November-December 2026

Lexington County Veteran Connection

"Serving those who served and sacrificed for America"

Presented By:

Lexington County Veterans Affairs

605 West Main Street, SuiteB
Lexington, SC 29072

(803) 785-8400

From the Director



Happy Veterans Day!

I always look forward to this holiday because it is a great time of year with the cooler temperatures, the changing color of leaves and many activities, both locally and nationally, that are patriotic and reflective. A time to be thankful and grateful for the blessings we have as Americans and living in a free country.

Speaking of blessings, November is also a time that restaurants and other retail merchants offer free or discounted meals and merchandise to Veterans and active-duty folks. We have a few local establishments in this issue and for a more extensive list, please click on the link below that takes you to the VA website. It is an overwhelming list of restaurants, attractions, museums, recreation, grocery and retailers. Please call or check online to ensure these offers are being honored.

https://news.va.gov/150505/2026-veterans-day-discounts-free-meals-offers/

I recently went on a historical trip to Paris and Normandy, France. The tour was jam packed with activities, both historical and personal. It was sponsored by the American Battle Monuments Foundation, which is a non-profit partner to the American Battle Monuments Commission. The Commission was birthed in 1923 by an act of Congress, and its first Superintendent was General John "Blackjack" Pershing. This commission operates and maintains 26 American military cemeteries and 31 monuments in 17 countries overseas, mainly in Europe, North Africa and Asia. They care for over 219,000 men and women who fought for freedom, died and are buried on foreign soil. For more information on both great organizations, click on the links below. I plan to talk about this trip in our next issue.

https://abmf.org/ https://www.abmc.gov/

Happy Thanksgiving and Merry Christmas to all our Veterans, their families and our readers!!

Thank all of you for your interest in our newsletter this year and the Veterans services we provide daily. We are honored to do this work and I am immensely proud of my team and look forward to working with them every day.

Enjoying the journey, Ed

YOUR SERVICE - YOUR BENEFITS

CALL TO SCHEDULE

(803) 785-8400

DON'T FORGET

Go to Welcome Center at Dorn VA Hospital

Enroll in VA Healthcare TODAY!

(803) 776-4000

HOLIDAY OFFICE CLOSINGS

We will be closed:

- NOV 11 — for Veterans Day
- NOV 26-27 — for Thanksgiving
- DEC 24-28 — for Christmas

EMAIL US

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VETERANS DAY AROUND LEXINGTON COUNTY



Free meals, discounts and local thank-yous for Veterans.

★ ★ ★

Please check before you go. Offers and participation can vary by location and may change. Call the local business first and bring proof of military service.

FREE MEALS & TREATS ★★★

Applebee's
Free dine-in entree from a select menu.

Chili's
Free dine-in entree from a select menu.

Freddy's
Free combo meal card Nov. 11. Redeem by Nov. 25.

IHOP
Ask about the Veterans Day pancake offer.

Buffalo Wild Wings
10 boneless wings with fries.

Golden Corral
Free buffet with beverage 4 p.m. to close.

Cracker Barrel
Free Sunrise Pancake Special.

Another Broken Egg Cafe, Lexington
Veterans Day special expected.
Call 839-205-3291 to confirm this year's offer.

BJ's Restaurant & Brewhouse, Harbison
Veterans Day deal reported.
Call the local restaurant to confirm participation.

Outback Steakhouse
Call to confirm the 2026 offer.

Red Robin
Free Red's Big Tavern Burger with Bottomless Fries.

Chicken Salad Chick
Ask about a free Chick Meal.

Mission BBQ
Free sandwich for Veterans on Nov. 11.

Starbucks
Ask about a free tall brewed coffee.

California Dreaming
50% off entree.

MORE VETERANS DAY THANK-YOUS ★★★

Great Clips
Free haircut or free haircut card on Nov. 11. Cards may be used through Dec. 4.

Five Below
10% off in-store purchases Nov. 9–15.

Tractor Supply
10% off on Nov. 11 for verified Neighbor's Club Hometown Heroes military members.

Thank you for your service.

★ ★ ★

When a restaurant provides a complimentary meal, please consider tipping your server based on the regular value of the meal.

Accredited VSO help is free.
Lexington County Veterans Affairs • 803-785-8400

What Your VSO *Wants You to Know*

After Filing and Follow-Up

A few things we wish every Veteran knew during and after a VA claim.

1

Be honest and specific at your C&P exam.

Attend each scheduled exam. Describe your symptoms honestly: frequency, severity, flare-ups, and limits at home or work. The examiner gathers evidence; VA makes the final decision.

2

Exposure does not guarantee service connection.

Some conditions qualify under presumptive rules. Others need evidence linking the illness to service or exposure. A secondary condition usually needs evidence that a service-connected disability caused or worsened it.

3

Useful evidence matters more than volume.

Submit evidence that supports your claim. Skip duplicates and unrelated records. Share new evidence with your VSO when possible, but submit it promptly and answer VA requests by the deadline.

4

Read the decision letter, not just your rating.

Read the reasons, effective date, and favorable findings. If you disagree, contact your VSO about the right review option. Many deadlines are one year.

5

Tell VA when your family circumstances change.

Report marriage, divorce, births, deaths, moves, and a child's schooling. Extra dependent pay usually stops at age 18 unless VA receives proof of eligible school attendance.

Accredited VSO help is free.
Lexington County Veterans Affairs • 803-785-8400

SPOUSAL AID & ATTENDANCE

WHEN YOUR SPOUSE NEEDS REGULAR HELP, YOUR VA PAYMENT MAY INCREASE



Already receiving VA disability compensation? If you are rated 30% or higher and your spouse needs regular personal care, you may qualify for an extra monthly amount. Your spouse does **not** need a service-connected condition.

WHO MAY QUALIFY?

The Veteran: Has a combined VA disability rating of 30% or higher.

The spouse: Is on the VA award, or can be added.

Medical evidence: Shows the spouse needs regular personal care.

WHAT DOES VA LOOK FOR?

Regular help with **bathing, dressing, eating, using the bathroom**, or staying safe.

Severe vision loss or qualifying nursing-home care can also count.

Age or help with chores alone does not qualify.

WHAT THIS MEANS

This is an added amount to the Veteran's monthly disability compensation when a spouse needs regular Aid and Attendance.

The amount varies with the Veteran's disability rating.

It is added to the Veteran's payment, not paid separately to the spouse.

WHEN TO CALL US

IF THIS SOUNDS FAMILIAR
Call if your spouse needs regular hands-on help or supervision for daily safety.

NO FORMS NEEDED FIRST
You do not need to gather VA forms before you call us.

WE CAN HELP
We can review your situation, explain what medical information may be needed, and help prepare the claim.

Accredited VSO help is free.
Lexington County Veterans Affairs • 803-785-8400

YOUR YEAR-END BENEFITS CHECKLIST



A few minutes now can help you start 2027 prepared.

2027 COLA: 3.6%

Social Security announced a 3.6% increase for 2027. VA disability compensation follows the same annual cost-of-living adjustment.

No new claim is needed for the routine increase.

DECEMBER 7: MEDICARE PLAN DEADLINE

Already have Medicare? Review or change a Medicare Advantage or Part D plan by December 7. Changes begin January 1.

See page 11 • **Medicare.gov**

This is not a deadline to first enroll in Parts A or B.

1 REVIEW YOUR DEPENDENTS

Marriage, divorce, or a child's status changed? Tell VA promptly. Veterans rated 30% or higher may qualify for extra dependent pay.

VA.gov/manage-dependents

2 CHECK YOUR PAYMENT DETAILS

Confirm your mailing address, phone, and direct deposit in your VA.gov profile.

VA.gov/profile

3 REFILL BEFORE THE HOLIDAYS

Request refills at least 10 days early. Allow extra time for holiday delivery.

VA.gov/health-care/manage-prescriptions-medications

4 RECEIVE VA PENSION?

Report changes in income or net worth promptly to help avoid overpayments.

VA benefits hotline: 800-827-1000.

Accredited Veterans Benefits Counselor help is FREE.

Lexington County Veterans Affairs • (803) 785-8400

605 West Main Street, Lexington, SC 29072



Questions and Answers About VA Benefits

My claim says "deferred." Was I denied?

No. VA has not decided that issue yet. It may need more records, an exam, or a medical opinion. Other conditions can be decided first. Watch for letters and respond if VA asks for information.

VA proposed reducing my rating. What now?

Read the notice immediately. Most proposed reductions allow 60 days for evidence and 30 days to request a hearing. Those deadlines matter. Contact an accredited VSO right away; a proposal is not a final reduction.

What if I cannot make my C&P exam?

Call the number on your exam notice right away, preferably at least 48 hours ahead. Ask to reschedule and explain why. Do not skip it: a missed exam can delay or hurt your claim.

Can I file decades after leaving the military?

Yes. There is no time limit on a post-service claim. You still need evidence connecting your condition to service. Payments usually do not go back to discharge when you file many years later.

Could asking for an increase lower my rating?

Possibly. New evidence may show your condition is better, unchanged, or worse. Legal protections and reduction rules may apply. Discuss your situation with an accredited VSO before filing for an increase.

Why does VA ask for more evidence?

Medical records may show treatment but not all VA needs to decide your claim. VA may ask for an opinion, an exam, or missing records. Read the request and respond by its deadline.

Accredited VSO help is free.
Lexington County Veterans Affairs • 803-785-8400

VETERANS ARE ASKING

More Questions and Answers About VA Benefits

Can I receive Social Security retirement and VA disability compensation?

Yes. VA service-connected disability compensation and Social Security retirement are separate programs. Receiving Social Security retirement does not, by itself, reduce VA disability compensation. But income affects needs-based VA pension and may affect Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Ask about the rules if you receive those benefits.

I had surgery for a service-connected condition. Will my rating go up?

Not automatically. Qualifying surgery or treatment for a service-connected condition may allow a temporary 100% rating during recovery. It depends on the procedure and medical evidence. Your regular rating is separate. Keep surgery and recovery records, and ask a VSO whether a temporary increase applies.

My claim was denied, but VA listed "favorable findings." Why?

A favorable finding means VA accepted one fact, such as a diagnosis or an event during service. Another requirement, like a connection between the two, may still be missing. Read the Reasons for Decision. Bring the full letter to your VSO to review options and deadlines.

I moved. Is updating my address at the VA clinic enough?

Not necessarily. Update both mailing and home addresses in your VA.gov profile. This updates many benefits and health care records, but some programs, including VA life insurance and CHAMPVA, require separate updates. Keeping your contact information current helps you receive exam notices, prescriptions, and letters.

Accredited VSO help is free.
Lexington County Veterans Affairs • 803-785-8400



SOME SEASONS ARE HARDER THAN OTHERS.

The holidays can bring grief, stress, or loneliness. Reach out if you need support, and check on someone who may be alone. Connection matters.

CONNECT WITH OTHERS

Call a friend, visit a neighbor, or join a local Veterans group. You may find someone who understands.

Lexington County Veterans Group
See meeting details on page 20.

COLUMBIA VET CENTER

Free, confidential counseling and groups for eligible Veterans, service members, and families.

803-765-9944

1710 Richland St., Suite A
Columbia • Ask about eligibility

YOUR VA CARE TEAM CAN HELP

Ask about care for grief, anxiety, sleep, or depression.

DORN VA
803-776-4000

VETERANS CRISIS LINE • 24/7 SUPPORT

CALL 988 • PRESS 1 **TEXT 838255**

Free, confidential, 24/7 • No VA enrollment needed

MEDICARE OPEN ENROLLMENT

OCT. 15 – DEC. 7

WHAT VETERANS NEED TO CHECK BEFORE DECEMBER 7

Review or change your Medicare Advantage or Part D plan for 2027.

This is not the Medicare Part B enrollment deadline.

Open Enrollment happens once a year and gives you a chance to compare plans and make changes for next year.

3 THINGS TO CHECK

1 READ YOUR 2027 PLAN NOTICE

- Look for changes in premiums, coverage and out-of-pocket costs.
- Check for any changes to benefits or pharmacy networks.
- Make sure the plan still meets your needs for next year.

2 CHECK YOUR DOCTORS & MEDICINES

- Make sure your doctors, specialists and hospitals are still in the plan's network.
- Confirm your prescription medications are still covered.
- Check for changes to preferred pharmacies or medication costs.

3 COMPARE YOUR TOTAL COSTS

- Look at premiums, deductibles, copays and your expected annual costs.
- Compare plans, not just the monthly premium.
- Choose the plan that best fits your health needs and budget.

IF YOU ALSO USE VA HEALTH CARE

MEDICARE PART B

VA health care does not replace the Medicare Part B enrollment rules. Delaying Part B can result in a lasting penalty.

MEDICARE PART D

VA prescription coverage is considered creditable coverage. Depending on your situation, you may be able to delay Part D while VA drug coverage continues.

GET FREE, UNBIASED HELP

South Carolina SHIP / I-CARE
800-868-9095

Medicare
1-800-MEDICARE
Medicare.gov/plan-compare

VA HEALTH CARE / HOLIDAY QUICK REFERENCE

WHEN THE CLINIC IS CLOSED



A quick guide to prescription refills, after-hours advice, and emergency care.

AFTER HOURS · 24 HOURS A DAY

VA HEALTH CONNECT

855-679-0214

For Veterans enrolled in Columbia VA health care. Talk with a nurse about symptoms, virtual care, and the right next step. Not for emergencies.

PLAN AHEAD

REFILL PRESCRIPTIONS EARLY

Columbia VA recommends ordering at least 10 days before your supply runs out. Refills are usually mailed.

10 DAYS

AUTOMATED REFILL LINE

803-647-5650

ONLINE REFILLS & TRACKING

VA.gov / My HealtheVet

MEDICAL EMERGENCY

CALL 911

or go to the nearest ER

AFTER A NON-VA ER VISIT

Notify VA within 72 hours of the start of care.

844-724-7842

Coverage rules still apply.

DORN VA MEDICAL CENTER 803-776-4000

CARING FOR A VETERAN

Support for family caregivers and the people who help every day



Caregivers need support too.

Caring for someone you love can be meaningful—but also tiring, stressful, and isolating. Asking questions early can make it easier to find help before burnout sets in.

You may already be a caregiver.

If you help a Veteran with appointments, medications, meals, transportation, bathing, dressing, or keeping up with daily needs, you may already be serving as a caregiver. VA support is not only for people providing around-the-clock care.

What support may be available?

- **Education and coaching** to help you care for the Veteran at home.
- **Help connecting** with VA and community resources.
- **Respite support** when you need a break.
- A local caregiver support coordinator who can help you figure out where to start.

START HERE

Columbia VA Caregiver Support
803-776-4000, ext. 56777

VA Caregiver Support Line
855-260-3274
Monday–Friday, 8 AM–8 PM ET

Dorn VA Medical Center
803-776-4000

Call and say you care for a Veteran and want caregiver support.

Good to know

Support may include counseling, skills training and referrals. Programs have different eligibility rules.

WINTER READY AT HOME

A simple South Carolina plan for cold snaps and power outages.

Cold snaps, ice and power outages can happen in South Carolina. A little preparation helps keep you, your home and your health care needs safe.



POWER & SUPPLIES

Charge phones. Keep flashlights, water, shelf-stable food and blankets handy.

HEAT SAFELY

Keep space heaters 3 feet from things that burn. Never run a generator indoors or in a garage.

CHECK ON SOMEONE

Make a plan to contact a neighbor, friend or Veteran who lives alone.

PROTECT YOUR HOME

Insulate exposed pipes and know where to shut off your water.

USE MEDICAL EQUIPMENT THAT NEEDS POWER?

Ask your VA care team about a backup plan before an outage.

LEXINGTON COUNTY CODERED

Sign up for free emergency alerts at lex-co.sc.gov

For life-threatening emergencies, call 911.

Accredited VSO help is free.

WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA

Help honor Veterans at Fort Jackson

Local organizers need help providing a remembrance wreath for every Veteran laid to rest at Fort Jackson National Cemetery.



$17 sponsors one wreath.
Please sponsor by December 1, 2026.

To sponsor: wreathsacrossamerica.org
Search "Fort Jackson National Cemetery" and select "Sponsor Wreaths."

Ceremony: December 19, 2026 • Noon
4170 Percival Road, Columbia
Wreath placement follows the ceremony.

Protect your VA benefits start date

File an Intent to File today.

An Intent to File can protect a potential benefits start date while you gather records. Submit your completed claim within 1 year. If VA approves it, back pay may be available.

For disability compensation, Veterans or survivors pension, and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC).



Online: va.gov/forms/21-0966/
Phone: 1-800-827-1000 • **TTY:** 711
Mail or in person: VA Form 21-0966



Veterans Crisis Line

DIAL 988 then PRESS 1

24/7 confidential support
For Veterans and loved ones.
No VA enrollment is needed.

Call 988, then Press 1

Text: **838255**

VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat

VET CENTER

The community has your six!

Free, confidential counseling for eligible Veterans, service members and families.

803-765-9944

1710 Richland St., Suite A
Columbia, SC 29201

Need a Little Help This Holiday Season?

Start local. Ask early. Help may be available with food, rent, utilities and other basic needs.

START LOCAL: MISSION LEXINGTON

Help for Lexington County residents facing a current crisis.

- Food assistance
- Rent or mortgage assistance
- Utility assistance
- Clothing and household essentials

803-785-6900

216 Harmon Street,
Lexington, SC 29072

Social Services: Mon–Fri, 9 a.m.–2 p.m.
Walk in; call for food-program hours.

Veterans & seniors on fixed income:
Mission Lexington's Food for Living program accepts current VA benefit letters as one form of income documentation for eligible households.

Bring required documents. Assistance is based on eligibility and available resources.

SC 211 — FIND LOCAL HELP

Free referrals for food, utilities, housing and community resources.

Dial 211
Text HELP to 211-211
866-892-9211
SC211.org

SALVATION ARMY OF THE MIDLANDS

Holiday and emergency assistance may include utility help, seasonal programs and other support. Availability and deadlines vary, so call first.

803-765-0260

DON'T WAIT UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE

Holiday programs may have limited funding, documentation requirements or early deadlines. Call as soon as you know you may need help.

Accredited VSO help is free.

DID YOU KNOW?

SOME GULF WAR VETERANS HAVE TWO KUWAIT LIBERATION MEDALS



During the 1990–1991 Gulf War, two different countries awarded their own liberation medals to eligible U.S. service members. These are two separate medals, not duplicates, and many Veterans are authorized to wear both.

KUWAIT LIBERATION MEDAL (KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA)

AWARDED BY SAUDI ARABIA



WHO COULD RECEIVE IT?

Qualifying service in support of Desert Storm, January 17–February 28, 1991.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Silver starburst with a gold-colored center; palm tree and crossed swords above.

KUWAIT LIBERATION MEDAL (GOVERNMENT OF KUWAIT)

AWARDED BY KUWAIT



WHO COULD RECEIVE IT?

Qualifying service in Desert Shield or Desert Storm, August 2, 1990–August 31, 1993.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Gold-colored medallion with a Kuwaiti dhow (sailing ship), flag and Arabic script.

TWO MEDALS. TWO COUNTRIES. ONE WAR.

QUICK FACTS

- ★ Both are foreign awards authorized for wear on U.S. military uniforms.
- ★ They honor the coalition effort to liberate Kuwait.
- ★ Many Gulf War Veterans qualify for both.
- ★ They reflect strong ties among wartime allies.



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

WE WANT YOU! TO VOLUNTEER!



Veterans are needed to lead

THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

at Lexington County Council meetings.

WHEN

2nd & 4th Tuesdays

Meeting begins at 4:30 p.m.

Please arrive by 4:15 p.m.

WHERE

County Council Chambers

2nd floor, Administration Building

212 South Lake Drive, Lexington

INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING?

CALL 803-785-8400

Email: ablake@lexingtoncounty.sc.gov

LEXINGTON COUNTY VETERANS GROUP



EVERY TUESDAY

10:00 a.m.–noon

American Legion Post 7

On the first Tuesday of each month, the group meets at a local restaurant instead.

211 American Legion Dr.
(off Harmon St.)
Lexington, SC 29072

All Lexington County Veterans are cordially invited to the weekly meeting.

Please contact us for more information about joining!

E.C. Murray • 803-606-9571
Rich (Richard) Little
803-422-1113

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

KEEP THIS PAGE HANDY

START HERE: LEXINGTON COUNTY VETERANS AFFAIRS

Benefits, claims, survivor questions and accredited assistance.

803-785-8400

605 West Main Street
Lexington, SC 29072

Monday – Friday
8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Appointments strongly encouraged.

VA BENEFITS & FAMILY

VA Benefits Hotline	**800-827-1000**
VA Education Hotline (GI Bill and dependents)	**888-442-4551**
VA Home Loans	**877-827-3702**
MyVA411 (General questions)	**800-698-2411**
Dependents & Survivor Benefits (VA General Information)	**800-827-1000**

VA HEALTH & MEDICAL

Healthcare Eligibility	**877-222-8387**
Dorn VA Medical Center (Columbia)	**803-776-4000**
Dorn Patient Advocate	**803-776-4000 ext. 56937**
VA Pharmacy Refills (Automated)	**803-647-5650** Toll Free: 800-293-8262
Community Care (Billing and Support)	**877-881-7618**
CHAMPVA (Family Medical)	**800-733-8387**
CHAMPVA Meds by Mail	**866-229-7389**
TRICARE (SE Region)	**800-444-5445**

LOCAL HELP & HOUSING

Mission Lexington (Food, rent, utilities and other crisis assistance)	**803-785-6900**
Transitions Homeless Center (Housing, meals and support)	**803-708-4861**
National Call Center for Homeless Veterans (24/7, confidential support)	**877-424-3838**
SC 211 (Community resources, food, utilities, housing and more)	**Dial 211** Text HELP to 211-211 SC211.org

BURIAL, INSURANCE & OTHER

Ft. Jackson National Cemetery	**866-577-5248**
VA Headstones & Markers	**800-697-6947**
SGLI / VGLI (Life Insurance)	**800-419-1473**
Other VA Life Insurance	**800-669-8477**

IN A CRISIS?

Support is available 24/7.

Veterans Crisis Line
Dial 988, then Press 1

Call **988, then Press 1**
Chat online at **VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat**
Text **838255**