CALVET
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

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NEWSLETTER

All veterans are reminded that the fastest way to learn about and secure the benefits they have earned is by visiting their local County Veterans Service Office. A listing of these offices is available at www.cacvso.org.

SEPTEMBER 2014

In-State Tuition at Public Colleges Soon Available to GI Bill Recipients

There's good news for Veterans headed to college. A bipartisan bill signed into law on August 7, 2014, grants GI Bill recipients automatic in-state tuition at public colleges beginning in the fall of 2015.

The new Federal law, Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014, could save Veteran families tens of thousands of dollars since in-state status also will be available to Veteran spouses and children.

Currently, California-resident students attending University of California (UC) campuses pay tuition of $12,192 per year. Nonresident students pay an additional $22,878. California State Universities (CSU) and California Community Colleges (CCC) also charge out-of-state students additional non-resident tuition.

Students often have to live in state for a year or more before establishing residency for in-state tuition. Military members deployed to a war zone find it especially difficult to establish residency.

Following the bill's signing, California Assemblymember Rocky Chavez announced he would amend Assembly Bill 13 to bring California colleges into compliance with the Federal new law. His bill would request the UCs, CSUs and CCCs to grant in-state tuition to all persons using GI Bill funds regardless of their residency status. Nationally, 28 states already offer similar residency waivers.

Prop 41 Funds Develop Affordable Housing for Homeless and Low Income Vets

The passage of Proposition 41 in June 2014, created the new Veterans Housing and Homelessness Prevention (VHHP) Program, providing $600 million in bond funds to allow Veterans to access and maintain housing stability utilizing a variety of affordable housing options.

CalVet is working with the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) and the California Housing Finance Agency to design and implement the program to administer the funds.

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Secretary's Message

During the month of September, Veteran recognition efforts, such as Prisoners of War / Missing in Action (POW/MIA) Remembrance Day, Hispanic Veterans Week, and the U.S. Air Force birthday take place. These events keep CalVet busy as we strive to acknowledge the significant contributions of our California Veterans throughout the Golden State.

Besides participating in local Stand Downs and the League of California Cities annual conference in Los Angeles, CalVet hosted and sponsored two events that significantly impact our Veterans community.

September 14-17, CalVet hosted the 2014 National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) conference in San Diego. NASDVA's conference brings together the leadership of the Departments of Veterans Affairs from each of the 50 states, Washington D.C., American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

The NASDVA conference provided a forum for national Veterans service leaders to identify and discuss the needs and challenges of our Veterans and how best to address them.. Moving forward, State legislators and other decision makers will use NASDVA conference outcomes to make informed policy decisions for all our Veterans.

On September 26 and 27, CalVet is co-hosting the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Leadership Forum to identify, explore, and discuss the spectrum of issues and needs specific to LGBT Servicemembers and Veterans by assembling leaders who are serving the LGBT, Servicemember, and Veteran communities.

Discussions will identify:

- Programs currently available
- Best practices/initiatives for duplication
- Gaps and exclusions in services
- Potential programs/initiatives

During the Forum, CalVet, in partnership with the California Research Bureau, will work to develop informational papers on services (or lack of services) for LGBT Veterans in health, housing, employment, education, and legal. This effort is intended to bridge the information gap that exists between Veterans and those benefits they have earned. This forum will feature discussions on housing, employment, healthcare, and education benefits and services that will help develop multiple avenues of communications to enable better access to services and facilitate greater access to earned benefits.

Serving the needs of our Veterans remains CalVet's mission. Looking for innovative ways to meet these needs is always our goal. It can never be said enough: Veterans, thank you for your service. You are what makes California great.

Sincerely,

Peter J. Gravett

Peter J. Gravett, Major General (Ret)
Secretary, California Department of Veterans Affairs

USDVA's Suicide Prevention Efforts Save Lives

People experience emotional and mental health crises in response to a wide range of situations. For Veterans, experiences in military service can heighten these crises. Sometimes, a crisis may involve thoughts of suicide. Tragically, 22 Veterans complete suicide in our country every day.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) is working hard to prevent Veteran suicides, and their efforts are saving lives! Since the Veterans Crisis Line launched in 2007, it has answered more than 1.25 million calls, 175,000 online chats, and 24,000 texts. Even more important, dedicated USDVA mental health professionals have "rescued" 39,426 suicidal Veterans who had an imminent plan.

The Veterans Crisis Line offers Veterans and their loved ones free, confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year—even if callers are not registered with the USDVA or enrolled in USDVA health care. The mental health professionals at the Veterans Crisis Line are specially trained and experienced in helping Veterans of all ages and circumstances. That includes Veterans coping with mental health issues never addressed to recently returned Veterans struggling with relationships or the transition back to civilian life.

Veterans and their loved ones can call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, chat online at www.VeteransCrisisLine.net, or send a text message to 838255 to receive support, even if they are not registered with USDVA or enrolled in USDVA health care.

VA also provides support for Service members through the Military Crisis Line. Service members and their families and friends can call and text the Veterans Crisis Line numbers and can chat online at www.MilitaryCrisisLine.net/Chat.

USDVA offers additional suicide prevention resources, including information about the warning signs of suicide, local suicide prevention coordinators, and educational materials for the whole family. Find those resources at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention.

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In July, the agencies sought stakeholder feedback about the program Framework by holding six meetings around the State involving hundreds of attendees, and a several-week online comment opportunity. You may view the program Framework created by the three agencies at www.hcd.ca.gov/fa/vets.

The next step in the process is to create Program Guidelines, which will also be available for public comment. Another round of stakeholder meetings are scheduled for fall after the Program Guidelines are released.

In December of 2014, HCD will make applications available to affordable housing developers to request funds to support affordable housing development projects with units set aside for Veterans. The Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) will allocate $75 million across our State.

The December 2014 NOFA is only the first of several intended to allocate the $600 million. This exciting opportunity represents the first time voters in California approved funding specifically to support housing for homeless or low-income Veterans and their families. In 2013, there were an estimated 15,000 homeless Veterans living in California.

According to the legislation that authorized Proposition 41, the VHHP Program funds may be used only for housing development and for housing project operating subsidies, not for Veterans services. Affordable housing developers will partner with Veterans services providers to create Supportive Housing, which will take disabled homeless Veterans off the street and provide housing and services that will help the Veterans remain stable and improve self-sufficiency.

CalVet is working with community partners to ensure that housing developers partner with competent and successful service providers to ensure successful outcomes for our Veterans. If you have questions about the Veterans Housing and Homelessness Prevention Program, contact Diane Luther at (916) 503-8309 or diane.luther@calvet.ca.gov.

New Administrator Appointed at Chula Vista Veterans Home

On Thursday, July 31, 2014, Governor Brown appointed Lael Hepworth of Orting, WA, as administrator at our California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) Veterans Home of California, Chula Vista.

"We are pleased to have Mr. Hepworth join our Veterans Homes team," said Diane Vanderpot, Undersecretary, Veterans Homes of California. "He brings with him many years of senior health care experience and, as a former service member, can relate with Chula Vista's Veterans and understand their needs."

Hepworth has served as superintendent at the Washington Soldiers Home since 2013. He was an administrator at Meadow Park-Extendicare from 2011 to 2013, at Nehalem Valley Care Center in 2011, at Prestige Care from 2010 to 2011 and at Avamere Rehabilitation of Salem from 2006 to 2010. Hepworth was senior business and application analyst at Boise Cascade from 2001 to 2005, and he served in the U.S. Army National Guard from 1993-2002.

USDVA "Rescue Bill" Signed into Law

In the wake of disturbing revelations about serious problems within the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA), Congress passed a complex, $17 billion "rescue bill." Known formally as the Veterans' Access to Care through Choice, Accountability, and Transparency Act of 2014 and signed into law August 7, 2014, the law is intended to improve access to and quality of care for Veterans at USDVA facilities.

To improve access to and quality of care for Veterans, the law:

- Requires USDVA to offer an authorization to receive non-USDVA care to any Veteran who was enrolled in the USDVA health care system as of August 1, 2014, or who is a newly discharged combat Veteran if such Veteran is unable to secure an appointment at a USDVA medical facility within 30 days (or a future published goal established by USDVA); or the Veteran resides more than 40 miles from the nearest USDVA medical facility, with certain exceptions;
- Requires an independent assessment of USDVA medical care and establishes a Congressional Commission on Care to evaluate access to care through the USDVA health care system;
- Extends the USDVA Access Received Closer to Home pilot program for two years;
- Extends for three years a pilot program to provide rehabilitation, quality of life, and community integration services to Veterans with complex-mild to severe traumatic brain injury (see Traumatic Brain Injury Pilot Program Spared article also in this issue.);
- Improves the delivery of care to Veterans who have experienced military sexual trauma as well as care for Native Hawaiian and Native American Veterans.

To expand USDVA's internal capacity to provide timely care to Veterans, the law:

- Provides $5 billion to USDVA to increase access to care through the hiring of physicians and other medical staff and by improving USDVA's physical infrastructure;
- Authorizes 27 major medical facility leases in 18 states and Puerto Rico;
- Authorizes USDVA to fire or demote Senior Executive Service (SES) employees and Title 38 SES equivalent employees for poor performance or misconduct.

To provide real accountability for incompetent or corrupt senior managers, the law:

- Authorizes USDVA to fire or demote Senior Executive Services (SES) employees and Title 38 SES equivalent employees for poor performance or misconduct.
- Reduce funding for bonuses available to USDVA employees by $40 million each year through fiscal year 2024.

The new law also improves education benefits for Veterans and dependents by:

- Requiring public colleges to provide in-state tuition to Veterans and eligible dependents for the school to remain eligible to receive GI Bill education payments;
- Expanding the Sgt. Fry Scholarship Program to provide full Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to spouses of servicemembers who died in the line of duty after 9/11.

Source: House Committee on Veterans Affairs website

Is the New GI Bill Working?

In response to issues raised in Congressional hearings and reports, and in response to increasing complaints from Veterans attending private-postsecondary schools, on April 27, 2012, President Obama issued an executive order establishing principles of excellence for educational institutions serving servicemembers, Veterans, spouses, and other family members. The Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee (HELP) then launched a two-year investigation into the for-profit college sector.

On July 30, 2014, HELP published its findings in a report titled, "Is the New G.I. Bill Working?: For-Profit Colleges Increasing Enrollment and Federal Funds." The executive summary of that report follows.

Executive Summary

Almost three years ago, the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee determined that eight of the top 10 recipients of the Veterans' educational benefits under the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits were large, publicly traded companies that operate for-profit colleges. A new analysis shows that in the program's fourth year, enrollment of Veterans in for-profit colleges has again increased sharply, in tandem with a steep decline in the share of Veterans enrolling in public institutions, even though overall student enrollment in for-profit colleges has declined.

Taxpayers continue to spend twice as much on average to send a Veteran to a for-profit college although HELP Committee analysis shows that up to 66 percent of the overall students who enrolled in these for-profit colleges in 2008-2009 withdrew without a degree or diploma. Additionally, some companies operating for-profit colleges appear to be increasingly depending on Post-9/11 GI Bill funds to comply with federal requirements intended to ensure that these companies do not become overly reliant on federal education resources.

- For-profit colleges received $1.7 billion in Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits during the 2012-13 academic year—almost as much as the total cost of the program just four years later.
- Eight of the top 10 recipients of Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits are large, publicly-traded companies that operate for-profit colleges. These eight companies have received $2.9 billion in taxpayer dollars to enroll Veterans in their for-profit colleges over the past four years, including 23 percent of all Post-9/11 GI Bill Benefits ($975 million) in 2012-13.
- Amongst the top recipients of Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits is Corinthian Colleges, Inc. Corinthian received $186 million in Post-9/11 GI Bill funds from 2009 to 2013, yet recently announced it was in such severe financial distress that it would close or sell all campuses. In all, seven of the eight companies are currently under investigation by state attorneys general or Federal agencies for deceptive and misleading recruiting or other possible violations of Federal law.
- While the total number of Veterans attending all colleges on the Post-9/11 GI Bill grew rapidly between 2009-10 and 2012-13, both the number of Veterans attending for-profit colleges and the amount of benefits these colleges received increased more than in other sectors of higher education.
- The percentage of Veterans attending a public college has declined precipitously, from 62 percent in 2009 to just 50 percent in 2013. During the same period, the percentage of Veterans enrolling in for-profit colleges increased from 23 to 31 percent of total enrollees.
- Although overall student enrollment has decreased at each of the eight top for-profit GI Bill beneficiaries, their enrollment of Veterans has dramatically increased during the same period.
- Taxpayers are paying twice as much on average to send a Veteran to a for-profit college for a year compared to the cost at a public college or university ($7,972 versus $3,914).
- The federal government does not currently track how Veterans are performing at different types of colleges. However, overall student outcomes provided by the companies to the HELP Committee for students enrolling between 2008 and 2009 give ample reason for concern. At the for-profit colleges currently receiving the most benefits, up to 66 percent of students withdrew without a degree or diploma.

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CalVet Library Partnership Gets International Attention

By John Kraft, CalVet Veterans Services Division Outreach Manager and Mirtha Villarreal-Younger, CalVet Deputy Secretary, Minority Veterans Affairs

Recently, CalVet teamed up with long-standing collaborative partner, The California State Library, to conduct a live webinar, "Veterans Connect @ the Library." Though designed as a primer for the ongoing Veteran resource center project training volunteers to staff kiosks at select California public library branches, the interactive online session was offered to interested libraries and library sciences professionals throughout the nation.

Because the entire presentation was archived on the web and accessible to any interested public entity, a government library official in the Republic of the Philippines noticed the project. The official expressed the library's desire to collaborate with CalVet to learn best practices for Veteran outreach through libraries. The effort is intended to reach the over 40,000 U.S. Veterans who currently reside in that country. This would clearly be a win for our Veterans beyond the borders of our state, and CalVet stands ready to assist in this important international endeavor to help all of our nation's Veterans.

The Filipino community has a proud history of service in our United States Armed Forces. In 1941, the Imperial Japanese Navy attacked Pearl Harbor and the Philippines. Filipino Americans, like other Americans, attempted to volunteer for military service, but were not allowed to enlist since they were neither citizens nor resident aliens. Following a change in legislation, it was announced on 3 January 1942, that Filipinos would be permitted to volunteer, and could be drafted, for military service; in California, almost half of the male Filipino American population enlisted.[(1)(2)]

More than 250,000 Filipino soldiers responded to President Roosevelt's call to arms and later fought under the American flag during World War II. Upon the surrender of the Bataan Peninsula, more than one-third of those soldiers, approximately 75,000, took part in the Bataan Death March. The Bataan March was a 65-mile forced march to prison camps. The prisoners were treated harshly and those too weak to continue on the march were killed. Approximately 10,000 Filipino and 650 American soldiers died as a result of the march.

To honor the sacrifices of our brave men and women, the annual Bataan Memorial Death March, a 26.2-mile march/run is scheduled in White Sands New Mexico on March 22, 2015. If you are interested in participating, registration is now open at www.bataanmarch.com. If you would like to form a CalVet team, contact Mirtha Villarreal-Younger at mirtha.villarreal@calvet.ca.gov.

(1) Robert Barkan, Elliot (1999). A Nation of Peoples: A Sourcebook on America's Multicultural Heritage. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group. p. 210. ISBN 978-0-313-29961-2. Retrieved 10 May 2011.

(2) Jump up ^ Frank, Sarah (2005). Filipinos in America. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Lerner Publications. p. 37. ISBN 978-0-8225-4873-7. Retrieved 10 May 2011.

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- Between 39 and 57 percent of the programs offered by four of the companies receiving the most Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits would fail to meet the proposed gainful employment rule, suggesting that the students who attend these institutions do not earn enough to pay back the debt they take on.
- Some large companies that operate for-profit colleges appear to be taking advantage of a loophole to use Post-9/11 GI Bill funds to comply with the federal requirement that no more than 90 percent of revenues come from federal student aid.

Full report, www.ausn.org/Portals/0/pdfs/Is%20The%20New%20GI%20Bill%20Working%20HELP%20Report%207-30-2014.pdf.

CalVet Launches Veterans Service Provider Survey

By John Kraft
CalVet Veterans Services Division

CalVet is creating an application to identify Veteran service providers interested in being included in the CalVet website database. If accepted after completing the application and vetting process, CalVet will link the organizations to the various services searched for on the CalVet website and push that information to Veterans, family members, and stakeholders who have indicated a service-category interest in their myCalVet profile.

If your organization provides local services to California Veterans and would like to be considered for inclusion on the CalVet website, please complete an application today at www.surveymonkey.com/s/M8BPJSF.

my CalVet

Receive veteran benefit information specific to your needs! Register with myCalVet today!

myCalVet provides veterans and their families the opportunity to create a customized profile which targets the benefits, resources, and services available in their community and throughout the State.

WWW.CALVET.CA.GOV

CalVet to Host DVBE Veterans Business Forum

CalVet invites Veteran business owners to attend its DVBE Veteran Business Forum on October 1, 2014. For complete information about the event, please contact John Anderson at john.anderson@calvet.ca.gov, (916) 657-9354 or Robert Beamer at robert.beamer@calvet.ca.gov, (916) 503-8375. This forum represents greater collaboration between Federal, state, and private entities and the first time they will work together in putting government contracts in the hands of our disabled Veterans.

If you are a disabled Veteran business owner, you can increase your business opportunities with California state government agencies by becoming a certified Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise (DVBE).

The State of California established the DVBE Program to increase business opportunities for service-connected, disabled Veteran entrepreneurs. State agencies are required to award at least 3 percent of their annual contracting dollars to certified DVBEs. The program creates a more level playing field for DVBEs competing for state contracts.

To qualify for DVBE certification:

- Disabled Veterans must have a service-connected disability of at least 10% declared by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs or the U.S. Department of Defense.
- One or more disabled Veterans living in California must own at least 51% of the business.
- Disabled Veterans must have an established, operational, and active business prior to submitting an application.

Once you become DVBE certified:

- The California Department of General Services' (DGS) adds your business to the database state and local agencies use to find DVBEs.
- At no cost, DVBE subcontractors may place ads on the DGS website to find contracting opportunities and work with prime contractors.
- Certification does not guarantee the award of state government contracts.

For more information on the DVBE certification process and how to do business with the State of California, go to www.dgs.ca.gov/pd/getcertified.

HomeStrong Heroes Home Donation Program

HomeStrong USA, a nonprofit community development organization, is giving honorably discharged Veterans and active-duty military personnel a chance to win a newly renovated, mortgage-free home in Lake Elsinore, California. The giveaway is HomeStrong's way of honoring and remembering their service and sacrifice of those who served and continue to serve in America's armed forces.

The contest rules are simple: Each entrant must complete an entry form and provide personal and service background information. An essay written by the entrant stating why he or she is most deserving of the free home must accompany each entry. The Selection Committee will judge each entry based on the completeness of the entry form and the originality and personalization of the essay.

Since its creation in 1999, HomeStrong has given away 14 homes across the country, five of which were in California. One or two more home giveaways are being considered in California later this year.

For your chance to win, download the form at http://homestrongusa.org/housingprograms/homes-for-heroes/apply and submit your entry and copy of your DD214, if applicable, by October 3, 2014.

HomeStrong will notify the lucky winner prior to November 8, 2014.

USDVA Announces Grants to Help Homeless Veterans and their Families

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) announced $300 million in grants to help homeless Veterans and their families nationwide through its Supporting Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program. California will receive $37,669,440 to support 33 Veteran service organizations.

The SSVF program is groundbreaking in that, along with helping homeless Veterans and their families secure housing, the program offers resources to prevent vulnerable families from becoming homeless in the first place. SSVF also provides essential supports that increase the efficacy of employment programs and will help tens of thousands of low income Veterans in California's tough housing market remain stable and spare them from the social consequences of homelessness and poverty.

Grant recipient organizations are gearing up and looking forward to increasing direct assistance to Veterans this October through this vital surge funding. You may view the entire SSVF awardee list at www.va.gov/HOMELESS/ssvf/docs/2014_SSVF_Award_List.pdf.

Creating a "Survivors File" for Your Spouse, Partner, or Family Members

By Joe Wright
Kings County Veterans Service Officer

Whether your marriage was in the early days of your military service or long after retirement, one of the most difficult situations your loved ones will ever face is dealing with your death. Nothing can make this transition easy, but ensuring your survivors are prepared can help.

Survivors will face a mound of paperwork required to tie up loose ends after your death, so getting organized before the need arises is a good idea. All of your important military papers won't help your survivors file the necessary forms if they are in an unlabeled file or drawer or on a computer protected by a password that only you know.

For example, your funeral wishes can't be honored if they are not known or if the cemetery you selected years ago is now closed to new burials. To make the transition easier and to ensure your survivors can do what needs to be done after your death, consider creating a "Survivors File" now.

The file you create should include your Social Security Number and a copy of your discharge papers. It should also include information on any U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) payments and any claims filed with the USDVA by you or on your behalf. If your are retired from the military, include a copy of your latest Retiree Account Statement and highlight the section that shows whether you enrolled in the Survivor Benefit Plan. If you did enroll, highlight the category of beneficiary for which you enrolled (for example, spouse, partner, former spouse or partner).

If you have life insurance, include a copy of your policy along with current information on what number to call to report your death. Make a note that your spouse or partner will need to get a new identification card and must notify the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) ((800) 538-9552) of your death.

The file should also include a copy of your will and information about where to find the original document. If you were married before, indicate whether any benefits will be going to your former spouse, partner, or children.

If you are receiving military retired pay, your surviving spouse or partner will need to contact the Defense Finance and Accounting Service's Retired Pay Center at (800) 321-1080 upon your death. Make note of that. If you are receiving USDVA disability compensation, your survivors will need to contact the USDVA at (800) 827-1000 and the local Social Security office after your death, so make note of that as well.

The local County Veterans Service Office (CVSO) can assist survivors with all of these matters. To find the office nearest you, go to www.cacvso.org. Click on Contact Us and then click on your county of residence. You may also call (844) SERV-VET ((844) 737-8838). Key in your zip code when prompted, and your call will be transferred immediately to the CVSO nearest you.

Recruiting, Hiring, and Retraining Veterans and Others with Disabilities

By Cheryl Stern
ICV Employment Workgroup Coordinator

The Interagency Council on Veterans (ICV) works every day on behalf of all California Veterans. The Employment Workgroup focuses on ways to help Veterans find civilian jobs after the active duty experience.

As part of the ICV effort to "coordinate strong coalitions to keep the conversations flowing and the accomplishments growing," the ICV would like to share some information about the Employer Assistance and Resource Network (EARN). EARN is working to share information with employers about how to better recruit and retain individuals with disabilities and Veterans. One EARN publication shares how employers can create an inclusionary workplace and publish information about inclusionary hiring practices.

An inclusionary workplace is one in which technology and open, honest discussion are used to empower employers to be leaders in the effort to include persons with disabilities and Veterans. Imagine a workplace in which the focus was including rather than excluding people who need a reasonable accommodation, a little help by the way of technology, to do a job.

EARN uses the term "professional development" to describe training resources available to human resource staff to transform a company's workplace and web presence into one that includes people with varying abilities. If the human resources department is contracted out, EARN provides resources especially developed for those dedicated to hiring, promotion and retention. EARN also provides resources for Technical Assistance and Reasonable Accommodations.

Job search often begins with an online research. Does your organization include an explicit statement about inclusive hiring practices in its online publications? If not, EARN can help. EARN can also help with external partnerships. Take a look at EARN's Community Resources page for more information. It could make a significant difference in one person's life, maybe yours.

For more information about EARN and the resources it provides, go to www.askearn.org. For more information about the ICV, go to www.icv.ca.gov.

New Regulations Automate Burial Payments for Veterans' Survivors

New burial regulations, which became effective July 7, 2014, now allow the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) to pay automatically the maximum amount allowable under law to most eligible surviving spouses more quickly and efficiently, without the need for a written application. Under former regulations, USDVA paid burial benefits on a reimbursement basis, which required survivors to submit receipts for relatively small one-time payments that USDVA generally paid at the maximum amount permitted by law.

This automation enables USDVA to pay a non-service-connected or service-connected burial allowance to an estimated 62,000 eligible surviving spouses out of a projected 140,000 claimants for burial benefits in 2014. USDVA will pay surviving spouses upon notice of the Veteran's death using information already in USDVA systems. The burial allowance for a non-service-connected death is $300, and $2,000 for a death connected to military service.

This revised regulation will further expedite the delivery of these benefits to surviving spouses, reduce the volume of claims requiring manual processing, and potentially make available resources for other activities that benefit Veterans and their survivors.

For more information on USDVA monetary burial benefits, go to www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/claims-special-burial.asp.

Traumatic Brain Injury Pilot Program Spared

The Veterans' Access to Care through Choice, Accountability, and Transparency Act of 2014, signed into law August 7, 2014, includes landmark reforms to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA). The new law saves a program that helps Veterans with traumatic brain injury. The law extends for three years a pilot program to provide rehabilitation, quality of life, and community integration services to Veterans with complex-mild to severe traumatic brain injury (TBI). The pilot program was originally slated to expire in October 2014.

TBI can occur when something outside the body hits the head with significant force. Whether it is a head hitting a windshield, impact from a fall, or trauma from a nearby blast or explosion, TBI can cause changes in a person's ability to think, control emotions, walk, or speak. TBI can also affect one's sense of sight or hearing.

Because of the widespread use of improvised explosive devices during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the U.S. Department of Defense reports more than 300,000 servicemembers have suffered TBI since 2000. TBI has earned the grim moniker "signature wound" of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The USDVA pilot program saved by the new law is called Assisted Living for Veterans with Traumatic Brain Injury. The program provides a variety of rehabilitation services which are customized to meet each Veteran's unique challenges.

Services include occupational and speech therapies, physical therapy, and psychological counseling and residential assistance. The program includes the most current best practices in TBI rehabilitation and the customized treatment plans help Veterans and others diagnosed with TBI relearn how to function at home and in their community, regain work-related skills, cope with day-to-day and long-term psychological challenges and regain daily functioning skills.

For more information about TBI, visit the USDVA Veterans Health Library at www.Veteranshealthlibrary.org/Rehab/TraumaticBrainInjury.

Resource Available for Veterans in the Film or Television Industry

Veterans in Film and Television (VFT) is a nonprofit networking organization that unites current and former members of the military working in the film and television industry. The organization also caters to those who are interested in getting into the business.

Created and operated by Veterans, VFT makes it simple and easy for the film and television industry to connect with the Veteran community working in it. It is a resource for the film and television industry to find and hire Veterans. It is also an organization for Veterans who work, or aspire to work, in film and television to interact with, support, and learn from each other.

By using the VFT online Veteran directory, one can search for Veterans who work, or are aspiring to work, in all areas of film & television and contact them directly through their personal VFT profile. Veterans who are actors, writers, technical consultants, gaffers, grips, students, etc. are all in the VFT directory. Best of all, this service is FREE for both the user and the Veteran!

For information about how you can work with Veterans in Film and Television, go to www.vftla.org.

New Final Resting Place for Yurok Tribe Veterans

Klamath, a beautiful, unincorporated rural area in Del Norte County at the uppermost western corner of California, is on US Route 101, just inland from the mouth of the winding Klamath River. Klamath is now home to a new $3.3 million Veterans cemetery for the Yurok Indian Tribe.

"Since the First World War, Yurok men and women have valiantly served in the American armed forces," say tribal officials. "According to the most accurate statistics, approximately 90 percent of Yurok men of appropriate age served in World Wars I and II. A great number of Yurok women served, too. Large portions of the Yurok population also served in Vietnam and are currently serving in Afghanistan and Iraq. According to the Department of Defense, more Native Americans serve in the United States military service per capita than any other ethnic group. Many of these Veterans have already expressed a desire to call the Yurok Tribe Veterans Cemetery their final resting place."

The new cemetery, located on switchback nine of Bald Hills Road, includes a committal shelter, full-casketed gravesites, cremains gravesites, and a memorial walkway. The cemetery will serve more than 465 Native American Veterans and their families. For more information, including project renderings, go to www.yuroktribe.org/departments/planning/VeteransCemeteryProject.htm.

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** Not all buyers will qualify.