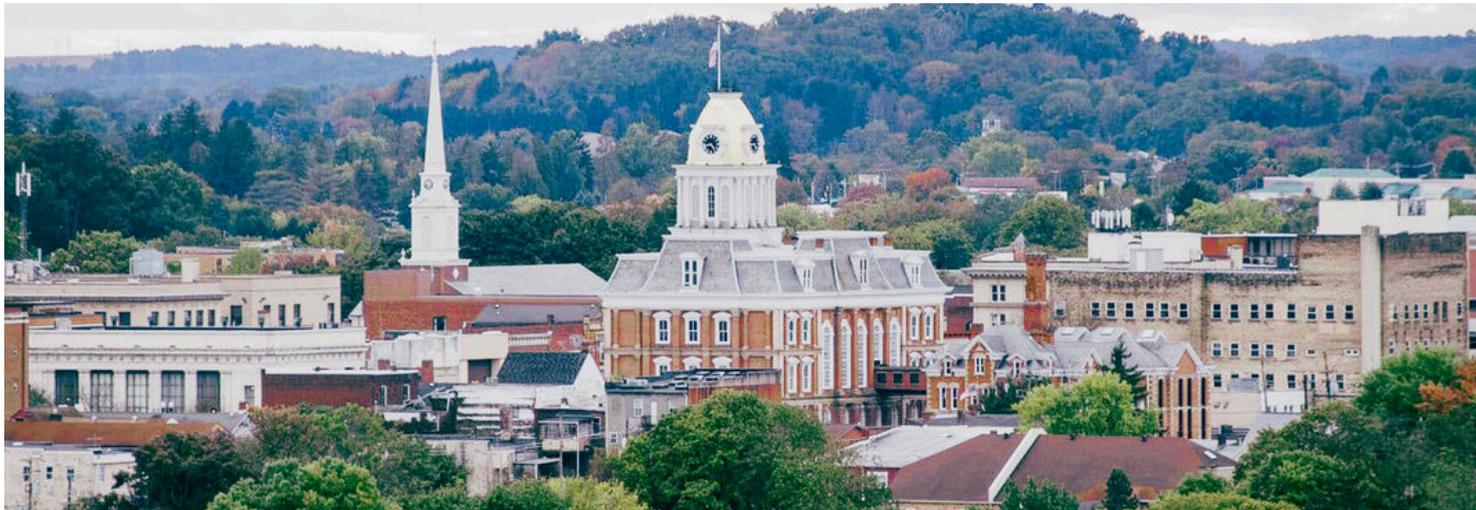




VETERANS AFFAIRS



Leading the Change

Dear Veterans, Families, and Members of Our Community,

As we move into March, many of us look forward to the first signs of spring. After a long winter, the longer days and warmer temperatures are a welcome change across our community.

March is also Women’s History Month, a time to recognize and celebrate the contributions of women throughout American history. In particular, we honor the more than 2.2 million women who have served in the United States Armed Forces. Women Veterans represent the fastest-growing demographic in the Veteran community, and their leadership, sacrifice, and service continue to shape both our military and our nation.

The 2026 Women’s History Month theme, “Leading the Change: Women Shaping a Sustainable Future,” reminds us that women’s impact extends far beyond the battlefield. Women in uniform have broken barriers, strengthened our armed forces, and paved the way for future generations to serve with pride.

Throughout our nation’s history, women have played pivotal roles in military service, demonstrating courage, leadership, and determination. Deborah Sampson disguised herself as a man to fight during the American Revolutionary War. In 1918, Opha May Johnson became the first woman to enlist in the United States Marine Corps, opening doors for women to serve officially in the armed forces. More recently, Col. Martha McSally flew combat missions during the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, becoming one of the first American women to fly in combat and helping expand opportunities for women in modern warfare. These trailblazers illustrate the enduring legacy of women in the military—from the Revolutionary War to contemporary conflicts.

As we welcome the arrival of spring, let us also take time to recognize the women Veterans in our community and thank them for their service. Their leadership continues to inspire future generations and reminds us that the story of our military—and our country—is stronger because of their contributions.

Jessica
 Jessica Walker
 Director

Highlights

Lunch & Learn

Recovery Month Contest

Survivor’s Benefits

Quit Like a Pro

2nd Amendment Rights

Vet Centers

Paws for Safety

Sewing Kits For Vets

We will place these in homeless shelters and distributed by Jessica Walker from Indiana Veteran's Affairs office.

Drop off items at Beth's Custom Leather, VFW, Back Street Outlet or Burrell Township Library.

items we are looking for

- thread
- straight pins
- 60" cloth tape measure
- small scissors
- buttons
- safety pins
- clean and small size pill bottles (labels removed)
- rain poncho
- small note pads
- pens
- misc. small items like nail clippers, band aids, etc.

Deadline for sending our 1st 100 kits is the end of June.

For more information, call 724-248-1218



Veteran Spotlight



Richard Sturgeon served in the United States Army as a 13B40 Field Artillery Senior Sergeant and Gunner from September 1968 to January 1974. During his military career, he dedicated three years of service in Germany and one year in Vietnam.

Following his service, Richard worked for Sam Jack Union Drilling Company and also as an HVAC technician. After many years of hard work and dedication, he has now been happily retired for 10 years.

Today, Richard enjoys a well-earned retirement filled with fishing, quality time with his wife Shirley, and making lasting memories with his grandson and granddaughter. We thank Richard for his service and for the example of dedication and perseverance he continues to set for his family and community.

Indiana County Department of Veterans Affairs presents to you

Veterans Lunch and Learn series

3rd Thursday of each month

11:30-1:00 PM
County Forensics Center
220 Airport Road
Indiana, PA

Bring a lunch!

- 19 MARCH** Dogs in the Lives of Veterans
Presented by Mary Jalongo, Ph.D.
- 16 APRIL** Veterans Mental Health
Presented by Dr. Ralph May
- 21 MAY** Starting Your Own Business
Presented by Joanna Sutton, Veterans Business Outreach Center

Reserve your spot! Call 724-465-3815 or [click here!](#)

2026 RECOVERY MONTH ART AND MIXED MEDIA CONTEST

THEME: MENTAL HEALTH RECOVERY

Entry Deadline: **April 30th**

Altoona submissions to Building 32 attention Sarah Weible.
CBOC submissions due April 30th, attention to nurse managers.

Awards Ceremony: **May 28th**

Mixed media can include songs, poems, short stories, photographs, drawings, sculptures, paintings, and more!

All Veterans, Caregivers & Family Members are welcome to compete!

Artwork Display and Voting:

All artwork displayed in the 2nd floor Mini Auditorium B, at the Main Medical Center
2907 Pleasant Valley Blvd. Altoona, PA 16602

May 7th 12:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.
May 14th 12:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.
May 21st 12:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.
May 28th 12:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Questions? Contact:

Sarah Weible
814-943-8164 EXT: 14159
Sarah.Weible@va.gov

Art speaks where words are unable to explain.
-Pam Holland

Disclosure: Any artwork that is offensive or may seem triggering will not be put out for display.

VA U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center

VA News and Information



Faster Processing of Survivor Benefits

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has announced a new regulation designed to speed up decisions and payments for certain survivors' claims. Previously, VA processed claims for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) and Survivors Pension separately, requiring formal decisions on both benefits and often delaying payments. Effective February 23, VA will now award and pay whichever benefit is higher—typically DIC—without waiting to fully develop the lesser benefit.

DIC is a tax-free monthly benefit for eligible surviving spouses, children, and parents of service members who died in the line of duty or Veterans who died from service-connected conditions. Survivors Pension provides tax-free payments to qualifying low-income surviving spouses and unmarried dependent children of wartime Veterans. In most cases, DIC provides the greater benefit. However, Survivors Pension will be awarded instead if the surviving spouse has no dependents, lives in a nursing home, and receives or has applied for Medicaid. [Read More](#)



Improving Dental Care

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has issued a request for proposals (RFP) to select a new dental care administrator for its next-generation community care dental network. The contract will support the development and management of a nationwide network of licensed dental providers offering general and specialty services, preventive care, and pharmacy support. VA aims to standardize and strengthen dental care delivery so eligible Veterans receive timely preventive and restorative treatment.

VA's community care program allows Veterans to receive care from non-VA providers at VA's expense, a practice dating back to World War II and reinforced by the VA MISSION Act of 2018. Today, about 40% of VA care is delivered through community providers. Of nearly nine million enrolled Veterans, about 26% qualify for dental benefits. In fiscal year 2025, more than 888,000 Veterans received dental care, including 3.5 million procedures through community care. [Read More](#)



Quit Like a Pro

During February's Great American Spit Out on Feb. 19, VA encouraged Veterans to "Quit Like a Pro" and highlighted resources to help them stop chewing or dipping. Tobacco addiction and cravings were real challenges, but VA provided medications—including nicotine replacement therapies and varenicline—along with counseling and support groups to improve success rates. Veterans who combined medication and counseling increased their chances of quitting. Over time, cravings became less intense and frequent. Quitting smokeless tobacco reduced risks of oral cancer, gum disease, heart disease, and stroke. Veterans were encouraged to contact their VA provider, call Quit VET at 1-855-QUIT-VET (1-855-784-8838), or use [SmokefreeVET](#) for support and motivation. [Read More](#)



VA Limits Apportionments

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced a new rule limiting when it will apportion disability compensation, pension, and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) benefits to dependents. VA will stop granting most need-based apportionments to avoid conflicts with state family court decisions, which are better equipped to handle complex family law and financial matters. Current apportionments will continue, but no adjustments will be made. Exceptions remain for incarcerated beneficiaries and incompetent Veterans institutionalized at government expense without a fiduciary. The changes took effect February 9, 2026. Eligible individuals may still request apportionments under these exceptions using VA Form 21-0788. [Read more](#)



2nd Amendment Rights

The Department of Veterans Affairs announced it will no longer report Veterans to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) solely because they require a fiduciary to manage VA benefits. After review and consultation with the Department of Justice, VA determined the decades-old practice violated the Gun Control Act and Veterans' Second Amendment rights, as no judicial or quasi-judicial ruling established they posed a danger to themselves or others. VA is coordinating with the FBI to remove prior reports and restore affected Veterans' rights. Secretary Doug Collins and Attorney General Pamela Bondi affirmed support for ensuring equal constitutional and due-process protections for all Veterans nationwide. [Read More](#)

Resources



Connection.
Camaraderie.
Community.

Mission

To welcome home and honor those who served, are serving, and their families by providing outreach, community engagement, free confidential counseling, and timely referrals to support successful transitions to civilian life.

Services

Vet Centers offer free, confidential readjustment counseling to eligible Veterans, service members (including National Guard and Reserves), and their families. Services include individual and group counseling, family counseling for military-related issues, bereavement counseling, military sexual trauma support, deployment support, community education, outreach, and referrals.

Eligibility

You may be eligible if you:

- Served in a combat theater or area of hostility
- Provided mortuary services or emergency medical care to war casualties
- Served on a UAV crew supporting combat operations
- Served during a declared national emergency or major disaster (federal or state orders)
- Participated in Coast Guard drug interdiction operations
- Are a current Reserve member in drill status needing care for a service-related behavioral health condition
- Experienced military sexual trauma
- Are a Vietnam Era Veteran who used Vet Center services before January 2, 2013
- Use VA educational benefits

You do not need to be enrolled in VA health care or have a service-connected disability to receive services. Family members are eligible when participation supports the Veteran or service member.

Bereavement Services

Available if the service member died on active duty, the Veteran was receiving Vet Center or VA psychological/hospice care at the time of death, or the death was by suicide.

For more information visit www.vetcenter.va.gov

White Oak Vet Center

2001 Lincoln Way, Suite 280
White Oak, PA 15131
Phone: 412-678-7704

DuBois Vet Center

100 Meadow Lane, Suite 8
DuBois, PA 15801
Phone: 814-372-2095

Pittsburgh Vet Center

2500 Baldwick Road, Suite 15
Pittsburgh, PA 15205
Phone: 412-920-1765



Paws for Safety

Safety Programs, Therapy Dogs, Community Programs

Paws for Safety is a community-driven organization founded by a law enforcement officer, U.S. Army Veteran, and his wife. Our mission is to promote safety, build positive relationships with youth and families, and strengthen community connections through education, outreach, and the healing presence of therapy dogs.

Through our Therapy Dog Team, we provide friendship, comfort, and emotional support to children, Veterans, first responders, individuals with physical and developmental challenges, hospital and hospice patients, and members of the community.

Together, we are creating safer, stronger communities — one lesson, one helping hand, and one paw at a time.

Contact

Jeffrey & Melissa Stahl
Pawsforsafetynonprofit@gmail.com
878.293.7442
<https://www.pawsforsafety.info/>

Thank you for reading!

<p>Indiana County Department of Veterans Affairs</p>	<p>(724) 465-3815</p>
<p>https://www.indianacountypa.gov/departments/veteran-affairs/</p>	<p>825 Philadelphia Street Second Floor, Court House Indiana, PA 15701</p>

