

The PACT Act: What Veterans Need to Know

The **Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act** is one of the most significant expansions of VA healthcare and benefits in history. Signed into law in August 2022, the PACT Act broadens VA coverage for veterans who were exposed to toxic substances during their service. It provides access to healthcare and disability compensation for those suffering from conditions linked to exposure to burn pits, Agent Orange, and other hazardous materials.

What Does the PACT Act Cover?

1. Expanded List of Presumptive Conditions

The VA now presumes that certain conditions are caused by exposure to toxic substances, meaning veterans do not need to prove a direct connection between their condition and military service. These conditions include:

- Cancers: Brain cancer, kidney cancer, lymphoma, pancreatic cancer, and more.
- Respiratory Diseases: Asthma, chronic bronchitis, COPD, pulmonary fibrosis, and more.
- Other Conditions: High blood pressure (hypertension) and monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance (MGUS).

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2. Expanded List of Eligible Locations & Eras

- The law covers veterans who served in specific locations where toxic exposure was common, including:
 - Vietnam War, Gulf War, and Post-9/11 eras.
 - Veterans who served in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and other regions with known burn pit exposure.
 - Veterans who were stationed in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and other locations affected by Agent Orange.
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3. Improved Access to VA Healthcare

- The PACT Act allows more veterans to enroll in VA healthcare, even if they weren't previously eligible. This is critical for veterans who may have been denied benefits in the past.

How to Submit a Claim Under the PACT Act

Veterans seeking benefits under the PACT Act should follow these steps:

- Gather Evidence
 - Medical records showing your diagnosis.
 - Service records proving your location and dates of service.
 - Buddy statements or personal accounts of exposure (if needed).
- File a Claim
 - Submit a VA Form 21-526EZ (Application for Disability Compensation and Related Compensation Benefits).
 - Claims can be filed online, by mail, in person at a VA office, or with the help of an attorney.
- Attend a VA Exam (If Required)
 - The VA may schedule a Compensation & Pension (C&P) exam to assess the severity of your condition.
- Wait for a Decision
 - The VA will review your claim and issue a decision, which can take several months.

The VA's Duty Under the PACT Act

The VA has a legal obligation under the PACT Act to:

- Presume service connection for covered conditions, meaning veterans don't have to prove their illness was caused by service.
- Process claims fairly and in a timely manner.
- Provide medical care to exposed veterans, even if they do not yet qualify for compensation.
- Conduct outreach to inform veterans of their new benefits.
- Review previously denied claims. Veterans who were denied for conditions now covered should reapply under the PACT Act.

Why the VA Denies Some PACT Act Claims & How We Can Help

Despite the promises of the PACT Act, the VA still denies many claims. Common reasons include:

- **Insufficient Medical Evidence:** Even though certain conditions are presumed, the VA may still argue that a veteran's medical records do not show a severe enough condition.
- **Service Location Not Properly Recognized:** The VA sometimes misinterprets or overlooks a veteran's service records, leading to denials.
- **Failure to Attend a C&P Exam:** Missing the VA's scheduled exam can result in an automatic denial.
- **VA Errors in Processing the Claim:** The VA has a history of making mistakes, misclassifying claims, or applying incorrect standards.
- **The VA Disagrees With the Severity of the Condition:** Even if a condition is granted service connection, the VA may assign a low disability rating, leading to lower compensation.

How We Can Assist Veterans With PACT Act Claims

- Filing a Strong Claim from the Start
 - We help gather medical records, service records, and expert opinions to strengthen your claim before submission.
- Filing an Appeal for Denied Claims
 - If the VA wrongfully denies your claim, we can file an appeal and fight for the benefits you deserve.
- Correcting VA Errors
 - Many denials happen due to paperwork mistakes, VA misinterpretations, or missing evidence. We work to correct these errors.
- Getting the Right Disability Rating
 - If the VA lowballs your rating, we fight to ensure you get the full compensation you are entitled to.

Final Message to Veterans

The PACT Act is a huge step forward, but the VA still denies claims unfairly. If you or someone you know has a toxic exposure-related illness, don't fight the VA alone. We can help you navigate the process, challenge denials, and make sure you receive the benefits you earned through service.

If your claim was denied or you're unsure what to do next, reach out for a free case evaluation. We're here to help.