



**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

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News Release

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VA Cares for Combat Theater Veterans

WASHINGTON – Military personnel who recently served in a combat zone are eligible for two years of free medical care from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for most conditions.

"We are able to help the newest generation of combat veterans serving in Afghanistan and engaged in the war against terrorism in ways not available to previous generations of veterans," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi.

Most veterans must prove that a medical problem is connected to their military service to receive free VA care for that condition, or they must have relatively low incomes. Since Nov. 11, 1998, VA has been authorized to provide free medical care for some veterans within two years after leaving active duty. Those veterans must have served in a combat zone or in comparable hostilities. They don't have to prove either a service-connection for their health care problems or that they have low incomes.

"The wounds of military conflicts are not always obvious," said Principi. "We must be ready to assist combat veterans who have medical problems that are unexplained or difficult to diagnose."

The benefit does not cover treatment for medical problems clearly unrelated to military service, such as care for common colds, injuries from accidents that happened after discharge from active duty and disorders that existed before joining the military.

To receive free medical care, veterans must be able to show that they served since Nov. 11, 1998 in a theater of combat operations or in combat against a hostile force. The coverage lasts for two years after discharge from active duty. It applies to VA hospital care, outpatient services and nursing home care.

"National Guard and reserve personnel, who serve alongside their active-duty comrades in combat will, in most cases, be eligible," said Dr. Robert Roswell, VA's Under Secretary for Health.

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Two Year 2/2/2/2

After two years, these veterans will be subject to the same eligibility and enrollment rules as other veterans.

"This benefit builds upon the lessons learned from the undiagnosed illnesses of Gulf War veterans and Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange," said Principi. "Combat veterans should not wait for medical care while we weigh the evidence linking their problems to military service."

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