

# VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS



## POST 9934 AND AUXILIARY 9934 DANA POINT, CALIFORNIA APRIL 2024



ALL STATE POST 2004-05, 2005-06, 2007-08,  
2008-09, 2009-10, 2010-11, 2011-12, 2012-13,  
2013-14, 2014-2015, 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-2018-  
2019-2020, 2021-2022

ALL AMERICAN POST 2007-08  
2009-10, 2010-11, 2011-12, 2012-13, 2013-2014,  
2014-2015, 2015-2016, 2019-2020, 2021-2022

**2018 NATIONAL OUTSTANDING COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD**  
**2022 NATIONAL OUTSTANDING COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD**

### COMMANDER'S MESSAGE

Greetings Comrades,

During the month of March, I had several occasions to observe and be part of the tremendous organization that is Post 9934 Dana Point.

As many of you know, we are constantly interacting with the veterans in our area who need assistance. We also have community members who refer veterans and/or active-duty personnel who could use a helping hand.

This has become an almost weekly occurrence. This month we were called upon to assist for a different reason.

The City of Dana Point and the Dana Point Police Services asked if our Post could assist with a fundraiser for one of their deputies. The Deputy, a Marine Corps Veteran, needed financial assistance. He has been diagnosed with terminal cancer and the financial burden on the family was too much.

The request was for our "world class" barbecue team to assist with the fundraiser and do what they do best.

We were only given one week to prepare...meet with the City...buy supplies...and arrange for personnel to assist.

After putting out the word, Post 9934 responded quickly and professionally. I asked for 7 or 8 comrades to assist and 13 of your brothers and sisters responded!

The response from the Post was commented on by the Mayor, City Manager, the Chief of Police, and the command staff of the Sheriff's Department.

It is always great to see that all of you give so much and expect so little in return.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> of March we observed Vietnam Veterans Remembrance Day. It wasn't until 2017 that the US Government officially recognized veterans from that conflict.

I felt as your Commander that it was necessary to send out a short message to the Post. I wanted to recognize our brothers and sisters who served in that conflict and remember the 58,600 of their Comrades who never returned home.

I received messages from many Post members who recalled their time "in country" and wanted to share feelings and memories with me.

To all my fellow comrades no matter where you served or what part you played in any conflict...You Are Never Alone!

I and your Post Officers are only a phone call or a text message away...Never Forget That.

I will see you April 9<sup>th</sup> at South Shores Church 1800 hrs.

Please be safe and be kind to each other.

*Rick Jauregui, Commander, Post 9934, Dana Point*

## REPRESENTATIVE LEVIN RECEIVES VFW CONGRESSIONAL AWARD



The VFW presented its 2024 Congressional Award to Rep. Mike Levin (CA-49) for his outstanding service and years of unwavering support of veterans, service members, their families and survivors. "I am honored to present this award to such a staunch advocate for our military and veteran communities," said VFW National Commander Duane Sarmiento. "Representative Levin exemplifies the values of service and advocacy that we at the VFW strive to live every day. His propensity for and track record of working across the aisle to deliver results is remarkable." Levin is a staunch proponent of the *GUARD VA Benefits Act* that would protect veterans by eliminating predatory claims practices, and is one of the VFW's top legislative priorities.

### VFW POST 9934 SCHEDULE OF EVENTS – APRIL 2024

- Wednesday April 3rd, 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm, Disability Clinic, Dana Point Community Center, 34052 Del Obispo St.
- Saturday April 6th, 7:00 am to 4:00 pm, Dana Point Sport Fishing trip. Call Dave 949-413-8495 or email: Docmfj15@hotmail.com
- **SATURDAY, APRIL 6 ARMY DAY**
- Tuesday, April 9th, 6:00 pm, VFW Post Meeting – South Shores Church, 32712 Crown Valley Pkwy. Feel free to invite a Veteran guest so they can see what our Post does! Post will present award to 2024 Scout of the Year. Post will elect Post Officers for 2024-2025 and Delegates to the 2024 District, Department and National Conventions.
- Saturday, April 13th, 7:00 am to 1:00 pm. VFW Auxiliary Garage Sale, 33442 Coral Reach Dr., D.P. (Items may be dropped off 1 week prior)
- Tuesday, April 16th, 6:00 pm, Dana Point City Council Meeting. Post will present awards to First Responders.
- Wednesday, April 17th, 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm, Disability Clinic, Dana Point Community Center, 34052 Del Obispo St..
- Wednesday, April 24<sup>th</sup>, 4:30PM – Dana Point State of the City

#### TO CONTACT YOUR POST

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Dana Point, Ca. 92629  
Telephone Office (949) 248-1419  
E-mail: vfwpost9934@cox.net  
Website: <https://www.vfwpost9934.org>  
Facebook: [www.facebook.com/vfwpost9934](http://www.facebook.com/vfwpost9934)

#### TO CONTACT U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

1-800-MyVA411

#### APRIL 2024 MEETING

The next meeting of the Post and Auxiliary 9934 will be Tuesday, April 9, 2024. **The Post meeting will be at South Shores Church, 32712 Crown Valley Parkway, starting at 6:00 p.m.** Agenda for the meeting will include election of Post officers for 2024-2025, and delegates for the District, Department, and National Conventions in 2024.

**The Auxiliary will meet at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, 33501 Stonehill. Auxiliary meeting time is 6:30 p.m.**

## VA HAS PROCESSED MORE THAN ONE MILLION VETERAN BENEFIT CLAIMS IN FISCAL YEAR 2024

The Department of Veterans Affairs announced that it has processed its one millionth Veteran benefits claim in fiscal year 2024. VA reached this milestone March 4 — the earliest in VA history and nearly six weeks faster than the previous all-time record (from fiscal year 2023). VA has completed almost 35% more claims than at this point last year.

VA is continuing to deliver more benefits, more quickly, to more Veterans than ever before. Through February of this fiscal year, VA provided \$69 billion in earned compensation and pension benefits to 6.5 million Veterans and survivors. This milestone builds on last year's historic pace, when VA delivered record amounts of earned benefits to Veterans and survivors.

This increase in Veteran benefits is largely due to the PACT Act, which has empowered VA to expand health care and benefits to millions of Veterans who were exposed to toxins and other hazards while serving our country.

"We're proud to be delivering more benefits, more quickly, to more Veterans and survivors than ever before — but we're not slowing down," said **VA Under Secretary for Benefits Josh Jacobs**. "We won't rest until every Veteran and every survivor to get the VA benefits and care that they've earned. So, to any Veteran or survivor out there: don't wait, submit your claim today."

Whenever a Veteran files a claim, our goal is to work with them every step of the way to get to "yes." As a result of this approach, VA has been able to grant benefits for 60.4% of claims filed in 2024 — including 75.1% of PACT Act claims — a sharp increase in the grant rate from pre-PACT Act levels.

Veterans also continue to apply for benefits at record rates, with VA receiving 4.5% more claims thus far in fiscal year 2024 than at this point in 2023. Since the PACT Act was

signed into law by President Biden, Veterans and their families have filed more than 3.5 million claims.

As a part of reaching one million claims, VA processed 221,592 disability compensation and pension claims during January 2024 alone — making it VA's highest single month of claims production ever, surpassing the previous monthly record of 193,411 from May 2023. VA's top 11 best claims production months in agency history all happened in the last 12 months. Additionally, the organization continues to achieve single day processing milestones — VA processed between 9,000 and 10,000 Veteran claims 43 times in fiscal year 2024 and more than 10,000 Veteran claims 35 times during the same time period. February 7, 2024 was the best single production day ever in VBA history with 10,997 claims completed. Before fiscal year 2024, VA had only had three 9,000 claim production days in history.

As a result of this record pace, Veteran claims pending over 125 days — known as the backlog — has decreased by more than 42,000 claims over the past three months. Due to record numbers of claims applications, the backlog is still expected to grow in 2024 before decreasing at the end of this year — and VA will continue to hire new claims processors, invest in continuous learning for all claims processors, and make technology improvements to ensure that Veterans, family members, caregivers and survivors receive the benefits they've earned and deserve as quickly and accurately as possible.

VA remains focused on hiring and training new claims processors and has grown the claims processing workforce more than 50% since fiscal year 2021. This growth, along with new technology to assist those processors, has allowed VA to meet the historic demand for benefits precipitated by the passage of the PACT Act in 2022.

[VA Release March 19, 2024]

## ONLINE EXCHANGE SHOPPING TO OPEN TO VETS

A Defense Department retail board in 2014, gave the go-ahead to a plan to open online exchange shopping to all honorably discharged veterans, with hopes of starting the program on Veterans Day in 2017. It seems that plan is coming to fruition.

Army & Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) estimated its annual sales would climb by \$185 million to \$525 million and earnings would increase by \$18 million to \$72 million. It could bring as much as \$108 million annually in support for Morale Welfare and Recreation (MWR) programs, which rely on Exchange dividends for the bulk of their funding across the services.

All veterans are being encouraged to take the first step in this process by confirming veteran eligibility status at <https://www.vetverify.org>. It might be a multi-step process, if the Defense Manpower Data Center lacks information to verify a veteran served and received an honorable discharge.

The Orange County Veterans Service Office can complete the DMV Veteran Status Verification Form for the new California Veteran Designation on your driver's license and also issues Veteran I.D. cards to honorably discharged veterans. Contact Scott Holwell if you would like to receive periodic veteran's information by email. There are many state and federal benefits and programs available to veterans and their dependents. To determine if you are eligible for any of these benefits, call or visit our office. We can and will assist you in completing all required application forms. You can get information on the Web from the Orange County Veterans Service Office webpage at [www.veterans.ocgov.com](http://www.veterans.ocgov.com).

### Send your questions to the Veterans Service Office County Operations Center

1300 S. Grand Avenue Building B, Room 247  
Santa Ana, California, CA 92705

**Office:** (714)480-6555 **Fax:** (714)567-7577

## VA SETS ALL-TIME RECORD FOR BENEFITS DELIVERED TO WOMEN VETERANS

The Department of Veterans Affairs announced that it is delivering disability compensation benefits to a record number of women Veterans. Right now, 702,557 women Veterans are receiving disability compensation benefits from VA — an all-time record and an increase of 180,959 women Veterans (or 26%) over five years ago.

The average woman Veteran who receives disability compensation benefits from VA has a 68% combined disability rating, and they receive an average of \$26,809 in earned disability compensation benefits per year from VA. The average grant rate for women Veterans is 89.2%, meaning that 89% of women Veterans who have applied for disability benefits with VA have received benefits for at least one condition.

Women Veterans are the fastest growing cohort at VA, and — in addition to delivering record levels of disability compensation benefits — VA is now serving more women Veterans in its health care system than ever before. The sharp increase in women Veteran benefits in recent years is largely due to the PACT Act, which has empowered VA to expand health care and benefits to millions of Veterans who were exposed to toxins and other hazards while serving the country.

“Women Veterans have fought in every war since the American Revolution, but they have not always been able to access the care and benefits they’ve earned and deserved. But now, at VA, we’re making sure that those days are over,” said Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs Tanya Bradsher, the first woman Veteran deputy secretary of VA. “These record numbers demonstrate that we’ve made tremendous progress in recent years, but they are still just the beginning — we won’t rest until every woman Veteran is coming to VA.”

“We want women Veterans to come to VA for their health care and benefits, which is why we’re hosting women Veteran outreach events across the country throughout this month and throughout this year,” said VA Under Secretary for Benefits Josh Jacobs. “To all the women Veterans out there, we encourage you to visit VA.gov or call 1-800-MYVA411 to apply for your earned benefits today. We will do everything in our power to serve you, just like you’ve served our coun-

try.”

In recognition of Women’s History Month, VA’s regional offices are hosting or participating in 139 outreach efforts specifically focused on women Veterans. In addition to disability compensation benefits, VA’s concerted efforts to reach out to women Veterans are helping them get education benefits and well-paying jobs: despite only making up 11.3 % of the Veteran population, women Veterans received 27.5% of Post 9/11 education benefits and 26.4% of Veteran Readiness and Employment benefits in 2023.

Over the past two years, VA has also dramatically expanded health care for women Veterans. Specifically, VA expanded breast cancer screenings and mammograms for Veterans with potential toxic exposures; supported access to reproductive health services, including contraception, in vitro fertilization, abortion counseling and — in certain cases — abortion care for Veterans and VA beneficiaries; and dramatically expanded one-on-one maternity care coordination for women Veterans. Women Veterans are also enrolling in VA health care at higher rates under the PACT Act, and VA recently hosted its first Women Veterans Experience Action Center, helping more than 340 women Veterans apply for the care and benefits they deserve. Additionally, as announced by the White House this week, VA and the Department of Defense are launching a new Women’s Health Research collaborative to explore opportunities to promote joint efforts to advance women’s health research and improve evidence-based care for Veterans and service members.

In every VA regional office, VA has Veteran Coordinators who function as the primary contact for women Veterans. These coordinators are able to provide specific information and comprehensive assistance to women Veterans, their dependents, and beneficiaries concerning VA benefits and related non-VA benefits. Each VA medical center nationwide also has a Women Veterans Program Manager, who helps coordinate all the services women Veterans might need. Women Veterans can also call, text, or chat online with the Women Veterans Call Center at 855-829-6636 to get help and find available resources and services in their area.

[VA Release March 21, 2024]

## QUARTERMASTER NOTE

I owe everyone a bit of explanation. After serving as the Post Quartermaster for some 27 years, I have found it necessary to decline election to the office for next year. My reason is strictly a matter of health.

Recently, I have ended up in the Emergency Room and spent time in the hospital every two months or so. The problem is an erratic heart rhythm. My Cardiologist is considered to be one of the most outstanding in her profession in this area and she has kept me more or less vertical for a long time but I am spending too much time in the hospital which makes it very difficult to perform the necessary duties of this office. The Doctor is now considering surgery which is considered extreme at my age.

I want to leave the office of Quartermaster with my boots on and pass the functions on in an orderly manner.

Comrade Phil Jimenez has agreed to take the office. He is a Past Post Commander and spent some years as a Post Trustee so he has significant experience with the office. Comrade Wayne Yost is also continuing as the Assistant Quartermaster. The office will be in good hands.

I have always enjoyed my work with Post 9934 and the outstanding support of so many veterans in our organization. I wish you smooth sailing and following seas in the future years.

Bill Manes

## DIGITAL DEFENSE: EMPOWERING VETERANS AGAINST SMISHING THREATS

### Security Excellence

You may be familiar with phishing as a common cyber scam, but have you heard of smishing? Smishing, which is a term that combines Short Message Service (SMS) and phishing, is one of the biggest cyber scams you need to watch out for because scammers try to steal your personal and banking information through unsolicited text messages on your mobile devices. Veterans may be targeted because of their service to this nation, as scammers impersonate government officials and agencies.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Privacy Service encourages Veterans to use the following tactics to spot, prevent, and report a smishing scam.

### How to Spot a Smishing Scam

You should be cautious of unsolicited messages, especially if they come from unknown numbers or sources. Sometimes these scammers will use your local area code to appear familiar. Scammers may impersonate local officials, family, or friends. Look out for urgent or threatening language in messages, as scammers often try to create panic and pressure you into immediate action. VA, and other legitimate organizations, will never request sensitive information like passwords or financial details through text messages, so be skeptical of such requests. Watch for misspellings and grammatical errors, as professional organizations usually send well-written communications. If you receive unexpected prize or gift notifications instructing you to provide personal information, exercise caution, as these are also likely scams.

### How to Prevent a Smishing Scam

Veterans, you can take steps to protect yourselves from potential scams and fraudulent activities.

Confirm the legitimacy of message senders by cross-checking information using official channels like the

official website or documents; avoid replying directly to texts.

Be cautious of clicking on links in messages, as smishing often involves deceptive links that may lead to malware. Keep your smartphones secure by installing and regularly updating security software to detect and block smishing attempts.

Ensure your phone settings are on automatic updates for the latest patches and fixes.

Strengthen your account security by enabling two-factor authentication whenever possible, adding an extra layer of protection.

Your vigilance is key to keeping your personal information safe.

### How to Report a Smishing Scam

Mobile carriers have mechanisms in place to handle reports of phishing and smishing attempts. You should forward any suspicious messages to your mobile carrier's designated reporting number, which you can find on their official website or by reaching out to customer support. If the smishing scam falsely claims to be from VA or another government agency, do not interact with the scam and report it immediately. All mobile carriers have the option to report suspicious texts by forwarding them to 7726 (SPAM).

If the smishing scam suggests criminal activity like identity theft or fraud, consider reaching out to your local law enforcement agency, providing them with detailed information, including screenshots and any other relevant data. If you're in the United States, filing a complaint with the FBI through the [Internet Crime Complaint Center](https://www.ic3.gov) [https://www.ic3.gov] is an option, ensuring you include comprehensive details about the smishing incident. The [Federal Trade Commission \(FTC\)](#) provides helpful information on identifying scam text messages as well.

## VETERANS AFFAIRS GETS 13% BUDGET BOOST

The Department of Veterans Affairs would get a nearly 13% boost in funding next fiscal year under a proposal unveiled by the White House, with large increases for medical center construction projects and caregiver program support.

The \$369.3 billion budget proposal for VA in fiscal 2025 comes just three days after congressional officials finalized spending for the current fiscal year, approving a \$328.1 billion fiscal plan for department programs through Oct. 1.

Despite repeated concerns from lawmakers about the size of the federal budget, VA's spending plans have grown substantially over the last two decades. The department has seen a funding bump of at least 7% in each of the last six fiscal years and in 17 of the last 23 years.

In fiscal 2001, the entire VA budget amounted to \$48 billion in spending. In fiscal 2017, it was \$182.3 billion, still less than half the fiscal 2025 presidential request.

Much of that increase has been in mandatory health care and benefits spending for the department as presidential

administrations and lawmakers have dramatically expanded the pool of veterans eligible for each.

Of the nearly \$370 billion budget request, \$24.5 billion is set aside for the Toxic Exposures Fund, an account specifically designed to deal with costs associated with implementing the 2022 PACT Act, legislation that expanded disability payouts and medical care options for troops who suffered injuries from chemicals and toxins they encountered while serving.

The VA budget plan includes a 6% increase in mental health care spending, to \$17.2 billion corresponding with department leaders' top stated priority of reducing veterans suicide. Health care programs specific to women veterans, another administration focus, would increase by 11% to \$1.1 billion.

Caregivers support programs would see almost a 21% increase, to \$2.9 billion. White House budget documents said the move "recognizes the critical role family caregivers play in supporting the health and wellness of veterans."

(cont'd page 7)



## MORE PHARMACY PROBLEMS ENDANGER FUTURE OF VA'S HEALTH RECORDS SYSTEM

Newly discovered errors in how patient prescriptions are logged in the Department of Veterans Affairs new electronic health records system could endanger medical care for tens of thousands of veterans, according to the latest report from a government watchdog.



But officials from the VA Office of Inspector General found significant lingering problems with how pharmacy records are shared between medical sites, with the new health records software and sites still using the department's legacy records system, VistA.

VA and Oracle Cerner officials said final fixes for the problem should be in place in coming days, but outside experts and lawmakers questioned whether those updates will fully address the system failures. And the setback again raises questions about when — if ever — the Millennium records system will move to other sites within the veterans health system.

The revelations came at a House Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing, the latest in a series of oversight events scrutinizing the embattled medical records system. Lawmakers lamented that despite repeated promises from officials involved with the project, little progress has been made in the last year.

### VA won't restart health records overhaul until next summer, if at all

"The situation we found in May of last year was dangerous and unsustainable, and it seems much the same today," said Rep. Matt Rosendale, R-Mont., chair of the committee's technology panel.

"Simply put, the medical centers using the Oracle Cerner electronic health records have been turned upside down. ... The results of the VA and Oracle strategy to improve the EHR have been one step forward and one step backwards. We're not gaining on this."

In 2018, then-President Donald Trump announced a new 10-year, \$16-billion plan for VA to adopt the Millennium system in an effort to put veterans health records and military medical files into the same software platform for the first time.

The new system was installed at five sites — the Spokane VA Health Care System in Washington, the VA Walla Walla Health Care System in Washington, the Roseburg VA Health Care System in Oregon, the VA Southern Oregon Health Care, and the VA Central Ohio Health Care System — before VA officials announced a full halt on the rollout in April 2023.

The move came in response to widespread employee discontent with the new software and concerns about patient safety due to system shortfalls. At Thursday's hearing, Dr. Neil Evans, acting program director for the health records project, said no timeline has been finalized for resuming that work.

He said officials have made "incremental but steady progress" but still need to put in place other system improvements, including issues surrounding pharmacy records.

Investigators found evidence that mail order pharmacy data for nearly 120,000 patients is outdated or could contain mistakes. About 250,000 patients total could face complications due to incomplete information in their records.

They warned that patients "may be prescribed contraindicated medications" because of the errors and noted that some health care providers at legacy sites "are making clinical decisions based on inaccurate data."

Officials from VA and Oracle Cerner said they have partially addressed the issue in recent months and hope to have another software patch related to the pharmacy issues in place in the next few weeks. But that update was already rescinded once because of errors that emerged in testing trials.

Despite those problems, and despite the department's pause in the Millennium system rollout, the department is planning to launch the records software at the Lovell Federal Health Care Center in Chicago next month. The site is a joint medical center with staff from VA and the Defense Department, which has not experienced the same issues with its implementation of new health records systems.

Mike Sicilia, executive vice president at Oracle Corporation, said the improvements made to the VA records system in the last year should make the rollout at that site less complicated and error prone.

But lawmakers on the panel dismissed that optimistic outlook.

"The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again while expecting a different result," Rosendale said. "I have come to believe that continuing this effort — to transform the Oracle Cerner pharmacy software into something completely different — is insanity."

He and several other lawmakers have called for VA to abandon the project, despite the \$9 billion already spent on the effort.

VA Deputy Inspector General David Case said his office has seen improvements in project management over the last year but warned numerous other fixes will be needed to get the records system rollout back on track.

"As VA moves toward its deployment next month at a complex facility jointly operated with the Department of Defense, transparency, communication, and program management will be essential to getting it right," he said. "Failures in these areas risk cascading problems."

[By Leo Shane III, Thursday, Feb 15]

## VA INCREASES ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE FOR THOUSANDS OF VETERANS THROUGH NATIONWIDE ACCESS SPRINTS

*VA's initiative has expanded access to care across the nation by offering night clinics, weekend clinics, increasing the number of Veterans scheduled into daily clinic schedules, and more*

The Department of Veterans Affairs announced that it has made it easier and faster for Veterans to access VA health care nationwide through VA's Access Sprints — an initiative to expand access to care by offering night and weekend clinics, increasing the number of Veterans scheduled into daily clinic schedules, and more.

As a result of these sprints, VA saw approximately 25,000 more new patients from October 2023 to February 2024 compared to the same period last year — and new patient appointments increased by 11%. Additionally:

81% of VA Medical Centers saw more new patients than the same period last year

12% fewer new patients are waiting more than 20 or 28 days for an appointment

14% fewer new patients are waiting for appointments with a community provider due to wait time eligibility

Expanding access to VA care is a top priority for VA and the entire Biden-Harris Administration because VA has proven to be the best care in America for Veterans. Veterans who receive VA health care 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. Additionally, VA health care is often more affordable than non-VA health care for Veterans.

“Our mission is to provide world-class health care to our Nation's heroes. When a Veteran comes to VA, we must be able to give them the care they deserve, whenever and wherever they need it,” said **VA Under Secretary for Health Shereef Elnahal, M.D.** “I am so proud of our workforce for finding new ways to open VA's doors wider — and I'm excited to use what we learned from the Access Sprints to make sure that Veterans have access to VA care at every turn.”

VA is currently delivering more care and more benefits to more Veterans than ever before in our nation's history, setting an all-time record for health care appointments provided in 2023.

VA is undertaking this effort at a time when we are also expanding health care eligibility for millions of Veterans nationwide under the PACT Act. As of March 5, all Veterans who were exposed to toxins and other hazards while serving in the military and meet certain requirements became eligible to enroll directly in VA health care beginning March 5, 2024. This means that 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 will be 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 will also be eligible to enroll.

This increase in access is part of a nationwide VA Access Sprint to benefit all Veterans who are eligible for VA care. Local VA facilities and regional networks spent several months designing and implementing locally driven innovations and tried-and-true practices. As part of VA's ongoing strategy of multiple, large-scale initiatives aimed at the goal of providing the soonest and best care to Veterans, their focus was to improve timeliness, efficiency, capacity, and employee experience.

This expansion of care is made possible, in part, by last year's record hiring in VA's Veterans Health Administration. Last year, VA exceeded its hiring goals in the Veterans Health Administration — growing at the fastest rate in 15 years and bringing in more than 61,000 new hires — to prepare for an increase in VA health care enrollment among Veterans under the PACT Act. In total, VHA now has more employees than ever before in VA history, and VA's retention efforts also led to a 20% decrease in turnover rate among VHA employees from 2022 to 2023.

For more information about VA care, visit VA's health care website. <https://www.va.gov/health-care/eligibility/>

[VA RELEASE March 26, 2024]

## VETERANS AFFAIRS BUDGET BOOST

(cont'd from page 5)

White House officials are asking for \$2.8 billion in major and minor construction funding — an increase of almost 65% from fiscal 2024 — to cover a host of medical center projects across the country. That includes money to build a new critical care center in West Los Angeles and a gravesite expansion at Fort Logan in Colorado.

Homeless prevention programs would see a 3% increase, to \$3.2 billion, under the president's proposal. Information technology investments would drop by 3%, to roughly \$6.2 billion, reflecting reduced spending on the department's stalled electronic health records modernization project.

The budget request now heads to Congress, where it will receive significant scrutiny over the next seven months. If

lawmakers cannot pass a full-year budget for federal agencies by Oct. 1, the impasse would prompt a partial government shutdown.

However, most VA programs have been insulated from those funding threats in recent years because lawmakers approve advance appropriations for the department with each new budget deal. In the appropriations plan approved late last week, Congress already signed off on \$308 billion in VA spending for fiscal 2025, to ensure benefits delivery and health care operations are not disrupted.

[By [Leo Shane III](#) March 11]

**POST OFFICERS FOR 2023-2024**

Post Commander:	Ricardo Jauregui	Service Officer:	Aaron Pluff
Senior Vice Commander:	Richard Alonzo	Service Officers Team:	Jim Socks
Junior Vice Commander	Carlos Garcia		Don Ellis
Post Quartermaster	Bill Manes		Ben Valencia
Assistant Quartermaster	Wayne Yost		John Coon
Post Chaplain:	Ronald Egigian	Service Officer Advisor	Marty Hoffman
Post Surgeon	Gil Castro	Service Officer Support	Debbie Yost
Judge Advocate	Dolores Padgett		
Adjutant	David Vera	Trustee (3-year term)	Robert Pruitt
Women Veterans Coordinator	Marcia Kuehl	Trustee (2-year term)	Scott Roberts
Post Color Guard Captain	Carlos Garcia	Trustee (1-year term)	Richard Carr

**AUXILIARY OFFICERS FOR 2023-2024**

President	Lisa Mers	Trustee 3	Judy Brandmeier
Junior Vice President	Sharon Miller	Trustee 2	Sharon Miller
Secretary	Terry Marr	Trustee 1	Mary Koebler
Treasurer	Cindy Somerville	Chaplain	Yvonne English
Guard	Tory Boegeman	Conductor	Ralph Mariano



**At the City Council meeting on March 19th, the City of Dana Point recognized Debbie and Wayne Yost as Volunteers of the Quarter!**

DANA POINT VFW POST AND AUXILIARY 9934  
 33282 Golden Lantern Suite 103  
 DANA POINT, CA 92629