

HAWAII VETERAN

Vol. 22, No. 2 State of Hawaii Office of Veterans' Services June 2020

Honoring our Fallen Armed Forces on Memorial Day



Photos by TSgt Andrew Jackson

Governor David Y. Ige and First Lady Dawn Amano-Ige are joined by MG Kenneth Hara; State Adjutant General, COL Stephen Logan; Deputy Adjutant General, CSM Dana Wingad; Senior Enlisted Advisor, Col (Ret) Ronald Han; Director, State Office of Veterans' Services, DeAnn Ferreira, Acting Cemetery Operations Manager and wreath bearer; TSgt (Ret) Mark Crabbe in a special wreath laying ceremony at the Hawaii State Veterans Cemetery in Kaneohe to pay tribute and to honor the sacrifices of our fallen members of the Armed Forces on Memorial Day, May 25, 2020.

OVS has Limited our Face to Face In-Office-Services

Aloha,
The State of Hawaii Office of Veterans' Services has limited our Face to Face In-Office-Services until further notice.

If you are physically here at the Tripler E-Wing, please contact us by phone (below) if you require assistance with:

1. DD Form 214 search
2. Exemptions for car registration or property tax info
3. Appointments with one of our counselors.

If you do not have a phone; please ask to use the public phone at the law enforcement desk.

Phone: (808) 433-0420
Fax: (808) 433-0385
Postal mail:
Office of Veterans' Services
459 Patterson Road
E-Wing, Room 1-A103
Honolulu, HI 96819

Please kindly wait in the hallway chairs provided and one of our office staff will greet you to sign in and do our best to support your request. Please note our offices close for lunch between 1200 hrs-1300 hrs. and at door services will be suspended at this time.

If you need a letter for the DMV, please fax or mail a

copy of your:

1. Car registration
2. VA letter showing you are 100% disabled
3. Driver's license
4. Current mailing address if different from license

Our staff will send you the original letter along with a copy for your records to your mailing address.

If you have a life-threatening emergency, please call 911 immediately.

Thank you for your kind understanding.



Director's Message

Ronald P. Han, Jr., COL USAF (Ret.)

Director State Office of Veterans' Services

Aloha!
On behalf of the entire State Office of Veterans' Services, we hope and pray that each of you and your families are doing well, staying safe and healthy in dealing with the effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic. We have all gone through many transformational changes in our individual and collective day to day lives and regimens as we adhere to the social distancing mandates and restrictions that we have all come to live with to protect the safety of our citizenry.

Our State OVS operations is no exception and appreciate your patience and support as we find ways to develop acceptable alternatives to accomplish our office and outreach services to you are coveted Veterans clientele and your respective families. Many of our Veteran Counselor Corps have now employed tele-counseling and tele-work options to service our customers drastically reducing or eliminating the need for face to face sessions. Our counselors have been extremely busy and are very committed to making these important changes work effectively when making disability claims, helping prepare your upgrade requirements and when dealing with appeal

hearings much of will be going in the same direction with virtual hearings as the main interface for meeting with Veterans and their accredited representatives.

State Veterans Cemetery

On the cemetery side, our personnel staff at the State and respective County levels have had to make changes that have been innumerable and have kept alignment with the Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Administration and with our federal counterparts at the National Cemetery of the Pacific at Punchbowl. Most notably, only direct internments/burials are being conducted and committal services and the rendering of military honors has been suspended mainly because of the 10 person or less mandate for gatherings and restrictions for Dept. of Defense Personnel to include the military honors details to travel to the neighbor islands. Once these restrictions are lifted, we look forward to working with each of the families and military honors details to ensure this important entitlement is carried out with honor and dignity, and to work through the back log as quickly as possible.

State Legislature

With the State legislature closing in March 2020 and again opening up for a brief

period and having special sessions in May 2020, we asked our Veterans to participate and to voice their opinions with written support and testimony for our quest for a second State Home, a 120-bed facility to be located in Kapolei, Hawaii on Oahu. Thanks to your strong advocacy for this additional supplement budget support, the legislature has placed this important budget insert in the upcoming capital improvement project budget. We're hopeful and optimistic it will remain in this supplemental budget like it almost did last year and finally make it across the Governor's desk for his signature and approval. We will keep you all posted on the outcome for this long-awaited and much needed project that can help many eligible disabled Veterans and their loved ones.

Veterans Advisory Board

We also say a fond farewell to our dedicated volunteers on our Governor's State Advisory Board on Veterans Services for two-terms and for eight years: Ann Greenlee, Clay Park, Wilbert Pereira and Chelsea Fernandez your indelible hands are imprinted in innumerable programs throughout our State...you will be sorely missed...our belated Memorial Day wishes to each of you as we remember our fallen...please take care and continue to stay safe and healthy! Aloha and Hui Hou and Mahalo Nui for your Kokua!



Protest activities within our communities and around the nation as a result of the death of George Floyd. In this moment of national despair, our faith in the humanity of others is being tried and we mourn the lives lost. In the midst of these challenging times, the pain that drives the demonstrations occurring across our nation is not only important to recognize, but important to discuss. We are committed to providing safety and the best care for you our Veterans who represent every age, gender, race, and identity equally.

This promise of integrity and commitment must be built on a foundation of **humble listening** and **concrete action**. Therefore, we commit to you, that VAPIHCS will:

- Uphold our **zero-tolerance policy towards racism** or any other forms of discrimination on the part of employees, patients, visitors – and among our TAMC partners and police officers
- Provide **clear and transparent communication** to our Veterans through regular newsletters, social media outreach, and community events
- **Get you the help you need:** The COVID-19 pandemic had already placed significant stress on many of our lives, and, now, the recent events surrounding the killing of George Floyd have only amplified that stress for persons of color and others in our communities. In partnership with our mental health professionals, and VA chaplains, we encourage everyone to seek support as you face these challenging and uncertain times. If you need spiritual assistance or emotional support, call and request a chaplain at: 433-0270 and if you need mental health professional call 1 800-214-1306.

VA Pacific Islands Health Care System (VAPIHCS) will be performing more face to face cases starting June 15, we'll be extending hours to 6:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday to Saturday.

The safety of Veterans and staff is our number one priority. Due to COVID-19 safety measures have been put into place, we are honoring current distancing guidelines while we open more face to face appointments, to minimize any confusion we are asking Veterans with appointments to call to confirm before coming to the facility **1 800-214-1306**. We will continue offering video and telehealth appointments to meet most of our Veterans' health care needs and only offer face to face appointments when it is in the best health interest of the patient.

Veterans will receive a reminder phone call from a VA medical assistant regarding their appointments, we will discontinue sending letters, texts, or postcard reminders at this time.

Safety measures at all VAPIHCS clinics

There are many ways that we are making sure all of our clinics are safe and clean. Here are some of the safety measures we have in place:

- **Masks on.** We are requiring all people to arrive with and wear a facial covering at all times in our clinics. You **must** wear a facial covering before being screened by our staff. We have no authority to allow anyone in our clinics without a mask. This is a VA requirement for all VA facilities.
- Please **do not** wear a mask with a valve. They do not prevent the spread of germs and are not allowed to be worn in the building.

Continued on the next page



Continued from previous page

- **Visitors and children** will not be allowed into our facilities; they will need to wait outside in a designated area or their vehicle. We will continue to allow medical attendants if required to assist the Veteran.

- **Deep cleaning and disinfecting.** Exam room surfaces and equipment are cleaned between each patient visit, and common areas are cleaned multiple times each day

- **Keeping physical distance.** We are arranging lobbies and other common areas to encourage physical distancing and will do our best to get you in and out as quickly as possible so that you can avoid waiting in common areas.

- **Separating patients who might have COVID-19.** Patients with COVID-19 symptoms will be screened either outside in their vehicles or in a designated outside area so that they will not be in common clinic areas and clinic exam space. If you believe you have symptoms associated with COVID-19, please call before arriving.

If you need to be seen face to face, we ask you to remember:

- We recommended parking in the parking garage

- Patients who arrive earlier than 15 minutes before their *scheduled appointment* time may be asked to wait in their vehicle or a designated area outside

- If you need physical assistance, someone can assist you. Please ask our schedulers how you should contact us once you arrive

- Emotional support animals will **NOT** be permitted

- Patients will be asked to pick up any pharmaceuticals in the drive-thru pharmacy **after** their appointment

**June is:
Pride Month**

VA recognizes June as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and related identities (LGBT) Pride Month. VAPIHCS' Spark M. Matsunaga VA Medical Center (ACC) has been designated a LGBTQ Healthcare Equality Leader for the past 6 years and we hope to continue this designation in the forthcoming Healthcare Equality Index (HEI) 2020. We take Pride in Serving All Who Served! Please visit the VAPIHCS LGBT website (www.hawaii.va.gov/services/lgbt/index.asp) for more information or to contact our LGBT Veteran Care Coordinator.

PTSD Awareness Month

June is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Awareness month. Listed below are a few ways to objectively assess symptoms of PTSD.

Have you or someone you know:

- Been through combat?

- Lived through a disaster?

- Experienced sexual, physical, or emotional abuse?

- Been in a serious accident?

- Experienced any other kind of traumatic event?

If You Think You May Have PTSD – More information <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/>

Speak with a mental health professional

Dept. of Defense Expanding Access to Commissaries, Military Exchanges and Recreation Facilities

The Dept. of Defense (DOD) is expanding commissary, military exchange, and morale, welfare, and recreation (MWR) retail privileges on U.S. military installations as specified in the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018, included in the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019.

Starting Jan. 1, 2020, access will expand to include all veterans with service-connected disabilities, veterans who are Purple Heart recipients, veterans who are former prisoners of war, and individuals approved and designated as the primary family caregivers of eligible veterans under the Dept. of Veterans Affairs (VA) Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. While this expansion will extend eligibility to over 4.1 million new patrons, the DOD expects little to no impact on current patrons in most locations. There may be some impact in areas with a high cost of living, but the DOD is preparing to accommodate all new patrons.

“These new privileges recognize the service and sacrifice of these veterans and those that care for them,” A.T. Johnston, deputy assistant secretary of defense for Military Community and Family Policy, said. “If you or someone you know might be eligible for these privileges, share the message,” Johnston said. “Please help us ensure these veterans and caregivers receive the privileges they’ve been granted.”

New patrons eligible solely under this authority should be aware that the law requires that DOD charge them a small user fee to offset the increased expense incurred by the Dept. of the Treasury for processing commercial credit or debit cards used for purchases at commissary stores.

The DOD is finalizing the details for these new privileges with the VA, Homeland Security and the Treasury. Information will be

announced soon regarding installation access and the authentication process for these privileges.

To learn more about the commissary, military exchange and MWR expansion, visit <https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Factsheets/expanding-access-fact-sheet.pdf>

For former service members who have not yet sought disability compensation from VA, visit <https://www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/>

Medal of Honor recipients and Veterans with 100% service-connected disability ratings are already eligible under existing DOD policy.

Caregivers

On Jan. 1, individuals approved and designated as the primary family caregiver of an eligible veteran under the PCAFC will be eligible for these privileges. Only Veterans who were seriously injured in the line of duty on or after 9/11/2001 are eligible for the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. VA will begin expanding eligibility for the PCAFC in Summer of 2020.

For information about primary family caregivers in the PCAFC, visit <https://www.caregiver.va.gov/>

Continued on page 7



Items we delivered to Maluhia Adult Day Health Center on Jan. 23, 2020. Their Senior Social Worker, Jeri has been in contact with Mr. Takeya who will be making the presentation to Mr. Nomura today...Mr. Takeya is very appreciative to MG Hara and COL Logan for supporting his short notice request.

Photo by Maluhia Adult Day Health Center

Lanai Cemetery Open House

**By Nancy Schubert Yurow
Veteran Services Counselor**

Citizens gathered at the Lanai Veteran Cemetery Open House on December 27, 2019 to mark the completion of a half million dollar cemetery renovation project. The new State Adjutant Major General Kenneth Hara and his team officiated at the event, sharing remarks with the attending Lanai veterans and community members. They thanked the veterans and many partners in this project including the Department of Defense (DOD), Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Office of Veterans' Services (OVS) and Maui County Department of Public Works (MDPW).



Photos by Krystal Kawabata

Individual contributors mentioned were chief engineer Warren Unemori, OVS Dir. Ronald Han, MDPW lead John Smith and Lanai District Supervisor Robbie Sanchez. The remarks were followed by a

cemetery tour which encompassed the many improvements – a new fence and sign, a water tank and pump system, a photovoltaic system, 3 new flag poles and a trash enclosure.



Thank you to everyone for your participation and support of the Lanai Veterans Cemetery Open House that took place on December 27, 2019. This event would not have been possible without your commitment and dedication to serving our veterans both past and present.

The veterans on Lanai have been requesting cemetery improvements for quite some time and worked with OVS to help make it happen. The OVS outreach counselor began talking with veterans about possible improvements in 2010 and Dir. Ronald Han began actively working with the VA on a cemetery improvement grant in 2011. As soon as the project implementation was finally underway in 2018, a small but dedicated group of Lanai veterans and citizens met every quarter to discuss and share their input toward the project. This Open House was truly a culmination of their hard work and persistence over the years.

Cut out and mail responses in a stamped envelope to:

Office of Veterans' Services
ATTN: HI VETERAN NEWSLETTER
E-Wing, Room 1-A103
459 Patterson Road
Honolulu, HI 96819-1522

Email us at:
ovs@hawaii.gov

Email Address: _____

Yes, I would enjoy a FREE copy of the Hawaii Veteran Newsletter.
Please add your email or mailing address.

Paper Copy

Digital Copy

Mailing Address

OVS is overhauling the Hawaii Veteran Newsletter. We need your help!

OVS is starting a new Veteran Newsletter database. If you would like to receive the Hawaii Veteran Newsletter please email or mail the bottom portion of this page to let us know how you would like to receive your newsletter.

Mailing expenses constitute approximately half the cost of printing and mailing the newsletter. In an effort to con-

tinue providing you with the newsletter we are asking for your cooperation in accepting the newsletter electronically (by email) if at all possible.

We understand that some of you do not have direct access to a computer or email. If this is the case, our branch offices will carry hard copies of the newsletter that you can pick up for free. If you would

like to continue receiving a hard copy of the newsletter, mail the bottom portion of this page to let us know how you would like to receive the newsletter. You can also email us at ovs@hawaii.gov

Your assistance in this new endeavor will be greatly appreciated. Thank you very much for your continued participation.

DOD Expanding Access to Commissaries

Continued from page 5

Required credentials

Veterans

Veterans must possess a Veteran Health Identification Card (VHIC) that displays "PURPLE HEART," "FORMER POW," or "SERVICE CONNECTED" below the photo on the front of the card. If an eligible Veteran is not eligible to obtain a VHIC, the VA Health Eligibility Center Form H623A indicating placement in VA health care priority group 8E, paired with an acceptable credential, like a REAL ID-compliant driver's license or U.S. passport, will be accepted. For information on enrolling in VA health care, visit www.va.gov/healthbenefits/enroll.

Medal of Honor recipients and Veterans with 100% service-connected disability ratings are eligible for DoD credentials under DoD policy.

Caregivers

Eligible caregivers will receive an eligibility letter from VA's Office of Community Care. If you are a primary family caregiver under the PCAFC and lose your eligibility letter, please call 1-877-733-7927 to request a replacement. Please allow two weeks for processing.

Visit <https://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vhic> for information regarding eligibility for the VHIC and the application process.