

## County helps veterans, families obtain benefits

By Carrie Walsh

Did you know 75-90% of the claims submitted for Veterans Administration benefits in the United States come through a county veterans service office? In the Charlotte County Human Services Department, we are proud to have a division solely dedicated to assisting veterans and their families.

Our county veteran service officers, or CVSOs, are accredited veterans who are trained to navigate the complicated VA system. We help veterans gather the necessary paperwork to support claims, file claims, or assist in appealing claims that have been previously denied. Since 2017, our CVSOs have realized more than \$16.2 million in retro awards and more than \$3.3 million monthly recurring awards for Charlotte County veterans and their dependents. With the increase in need for veteran services, we added a Senior CVSO to our team.

After the PACT Act was enacted, we have seen a sharp increase in calls and requests for appointments. We are here and stand ready to serve you, but your patience is appreciated. Once you call our office, appointments are scheduled approximately within a few weeks due to the volume of requests. The PACT Act is one of the largest health care and benefit expansions in recent history.

- Expands and extends eligibility for VA health care for veterans with toxic exposures and veterans of the Vietnam, Gulf War, and post-9/11 eras
- Adds more than 20 new presumptive conditions for burn pits and other toxic exposures
- Adds more presumptive-exposure locations for Agent Orange and radiation
- Requires VA to provide a toxic exposure screening to every veteran enrolled in VA health care

If you're a veteran or survivor, you can file claims now to apply for PACT Act-related benefits. Charlotte County Veteran Services help veterans and their families receive better access to services. There is no fee or cost for applying for VA benefits. Our services are also free of charge.

We appreciate veterans and their service to our country. You will always be treated with courtesy and compassion at our office. We are committed to providing you with a clear, complete, and accurate explanation of the process of applying for veteran's benefits and services.

If you want assistance or need help in obtaining veteran benefits, please contact us and we will do our best to help you. Call 941-764-5579 to speak with a veteran service officer.

Appointments are required for office visits. We have two locations: Main Office, 1050 Loveland Blvd., Port Charlotte and West County Annex, 6868 San Casa Drive, Englewood.

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