



Georgia Department of Veterans Service

Cultivating community connections
– empowering Georgia’s veterans
and their families to flourish.

August 2022

THE PACT ACT BECOMES LAW GDVS IS HERE TO HELP VETERANS WITH TOXIC EXPOSURE RECEIVE BENEFITS

Veterans exposed to toxic burn pits will no longer suffer in silence thanks to *The Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act*. President Biden signed this historic bipartisan legislation into law on August 10, 2022.

“The passage of the PACT Act is potentially life-changing for hundreds of thousands of Georgia’s veterans who were exposed to toxic chemicals during their active military service. Our agency and its accredited veterans service officers are available and ready to support this community,” said GDVS Commissioner Patricia Ross.

The PACT Act provides benefits and care to Gulf War and post-9/11 veterans who may suffer from more than 20 toxic exposure-related conditions, as well as adding new presumptive conditions and locations for Vietnam War veterans. According to the White House, the PACT Act is the most significant expansion of VA Health Care in 30 years.

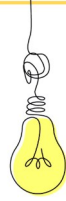


What is the PACT Act?

The PACT Act is one of the largest VA health care and benefits expansions for veterans of the Vietnam, Gulf War, and post-9/11 eras.

Did you or your loved one serve during one of these eras?

We're here to help.



Who does this affect?

Georgia has over 294,000 Gulf War and 260,000 Vietnam War veterans.

This is about **2/3** of our state veteran population.

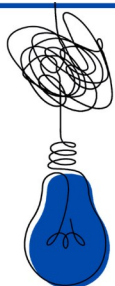
Surviving spouses and their children may also be eligible for benefits.



The GDVS is here to help.

Contact your local GDVS office today to file a claim or to appeal a previously denied claim.

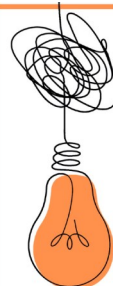
<https://veterans.georgia.gov/field-offices>



What is covered?

20 new presumptive conditions for burn pits and other toxic exposures:

- Brain cancer
- Gastrointestinal cancer
- Glioblastoma
- Head cancer
- Kidney cancer
- Lymphatic cancer
- Melanoma
- Neck cancer
- Pancreatic cancer
- Reproductive cancer
- Respiratory cancer
- Asthma (diagnosed after service)
- Chronic bronchitis
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
- Chronic rhinitis
- Chronic sinusitis
- Constrictive bronchiolitis
- Obliterative bronchiolitis
- Emphysema
- Granulomatous disease
- Interstitial lung disease (ILD)
- Pleuritis
- Pulmonary fibrosis
- Sarcoidosis



What is covered?

2 new Agent Orange presumptive conditions:

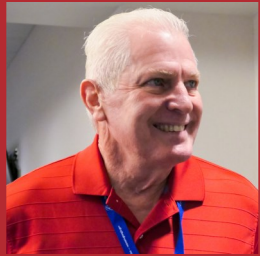
- High blood pressure (hypertension)
- Monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance (MGUS)

5 new Agent Orange presumptive locations:

- Any **U.S. or Royal Thai military base in Thailand** from January 9, 1962, through June 30, 1976
- **Laos** from December 1, 1965, through September 30, 1969
- **Cambodia at Mimot or Krek, Kampong Cham Province** from April 16, 1969, through April 30, 1969
- **Guam or American Samoa** or in the territorial waters off of Guam or American Samoa from January 9, 1962, through July 30, 1980
- **Johnston Atoll** or on a ship that called at Johnston Atoll from January 1, 1972, through September 30, 1977



ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER CANAVAGGIO RETIRES



There is only one person at the Georgia Department of Veterans Service who has probably interacted with every single employee, whether through benefits assistance, annual training, appeals instruction, or just sharing a funny story—Assistant Commissioner **George Canavaggio**. He has been a pillar of support for Georgia’s veterans and their families over 20 years. With his retirement this month, he leaves everyone with a “George” story of their own.

Canavaggio began working with the department in 1998 as a field service officer in Macon, Georgia. In 2001, he became the manager of the office. He was later promoted to work in the claims and appeals division where he spent 10 years advocating for veterans. He was promoted to the Assistant Director of Appeals in 2013, and became Director of Appeals in 2014. Two years later, in 2016, Canavaggio was appointed as the Assistant Commissioner of Field Operations and Appeals for the Department of Veterans Service.

Canavaggio has played an instrumental role in the changes that have taken place throughout the years. One of the most crucial of those changes was in the GDVS’s use of technology. Due to his knowledge and efforts to see improvements within the GDVS, the department moved from typewriters to computers in the late 90’s after he successfully piloted a test program.

He was always ready and willing to support and assist the needs of GDVS staff whose work he says is a “life changing experience for most veterans.” It is his belief veterans would give up and not get the benefits they are entitled to without help from veterans service officers. He will most miss “working with a group of people who share a common desire to help veterans.”

An Army veteran, Canavaggio began his service as a Combat Engineer in 1974 and left in 1994 as a Warrant Officer 3. “I was once told by an old Army E-8 that if you take care of your people, they will take care of you. You need to care about each other regardless of your position,” said Canavaggio. “I don’t believe I have changed from being a VSO in the Macon Field Office to my present position as the Assistant Commissioner over Field Operations & Appeals—I have always believed in our ability to help others.”

GDVS FOCUSES ON SUICIDE PREVENTION WITH NEW COORDINATOR

Calandra Ferguson (Fergie) joined the GDVS team as the Suicide Prevention and Outreach Coordinator in July 2022.

A military veteran with 24 years of service, she is “honored to be a part of an organization that is changing lives.” Fergie served as the Alcohol and Drug Control Officer (ADCO) / Risk Reduction Coordinator (RRC) for the Georgia Army National Guard’s Substance Abuse and Suicide Prevention Programs where she was one of the primary trainers responsible for training soldiers and civilians to provide first aid for persons with thoughts of suicide.

NEW DIRECTOR FOR APPEALS

After serving 6 years in the GDVS Appeals Division, as an appeals officer and Assistant Director, **Edwin Berry** has been appointed to serve as the Director of Appeals Division.

Correction from July Newsletter: Cartersville Office Manager, **Steven** Hungarter, runs the Survivor Camp.

GDVS LEADERSHIP HAS A NEW FACE

In her commitment to “honor the sacrifices of our service men and women,” **Shelly—Ann Simpson** has stayed the course. Working steadfastly for 16 years in various positions with the GDVS, she was chosen as the new Executive Director for Field Operations and Appeals.

Simpson first joined the GDVS in 2001 and briefly left the department to work for the Georgia Division of Transportation. She later returned to GDVS as a claims and appeals officer. After 7 years in the Appeals Division, she was chosen to serve as Director of the division in 2019.

She stresses she is not only an advocate for veterans, but also an advocate “for those who work closely with me, their success is my success. I believe in team-building, mentoring, and fostering leadership in others.”

Leadership is exactly what is expected of Simpson as she takes on the responsibility of leading the Field Operations and Appeals Division. It is a role where she “intends to continue to bring new processes to the way we do business. While we assist veterans and their families with VA benefits, I wish for us to be more encompassing and provide assistance that stretches beyond those barriers.”

