

## **Minnesota Veterans and Coronavirus**

The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) in St. Paul is now accepting applications from Minnesota Veterans who have been financially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. MDVA will award one-time financial relief grants in the amount of \$1,000. Funding is available for both Disaster Relief Grants and Special Needs Grants.

“We are grateful to Governor Walz and the Minnesota Legislature for their support of Minnesota Veterans in the recently enacted Emergency Response package,” said MDVA Commissioner Larry Herke. “Minnesota Veterans have served our country in many past conflicts, so it is only right that we support them now during this challenging time.”

Eligible Applicants must be: A Veteran or the surviving spouse of a deceased Veteran as defined by MN Statute 197.447; A Minnesota resident, and; negatively financial impacted by COVID-19. To apply for the Disaster Relief Grant: Contact your local County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO) or MDVA Field Operations Representative at FO.MDVA@state.mn.us OR apply online at [MinnesotaVeteran.org/COVIDRelief](https://MinnesotaVeteran.org/COVIDRelief).

On the national level, the VA is experiencing some of the same difficulties other hospitals in the nation are experiencing. Some of those are staff shortages, lack of needed supplies and no defined plan of response to a national crisis. The VA didn't release its COVID-19 response plan until 27 March. The VA announced that it is suspending all actions on Veteran debts and extending repayment terms on existing VA moneys owed the VA by Veterans. The VA is continuing to provide services to all Veterans but has asked that whenever possible for Veterans to use the on-line application to communicate with the VA. It works, I've received replies in less than 24 hours for all of my questions. If you have an elective medical appointment and are able to postpone it, please do so. The VA is working with local health care facilities in providing beds for patients who are not Veterans. For instance, the VA opened 50 beds to non-Veteran patients in New York City. “Veterans come first,” VA Secretary Wilkie said. “It's only when we have that excess capacity would we open up our facilities for people outside of VA.” The VA has also severely restricted who can visit Veterans in VA hospitals and assisted living homes. The VA is still supporting their Choice program where Veterans can receive health care from non-VA hospitals, but due to the huge demand on other hospitals, many are not taking new VA patients.

As of 6 April, the VA reported 2,866 positive Veterans cases of COVID-19. Fargo reported 1 inpatient and 1 outpatient, Minneapolis reported 3 inpatient and 11 outpatient cases and Sioux Falls, SD reported 2 outpatient cases. The nearest VA hospital to me in Arizona is in Tucson reported 4 inpatient and 6 outpatient cases. The VA reported a total of 125 deaths at VA hospitals.