

COVID-19 Veterans Resource Guide

DEREK  KILMER
Proudly Representing Washington's 6th District

A Note from Representative Kilmer:

Across our region and the entire country, the COVID-19 pandemic is putting an extraordinary strain on our health care system, our economy, and on families. I hope you are all keeping safe, staying well, and managing these challenging times.

Since this public health crisis began, I've had a phone attached to my ear from dawn until dusk – hearing from hospital leaders, local housing authorities, folks at the Naval Shipyard, disability advocates, veterans organizations, higher education institutions, immigrant and refugee support groups, labor leaders, small business owners, transit organizations, and thousands of constituents. I've had those conversations to hear directly from folks in every corner of our region about how COVID-19 and efforts to contain its spread are impacting Washingtonians – and to learn more about what resources are needed from the federal government.

In response, I've worked with my colleagues in Congress to pass three emergency response bills that have now been signed into law by the President. These new bills will provide bold and urgent action to protect the health, safety, and economic well-being of the American people – including our veterans.

I believe that if you serve our country, we should have your back. Our nation owes a debt of gratitude to those who put their lives on the line to defend our freedom. That means ensuring that veterans have access to the benefits they have earned and deserve, especially in times of need. This resource guide contains information about new and existing resources available to veterans impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As this situation evolves, I encourage you to continue to visit [Kilmer.House.Gov](https://www.kilmer.house.gov) for more information or reach out to my team and me in Tacoma at 253-272-3515 if we can lend a hand.

As always, I'm honored to represent you.

Sincerely,



Derek Kilmer

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Resources

If you're experiencing a health emergency, dial 9-1-1

For daily updates and consolidated resources about the statewide response to this pandemic please check Washington State's [Central COVID-19 Webpage](#).

For information about the VA provisions included in the **Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act**, [click here](#).

For access to local, state, and regional VA resources, the following links may be helpful:

- General information about the VA's COVID-19 response plan for Washington state, which includes guidance and resources for veterans, can be found [here](#).
- Contact information for your local VA facility can be found on the [WA State Department of Veterans Affairs](#) website, or choose from one of the following:
 - [VA Puget Sound Health Care System](#)
 - [Pierce County Veterans Assistance Programs](#)
 - [Kitsap County Veterans Assistance](#)
 - [Jefferson County Veteran Services](#)
 - [Northwest Veterans Resource Center \(Clallam County\)](#)
 - [Grays Harbor Public Health & Social Services Veterans Resources](#)
 - [Mason County Veterans Services](#)

The following national VA resources may also be helpful:

- [Veterans Crisis Line](#) – Call 1-800-273-8255 (Press 1) or Text 838255
- [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs \(VA\) Public Health Response](#)
- [VA Coronavirus FAQ - What Veterans need to know](#)

For additional assistance please contact any of my offices, or visit my website at www.kilmer.house.gov

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Frequently Asked Questions

Questions Related to Your Health Care

What should veterans do if they think they have COVID-19?

Before visiting local VA medical facilities, community providers, urgent care centers, or emergency departments in their communities, veterans experiencing COVID-19 symptoms—such as fever, cough, and shortness of breath—are encouraged to call their VA medical facility or call MyVA311 (844-698-2311, press #3 to be connected). Veterans can also send secure messages to their health care providers via [MyhealtheVet \(www.myhealth.va.gov\)](http://www.myhealth.va.gov), VA's online patient portal. VA clinicians will evaluate veterans' symptoms and direct them to the most appropriate providers for further evaluation and treatment. This may include referral to state or local health departments for COVID-19 testing.

What about routine appointments and previously scheduled procedures?

The VA is encouraging all veterans to call their VA facility before seeking any care—even previously scheduled medical visits, mental health appointments, or surgical procedures. Veterans can also send secure messages to their health care providers via [MyhealtheVet \(www.myhealth.va.gov\)](http://www.myhealth.va.gov) and find out whether they should still come in for their scheduled appointments. VA providers may arrange to convert appointments to video visits, where possible. Additionally, veterans should feel free to request telehealth appointments from their VA providers.

Can visitors still access VA medical facilities?

Many VA medical facilities have cancelled public events for the time being, and the VA is urging all visitors who do not feel well to postpone their visits to local VA medical facilities. Facilities have also been directed to limit the number of entrances through which visitors can enter. Upon arrival, all patients, visitors, and employees will be screened for COVID-19 symptoms and possible exposure.

What about VA nursing homes and spinal cord injury units?

On March 10, 2020, the VA announced that its 134 nursing homes (also called VA community living centers) and 24 spinal cord injury and disorder centers would be closed to all outside visitors. All clinical staff will be screened for COVID-19 daily before entering the nursing home or spinal cord injury units, and staff will work only within those units to limit possible transmission of the virus. Exceptions to the visitor policy will only be made for cases when veterans are in their last stages of life on hospice units or inpatient spinal cord injury units.

I am a veteran living in a rural area and am being told that my appointments will now be through telehealth, but I can't afford internet services or don't have a good internet connection. How will this bill help me?

Talk to your provider and local VA about getting an iPad or other tablet from VA. This bill allows VA to enter into partnerships with local telecommunications companies to subsidize or completely pay for broadband internet services. Call your local VA facility or send a secure message to your provider on [MyhealthVet \(www.myhealth.va.gov\)](http://www.myhealth.va.gov) to ask about this option.

I use VA's prosthetics service and need to get my prosthetic adjusted, but am nervous to go into a VA facility because I have underlying conditions that make me more at risk of complications from COVID-19. Where can I go to get my prosthetic adjusted?

This bill gives VA more flexibility to allow veterans who need their prosthetics created or adjusted to do so in their local community. Call your local VA provider or message them on [MyhealthVet \(www.myhealth.va.gov\)](http://www.myhealth.va.gov) to ask about this option.

How can I help prevent the spread of COVID-19?

The CDC released guidelines that individuals can follow to protect themselves and their communities from COVID-19. These precautions include washing your hands for 20 seconds with warm water and practicing social distancing so the virus does not unintentionally spread to other people. Since many veterans care for family members at high risk of contracting COVID-19, it is important to contact state and local health authorities for next steps and treatment.

I'm a veteran in need of home-based care. Can I still enroll or renew my participation in the Veteran Directed Care program? And if I can't get to a printer or post office to send in my renewal paperwork due to COVID-19, will I be kicked out of the program?

Under the CARES Act, you can enroll or renew your participation in the Veteran Directed Care program through telephone or telehealth, with no in-home visit required. In addition, veterans and their caregivers will not be penalized for late paperwork and will not be disenrolled or suspended from the program.

I'm a veteran using the Veteran Directed Care program for home-based care, but I am currently living outside of my home state and can't travel home due to COVID-19 restrictions and health concerns. Can my caregiver still be paid for services, even if we are out of state?

Yes. Under the CARES Act, veterans and their caregivers will not be penalized for being out of state for more than 14 days during the COVID-19 emergency and should continue to receive payments for care.

Supporting others

The significant impact COVID-19 has on daily routines may cause unanticipated stress on some veterans in crisis. Help is available for veterans in crisis by calling the Veteran Crisis Line at 1 (800) 273-8255 and pressing 1, at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat, or by texting 838255.

Questions Regarding Benefits and Housing

Is there any support to cover my mortgage? How does it work if I have a VA mortgage?

Homeowners with FHA, USDA, VA, or Section 184 or 184A mortgages (for members of federally recognized tribes) and those with mortgages backed by Fannie Mae or Freddie Mac have the right to request forbearance. Forbearance can be provided on payments for up to 6 months, with a possible extension for another 6 months without fees, penalties, or extra interest. Homeowners should contact their mortgage servicing company directly.

Are there any protections for renters?

Yes. Renters residing in public or assisted housing, or in a home or apartment whose owner has a federally backed mortgage, and who are unable to pay their rent, are protected from eviction for 4 months.

Will I be getting a check from the government to help deal with this crisis?

The CARES Act includes direct payments – up to \$1,200 per adult and \$500 per child – to help them get by during the COVID-19 pandemic. **Anyone who filed a return for tax year 2018 or 2019 doesn't need to do anything to receive these funds.** They will automatically receive the appropriate amount based on the income in their latest tax return.

The Internal Revenue Service announced on Monday, March 30, 2020 that **distribution of economic impact payments will begin in the next three weeks** and will be distributed automatically, with no action required for most people.

- Checks being delivered by direct deposit should arrive within weeks
- Check being delivered by mail should be delivered within months

Who is eligible to receive a Direct Payment and how much will you receive?

Individuals making up to \$75,000 (\$150,000 for married workers) will receive payments of \$1,200 with an additional \$500 payment per minor child. The payments decrease ratably and stop altogether for single workers making more than \$99,000 (\$198,000 for married workers and \$218,000 for a family of four.)

Will these direct payments count towards my income for determining my eligibility for pension, health care, and other VA needs-based benefits?

No. Under the CARES Act, the 2020 Recovery Rebate payment cannot be counted as income when determining a veteran's eligibility for any VA needs-based benefits.

I'm a student and I am worried about losing my GI benefits because of changes in my academic program due to COVID-19. Is there any support for student veterans?

On March 21, 2020, Congress passed, and the President signed into law a bill Rep. Kilmer supported to guarantee that student veterans will continue to receive their GI Bill benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic regardless of any interruption to their academic program. The law relaxes rules that had threatened to reduce the monthly stipends of student veterans whose universities and colleges switched to online-only instruction due to the pandemic. These student veterans will now continue to receive their full GI Bill benefits, including housing, even if their institutions of higher education move all classes online. You can learn more about these new flexibilities [here](#).