

VA Secretary Peake: Honoring Commitment to Newest Combat Veterans

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WASHINGTON — Military veterans who have served in combat since Nov. 11, 1998, including veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, are now eligible for five years of free medical care for most conditions from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). This measure increases a two-year limit that has been in effect nearly a decade.

“By their service and their sacrifice, America’s newest combat veterans have earned this special eligibility period for VA’s world-class health care,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake.

The five-year deadline has no effect upon veterans with medical conditions related to their military service. Veterans may apply at any time after their discharge from the military -- even decades later -- for medical care for service-connected health problems.

The new provision, part of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2008 signed by President Bush on Jan. 28, 2008, applies to care in a VA hospital, outpatient clinic or nursing home. It also extends VA dental benefits -- previously limited to 90 days after discharge for most veterans -- to 180 days.

Combat veterans who were discharged between Nov. 11, 1998 and Jan. 16, 2003, and who never took advantage of VA’s health care system, have until Jan. 27, 2011 to qualify for free VA health care.

The five-year window is also open to activated Reservists and members of the National Guard, if they served in a theater of combat operations after Nov. 11, 1998, and were discharged under other than dishonorable conditions.

Veterans who take advantage of this five-year window to receive VA health care can continue to receive care after five years, although they may have to pay co-payments for medical problems unrelated to their military service. Co-payments range from \$8 for a 30-day supply of prescription medicine to \$1,024 for the first 90 days of inpatient care each

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111
Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

year.