



# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**  
**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## LIVE UP TO THEIR LEGACY

Each December, millions of Americans come together across the country to remember the fallen, honor those that serve, and teach the next generation about the value of freedom.

The freezing cold temperature did not deter hundreds of South Dakotans from paying tribute December 18 to veterans buried at the South Dakota Veterans Cemetery in Sioux Falls.

It's been said, "we stand on the shoulders of heroes



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that have gone before us, and really what we strive to do is live up to their legacy," so it was fitting that "Live Up to Their Legacy," was the 2021 theme.

"Laying the green wreaths with red bows at Christmas is a fitting way to honor those buried on our sacred

grounds," said SDVC Director Erin Brown. "Our special thanks to Midwest Honor Flight and their partners for sponsorship of this great program."

This year's program will be held again at the South Dakota Veterans Cemetery, on Saturday, December 17, 2022.



# NEW DIRECTOR NAMED AT VABHHCS

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is pleased to announce the appointment of Lisa R. Curnes, MHA, BSN, RN, as the new director of VA Black Hills Health Care System effective January 30, 2022.

“Ms. Curnes brings strong leadership qualities and proven experience,” said Mr. Robert McDivitt, VA Midwest Health Care Network Director. “I am certain she will be an asset to our Veterans Integrated Services Network (VISN), our employees and volunteers, our health care partners, the community, and most importantly, for the veterans of South Dakota we are honored to serve.”

Curnes has been with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs for over 27 years. She currently serves as the associate director for the Eastern Kansas VA Health Care System, Leavenworth/Topeka, Kansas.

Ms. Curnes holds a Bachelor of Science and Nursing from the University of Iowa, and a Master of Health Administration from Des Moines University.



# VET CENTERS EXPAND ELIGIBILITY

Doug McCuddin, outreach specialist with the Sioux Falls Vet Center, has notified the Department that the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2021 extends Vet Center eligibility to current members of the Reserve Component assigned to a military reserve command in a drilling status, to include Active Reserves, who have a behavioral health condition or psychological trauma that is related to the individual’s military service and has an adverse effect on their ability to have a desired quality of life or hinders their adjustment to civilian life.

These benefits are effective January 1, 2022. Questions and referrals can be directed to the Sioux Falls Vet Center at 605.330.4552.



*Connection.  
Camaraderie.  
Community.*

# VA DESIGNATES FLEXIBLE FUNDING TO SUPPORT HOMELESS VETERANS

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs disbursed \$20 million in American Rescue Plan funds, Dec. 21, 2021, to VA Medical Centers to provide critical and life-saving emergency assistance to veterans experiencing homelessness or those enrolled in the [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program](#) during the coronavirus pandemic.

Through a time-limited congressional authority, VAMCs can use these funds to bring help required for safety and survival and to support stability and health for transportation and communications equipment and services.

“This unprecedented authority allows the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to meet the immediate needs of veterans who lack stable housing, transportation to medical appointments, food and other essentials – all while helping them to achieve long-term housing and financial stability,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “COVID-19 transmission continues to rise this winter in many communities and these resources will help the VA use these flexibilities to protect the health and safety of homeless and at-risk veterans.”

In 2021 VAMCs across the country helped more than 24,000 veterans from May through November thanks to the expanded authorization described in section 4201(a) of the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (Public Law 116-315). VAMCs have purchased groceries, meals, apartment start-up kits, furniture, merchandise vouchers, and laundry vouchers for veterans experiencing homelessness. In addition, these funds have allowed for the creation of a nationally coordinated rideshare program which offers support to veterans who need transportation to meet health, housing, legal, and employment needs.

Veterans experiencing homelessness should visit their [local VAMC](#) for assistance and to take advantage of the support made possible by this authorization. These life-saving services are available to [eligible veterans](#) who are experiencing homelessness or those participating in the HUD-VASH program.

For immediate assistance contact the [National Call Center for Homeless Veterans](#) at 877-4AID-VET (877-424-3838).

Click here to learn more about [this flexible assistance for homeless veterans](#).

## VA Homeless Programs



# VA SEEKS FEEDBACK TO GUIDE NEW COPAYMENT WAIVER PROGRAM FOR VETERANS AT RISK FOR SUICIDE

To encourage outpatient mental health care and reduce any potential barriers associated with seeking it, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is proposing to eliminate copayment requirements for outpatient mental health visits and reduce the copayments for medications dispensed to veterans who are identified as high risk for suicide by a VA clinician.

The VA [published a notice](#) in the Federal Register Jan. 5, to solicit public feedback to guide implementation of the new VA program modifying copayments for veterans at risk of suicide.

“Research shows increased frequency of outpatient mental health encounters for high-risk veterans reduces their risk of suicide,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “Through these efforts, the VA will continue to address this national public health crisis by further eliminating financial burdens on veterans which may negatively influence their engagement in mental health treatment and their critical medication availability.”

Currently, there is no exemption from outpatient care copayments for veterans who are at risk for suicide, and such veterans have to pay a \$15.00 or \$50.00 copayment for each outpatient visit, depending on whether the visit qualifies as primary care or specialty care.

In addition, to decrease the risk of overdose on prescribed medications, prescription-based lethal means safety programs often focus on limiting the supply of medications that may, intentionally or unintentionally, contribute to an overdose. An example of this would be to prescribe a seven-day supply of medication with four refills rather than a prescribing one 30-day supply of the medication.

This proposed rule would reduce the financial burden of multiple co-payments associated with both increased outpatient visits as well as more frequent, but limited supply of prescribed medications.

The public notice requests feedback at the [Federal Register](#). The public comment period ends March 7. More information on lethal means safety and safe medication storage can be found at [Firearm Suicide Prevention & Lethal Means Safety - REACH \(va.gov\)](#).

# CLOYD NAMED MJFSVH EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH

Sadie Cloyd, certified homemaker, has been named the “employee of the month” at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home.

Sadie has worked at the Home for four years. She shows up with a smile on her face and is always ready to take on the challenges and opportunities that are afforded her. Her endless dedication, reliability and team player mentality are truly appreciated. Sadie works in the Memory Care unit and her ability to work through the most stressful situations, is amazing.

“Sadie is an outstanding, compassionate aide,” said Jeff Tarrell, household coordinator. “I can count on her to step up every day, without being asked. She simply sees what needs to be done and takes care of business. Sadie is highly respected, by coworkers, and strives every day to do her best.”

# ELVES DELIVERED GIFTS, FOOD AND HAPPINESS TO HEROES AT THE STATE VETERANS HOME

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs is very thankful for all the “elves” that visited the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home this past holiday season.

Partners throughout the state, although not being able to visit the veterans, still delivered care packages, treats, presents, and gift cards for our heroes.

Elves from Pierre Elks Lodge 1953 delivered gifts and treats for residents at the State Veterans Home and the VA Black Hills Health Care Center in Hot Springs totaling over \$28,000. Their gifting included presents and treats for the residents, but also many items for use in the Home’s neighborhood kitchens and living rooms.

Sincere thanks to all our partners who took time out of their busy holiday schedules to bring the spirit of Christmas to our heroes!



# UPCOMING EVENTS

Jan 10—POW/MIA Chair of Honor Dedication—State Capitol—2:00 pm (CT)  
Jan 11—Governor’s State of the State Address  
Jan 12—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Redrossa Italian Grille—Pierre—3:00 pm (CT)  
Jan 12—SD Veterans Council/SDDVA Legislative Reception—Redrossa Italian Grille—Pierre—5:30—7:30 pm (CT)  
Jan 19—SDDVA “Virtual” Mini Conference—10:00 am (CT)  
Jan 30-31—SD VFW Annual Legislative Conference—Moose Lodge (910 N. Deadwood Street)—Fort Pierre  
Feb 18-20—American Legion Mid Winter Conference—Oacoma  
Feb 26-27—SD Vietnam Veterans & Era Reunion—Ramada Inn—Mitchell  
Feb 27-Mar 3—National VFW Legislative Conference—Washington, DC  
Apr 4—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—(20901 Pleasant Valley Dr)—Sturgis—9:00 am (MT)  
Apr 8-10—DAV of South Dakota State Convention—Rushmore Hotel and Suites (445 Mt. Rushmore Road)—  
Rapid City  
Jun 9-12—State VFW Convention—Ramada Inn—Mitchell  
Jun 12—Midwest Honor Flight Annual Honor Ride  
Jun 16-19—State American Legion Conference—Watertown  
Jul 11—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—(20901 Pleasant Valley Dr)—Sturgis—9:00 am (MT)  
Jul 18-23—National Veterans Golden Age Games—Sioux Falls  
Jul 31-Aug 4—Military Order of the Purple Heart National Convention—Rapid City  
Aug 15-18—SDDVA Annual CTVSO Benefit School  
Sep 1—Veterans Day at the South Dakota State Fair  
Sep 1-5—South Dakota State Fair  
Oct 3—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—(20901 Pleasant Valley Dr)—Sturgis—9:00 am (MT)  
Dec 17—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—  
11:00 am (CT)

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