VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs | News Release
Office of Public Affairs
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 8, 2025

EMBARGOED UNTIL 5AM ET ON 1/8/25

VA makes several cancers presumptive for service connection – lowering the burden of proof for Veterans to receive no-cost health care and earned benefits

WASHINGTON — Today, in a step that builds on the Biden-Harris Administration's focus to fulfill our nation's sacred obligation to our nation's Veterans, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced that it is making acute and chronic leukemias, multiple myelomas, myelodysplastic syndromes, myelofibrosis, urinary bladder, ureter, and related genitourinary cancers presumptive for service-connection for:

- **Gulf War Veterans:** Veterans who served in Somalia or the Southwest Asia theater of operations (which includes Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the neutral zone between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, the Gulf of Aden, the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, the Red Sea, and the airspace above these locations) during the Persian Gulf War on or after August 2, 1990.
- **Post-9/11 Veterans:** Veterans who served in Afghanistan, Iraq, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, or Uzbekistan and the airspace above these locations during the Gulf War on or after September 11, 2001. This includes Veterans who served at the Karshi-Khanabad (K2) base in Uzbekistan after September 11, 2001.

This step lowers the burden of proof for these Veterans, meaning that they do not need to prove that their service caused their condition to receive benefits for it. Instead, VA automatically assumes service connection for the condition and provides benefits accordingly. Additionally, when a Veteran becomes service connected for a health condition, it gives them access to free health care for that condition. The presumptions for urinary bladder, ureter, and related genitourinary cancers went into effect on January 2, 2025, and the presumptions for acute and chronic leukemias, multiple myelomas, and myelodysplastic syndromes, myelofibrosis will be effective on January 10, 2025.

This expansion is part of a comprehensive, yearslong effort by VA and the entire Biden-Harris Administration to expand access to benefits for Veterans as part of President Biden's Unity Agenda for the nation. In 2022, President Biden signed the PACT Act into law – the largest expansion of Veteran benefits in generations. VA then made millions of Veterans eligible for health care and benefits years earlier than called for by the law and launched the largest outreach campaign in VA history to encourage Veterans to apply. As a result, VA is currently delivering more care and more benefits to more Veterans than ever before – and earning Veteran trust at record rates.

> "At VA, our goal is to provide *every* Veteran with the care and benefits that they've earned for their service to our nation – and that's what this is all about," said **VA Secretary Denis McDonough.** "Adding these presumptives lowers the burden of proof for Veterans to get the benefits they deserve for the conditions that followed them home from war. We encourage Veterans with these conditions – and all Veterans – to apply today for the benefits they deserve today."

Since the PACT Act was signed into law, VA has conducted the largest outreach campaign in VA history to ensure that Veterans are signing up for the care and benefits they are newly eligible for. As a result of this effort, nearly 890,000 Veterans have signed up for VA care since the bill was signed into law (a nearly 30% increase over the previous equivalent period) and Veterans have submitted more than 4.8 million applications for VA benefits (an 42% increase over the previous equivalent period and an all-time record). In total, more than 1.3 million Veterans have enrolled in VA health care since President Biden took office in 2021, and VA has delivered more than $600 billion in earned benefits directly to Veterans, their families, and survivors during that time.

In addition to supporting all Veterans who served during the Gulf War, Iraq War, and Afghanistan War, these steps are also a part of a comprehensive effort VA is undertaking to listen to Veterans who served at the Karshi-Khanabad (K2) base and ensure that we are providing them – and their survivors – with the care and benefits they deserve. Partly as a result of these efforts, K2 Veterans have higher claim and approval rates than any other cohort of Veterans: 13,002 K2 Veterans of the approximately 16,000 known K2 Veterans are currently enrolled in VA healthcare, more than 11,800 are service-connected for at least one condition, the average K2 Veteran is service connected for 14.6 conditions at a 70% disability rating, and the average service-connected K2 Veteran receives an average of $30,000 a year in earned benefits. VA continues to work to ensure that all K2 Veterans get access to the benefits they deserve.

VA encourages Veterans with these conditions to apply for benefits today, and we encourage eligible Veterans with previously denied claims to reapply. VA will update publicly available information and conduct general outreach to Veterans and survivors to publicize this new eligibility and how to apply. To apply for benefits, Veterans and survivors may visit VA.gov or call 1-800-MYVA411.

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