

# San Diego VA Regional Office

*Integrity • Commitment • Advocacy • Respect • Excellence*

To fulfill President Lincoln's promise "To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan" by serving and honoring the men and women who are America's Veterans.

## OUR EMPLOYEES

San Diego VARO is proud to say 85% of our 785 employees are Veterans who have made it their mission to support Veterans in a variety of professional roles.

## LEADERSHIP

Patrick Prieb, Director  
Andrea Lapinski, Assistant Director  
Edward Croft, Assistant Director

## KEY PERSONNEL

Ms. Ashley Johnson, VREO  
Mr. Marvin Rivas, VSCM  
Mr. James Smith, Acting SSDC

### San Diego VA Regional Office

Due to national and local guidance with regard to COVID-19, San Diego VARO is currently closed to the public until further notice.

[www.benefits.va.gov/sandiego](http://www.benefits.va.gov/sandiego)



## CENTER OF EXCELLENCE FOR VETERANS

San Diego VA Regional Office (VARO) proudly administers a wide array of benefits to our Nation's Veterans in San Diego, Riverside, Imperial, and Orange counties. San Diego VARO is home to the Mission Valley VHA Outpatient Clinic and Region 5 Network Support Center; as well as out-based locations for eight Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs). In addition, Veterans can access San Diego VARO services at 13 locations throughout Southern California.

**\*\*Please note all VBA outbased locations are currently closed to the public until further notice\*\***

## VETERAN STATISTICS

**Veteran Population:** ~472,997, representing 26 percent of the Veteran population for the state of California and 2 percent for the nation;  
**Compensation & Pension recipients:** 173,134  
**Compensation & Pension benefits paid annually:** \$2.97 billion.

## VBA REGIONAL OFFICE CLOSURES

Effective March 19, 2020:

Under Secretary for Benefits, Dr. Paul R. Lawrence, directed the temporary closure of all Regional Benefit Offices, until further notice, in order to prioritize the safety of both the Veteran population and VBA employees. Although our offices are closed to the public for the time being, please note the following:

1. Submit or check the status of a claim, or ask a question at:  
[www.iris.custhelp.va.gov/app/home](http://www.iris.custhelp.va.gov/app/home) OR [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)
2. VR&E Counseling & Orientation sessions continue uninterrupted via telecounseling
3. Disability claims and appeals processing continues uninterrupted
4. Face to face/in-person service is on hold, however inquiries can be submitted via:  
VA Benefits Hotline: 1-800-827-1000  
eBenefits Technical Support: 1-800-983-0937  
\*If you have hearing loss, call TTY: 711
4. Claims intake continues uninterrupted and can be mailed to:  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
Claims Intake Center  
PO Box 4444  
Janesville, WI 53547-4444
5. Veteran Service Organizations:  
**DAV:** Please visit [www.benefitsquestions.org](http://www.benefitsquestions.org). For document submission via fax, please fax to: 1-844-531-7818  
**AMVETS:** Please call 1-800-827-1000 for assistance.  
**PVA:** Please email: [robertk@pva.org](mailto:robertk@pva.org) or [samanthag@pva.org](mailto:samanthag@pva.org)  
**Riverside CVSO:** Please utilize: 1-844-737-8838. The automated system will ask for the caller's zip code and route the call to the CVSO office nearest.  
**American Legion:** Please visit [www.benefitsquestions.org](http://www.benefitsquestions.org). For document submission via fax, please fax to: 1-844-531-7818  
**CDVA:** Please call: 619-400-0070 and a claims representative will contact within 24 hours to assist.  
**VFW:** Please call: 619-400-5322, email: [vfw.vbasdc@va.gov](mailto:vfw.vbasdc@va.gov) or fax documents to: 619-291-8516

## NATIONAL RATING TIMELINESS

*Average Days Pending (ADP) 80.7 Days*  
*Average Days to Complete (ADC) 87.7 Days*

### COVID-19: ONLINE AND DISTANCE LEARNING UPDATE

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Payment of Subsistence Allowance in The Event of Facilities Converting to Distance Learning or On-Line Format from In-Residence.

In an attempt to control the spread of COVID-19, many facilities are temporarily converting to distance learning only, meaning in-residence classes are transitioning to an on-line format for a period of time. This change is not the result of a reclassification of the type of program, meaning the facilities are not officially reclassifying in-residence classes to on-line classes for VA purposes; therefore, there is no need to request an updated certification for the current term as a result of this change.

Also, it is VR&E's policy to pay the in-residence rate for a term that includes a combination of in-residence and on-line training. However, if this practice is still in place at the beginning of the facility's next scheduled term, an updated certification must be sent to the facility to verify the classification of the type of program.

### Important Numbers

**Veteran Crisis Line: (800) 273-8255  
Press 1**

**VA Benefits Information:  
(800) 827-1000**

**VA Health Care: (877) 222-8387**

**Board of Veterans Appeals:  
(800) 923-8387**

**VA Fiduciary: (888) 407-0144**

**VA Inspector General: (800) 488-8244**

**G.I. Bill: (888) 442-4551**

**Home Loan Guarantee: (877) 827-3702**

**Debt Management Center:  
(800) 827-0648**

**White House/VA Veterans' Complaint  
Hotline: (855) 948-2311**

IT'S NORMAL TO FEEL SAD,  
STRESSED, CONFUSED, SCARED  
OR ANGRY DURING A CRISIS.



TALK TO PEOPLE YOU TRUST, SUCH  
AS FRIENDS AND FAMILY OR YOUR  
FELLOW COMMUNITY MEMBERS.

## **GI-BILL BENEFITS DURING COVID-19**

President Trump signed into law S. 3503, March 21, 2020, which will enable the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to continue providing the same level of education benefits to students having to take courses online due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

The law gives VA temporary authority to continue GI Bill payments uninterrupted in the event of national emergencies, allowing for continued payment of benefits even if the program has changed from resident training to online training. GI Bill students will continue receiving the same monthly housing allowance payments they received for resident training until December 21, 2020, or until the school resumes in-person classes.

In the wake of COVID-19, thousands of students nationwide have been converted to distance learning as many educational institutions are transitioning to technology-based lesson delivery. VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said “It will give Veteran students certainty as they continue their education”. Students receiving GI Bill benefits are not required to take any action. Benefits will continue automatically. VA will work closely with schools to ensure enrollments are accurately certified and processed timely. Updates will be provided to students via direct email campaigns and social media regarding VA’s effort to implement these new changes.

Students with specific questions can contact the Education Call Center at: 888-442-4551 between 8 a.m.-7 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday-Friday.

## **VA NATIONAL CEMETERIES DURING COVID-19**

All U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) national cemeteries are open and will continue to provide interments for Veterans and eligible individuals.

Effective March 23 — as part of the agency’s response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) — committal services and the rendering of military funeral honors will discontinue until further notice. Immediate family members (limited to no more than 10 individuals) of the deceased may witness the interment if requested. “We are committed to the safety of our Veterans, their families and employees, and have implemented an aggressive public health response to COVID-19,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “At the same time, we continue to take steps to provide flexibility to Veterans and their loved ones, where possible”.

Families choosing to continue with interment may schedule a committal service for a later date. Families wishing to postpone an already scheduled interment to a later date should contact the cemetery as soon as possible to convey their wishes. Although VA national cemeteries remain open to visitors, guests are strongly urged to obey local travel restrictions and avoid unnecessary travel. Certain portions of a cemetery typically open to the public, such as public information centers or chapels, may be closed to the public. Contact your local cemetery for updates regarding closures.

For more information, contact NCA at 202-891-9987. Veterans can call the National Cemetery Scheduling Office at 800-535-1117 or schedule a burial arrangement online at: <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/schedule-a-burial/>

# UPCOMING OUTREACH EVENTS

**All Outreach events have been temporarily suspended.  
Please visit [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) for additional assistance.**



**\*\*Please note events can change without notice\*\***

For more information on outreach events, please contact:

Stephanie Baldwin, Outreach Coach, at [stephanie.baldwin1@va.gov](mailto:stephanie.baldwin1@va.gov), or

Kadell Felton, Homeless Veteran Coordinator, at [Kadell.Felton2@va.gov](mailto:Kadell.Felton2@va.gov) or

Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment (VR&E) Services, at [vre.vbasdc@va.gov](mailto:vre.vbasdc@va.gov)

For more information about the SDRO or to sign up to receive this monthly fact sheet, please email [dir.vbasdc@va.gov](mailto:dir.vbasdc@va.gov)