



# Monthly Bulletin

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## American Legion Dorchester Post 91 Helps

### Veterans with Hearing Loss Get Hearing Aids

Until October 2008, many of the veterans who were treated at VA clinics needed hearing aids, but were ineligible under VA federal guidelines to receive them. At a cost of \$600 to \$1,300 per two devices, the expensive hearing aids were in great demand and supplies diminished quickly.

Members of the American Legion Dorchester Post 91, in consultation with the VA Maryland Health Care System, decided to help by using part of the proceeds from their slot machines to assist veterans with hearing loss get the help they needed.

Over the course of nearly two decades, the American Legion Dorchester Post 91 donated over \$33,000 to the VA Maryland Health Care System to purchase hearing aids for Eastern Shore veterans who receive their health care services at the Cambridge VA Outpatient Clinic. The Cambridge VA Outpatient Clinic, which is the largest outpatient clinic in the VA Maryland Health Care System, serves a large veteran population with over 25,000 outpatient visits every year.

"Since the establishment of the Cambridge VA Outpatient Clinic in 1986, the American Legion Dorchester Post 91 has been one of the strongest supporters of the Hearing Aid Program," says Shelly Cheesman, clinic coordinator for the Cambridge and

Pocomoke VA Outpatient Clinics. "Their continued commitment to this project is tremendous and has helped to enrich the quality of life for many veterans who might not otherwise be able to afford hearing aids."

In October 2008, the VA established a policy that all enrolled veterans and

those veterans exempt from enrollment are eligible for medical services that include diagnostic audiology services. The policy also requires the prescription and provision of hearing aids to all eligible veterans, diminishing the need for donations to help veterans receive hearing aids. The American Legion Dorchester Post 91 will continue to raise and donate money to improve the quality of life of veterans on the Eastern Shore.



## VHA Directive 2008-070

The Department of Veterans Affairs must provide audiology and eye care services, hearing aids and glasses to military veterans with any compensable service-connected disability. Public Law 104-262, the Veterans Health Care Eligibility Reform Act of 1996, changed eligibility laws to allow the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) to furnish prosthetic appliances to veterans. However, that law further provided that VHA could not furnish sensori-neural aids (hearing aids and eyeglasses) except in accordance with guidelines that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) prescribes. Subsequently, the

VA published regulations establishing such guidelines. In 2002, VHA issued Directive 2002-039 to establish uniform policy for the provision of hearing aids and eyeglasses. It is now VHA policy that all enrolled veterans and those veterans exempt from enrollment are eligible for medical services that include diagnostic audiology and diagnostic and preventive eye care services, and that the prescription and provision of hearing aids and eyeglasses must be furnished to all eligible veterans in accordance with the parameters and criteria defined in VHA DIRECTIVE 2008-070 dated 28 OCT 08. Full details of the directive can be viewed at <http://tinyurl.com/ykwhv4v>.

# ODHH Updates and Director's Corner



ODHH Director  
Lisa H. Kornberg

World War I ended on November 11, 1918. On the same date three years later an unknown soldier from that war was buried at Arlington National Cemetery. November 11 eventually became the date when America honors all who have served our country in war.

In honor of Veterans Day, this month's *Bulletin* is dedicated entirely to information and resources for Maryland's veterans in general, but those with hearing loss in particular. In 2008 nearly 70,000 service men and women who served in Iraq and Afghanistan collected disability for tinnitus and more than 58,000 were on disability for hearing loss caused by IEDs, according to the VA.

Exposure to more than 85 decibels continuously or

140 decibels for any length of time can damage hearing. A rifle can produce 160 decibels of sound. On average, the men and women serving in Afghanistan and Iraq have served longer time in combat than any other U.S. military conflict.

Through our participation in the MDVA Veteran Musters (page 3), ODHH reaches out to veterans with hearing loss in an effort to ensure that all of the men and women who risked their lives for this country are able to hear us thank them for their service.

To the service members and their families, thank you for the sacrifices you've made and your commitment to keeping us safe. Happy Veterans Day from ODHH.

*Lisa*

**"H.R. 2506 expresses the sense of Congress that tinnitus is one of the leading service-connected disability issues not being addressed."**

## H.R. 2506 - Veterans Hearing and Assessment Act

H.R. 2506 – The Veterans Hearing and Assessment Act - expresses the sense of Congress that tinnitus is one of the leading service-connected disability issues that is not being addressed.

The Act, introduced by Rep. Harry Teague of New Mexico, directs the Secretary of Defense to ensure that each member of the Armed Forces receives a hearing evaluation that includes a screening for tinnitus before the member is deployed and after the member returns from a deployment.

The Act further requires the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to:

- (1) recognize tinnitus as a mandatory condition for research and treatment by Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Auditory Centers of Excellence; and
- (2) ensure that research is conducted at VA facilities on the prevention, treatment, and curing of tinnitus.

The bill was introduced in May 2009. To date, no Representatives from Maryland have signed on as cosponsors for the legislation. For more information, visit <http://tinyurl.com/bd4zmv> and enter H.R. 2506 into the "Search" field.

## NTID Welcomes Veterans With Hearing Loss

A college specializing in technical education for students with hearing loss is reaching out to U.S. troops who have suffered significant hearing loss as a result of exposure to gunfire and explosions during their military service. The National Technical Institute for the Deaf, a college of Rochester Institute of Technology, has established the Military Veterans with Hearing Loss Project at RIT/NTID and plans to admit recent veterans with hearing loss. Those veterans can earn bachelor or graduate-level degrees at RIT with access services – such as real-time captioning and notetaking in the classroom – from NTID.



Nearly 1,300 deaf and hard-of-hearing students attend NTID. They receive access services as needed in classrooms throughout the RIT campus.

"It makes sense for us to welcome the men and women serving our country who could benefit from the education and access services we offer," said NTID President Alan Hurwitz. "Our talented faculty and staff have experience helping those who have suffered a sudden hearing loss. RIT/NTID would be a perfect option for veterans seeking to continue their education. We are happy to help serve the men and women who have already sacrificed so much to serve our country." For more information, visit [www.rit.edu/ntid/veterans](http://www.rit.edu/ntid/veterans).

# Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs

The Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) was created by the State legislature in 1999 as an executive agency with the mission of assisting veterans, active duty service members, their families, and their dependents in securing benefits earned through military service. The Secretary of the MDVA, who is appointed by the Governor, must be an honorably discharged veteran. The MDVA's origin follows the history of the Maryland Veterans Commission back to 1924, when the Soldiers' Relief Fund Commission was formed to administer a State relief fund for disabled veterans of World War I.

The MDVA has four major programs: the Outreach and Advocacy Program; Veterans Service and Benefits Program; the Veterans Home Program; and the Veterans Cemetery and Memorials Program.

The Outreach and Advocacy Program ensures that veterans know what services, benefits, and assistance the federal and State governments provide for them. MDVA informs and educates veterans and their eligible dependents of business, tax, health care, disability, pension and education benefits to which they might be entitled. The Program also keeps the Governor and General Assembly informed on issues important to veterans which may require gubernatorial or legislative action.

Through the Veterans Service and Benefits Program

the MDVA's Veterans Service Officers advise, assist, and represent Maryland veterans, their dependents, and survivors seeking federal, state and local veteran benefits. These benefits include education, home loans, insurance, pensions, and compensation for service-related disabilities, as well as benefits for health care, burial, and surviving family members. MDVA operates veterans service and benefits offices at various locations throughout the State.

Charlotte Hall Veterans Home is the only veterans home in the State of Maryland. The facility opened in 1985 and is situated in a beautiful, park-like setting on 126 tranquil acres. The Home is a 462-bed facility providing a continuum of care from the 184-bed Assisted Living unit to higher level of care in the 278-bed Skilled Nursing Home.

The State of Maryland, through the Cemetery Program of the MDVA, offers Maryland veterans, and their eligible dependents, a final resting place at one of five State veterans' cemeteries located throughout Maryland. The Program is the largest of its kind in the nation. The Veterans Memorial Program was established in 1989 to operate, maintain, secure, and preserve the State Veterans Memorials. All are open to the public 365 days a year. They are operated and cared for by MDVA.

More information at: <http://mdva.state.md.us/>.

*“The MDVA has the mission of assisting veterans, active duty service members, their families, and their dependents in securing benefits earned through military service.”*

## MDVA Veteran Musters

The Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) conducts a free, information fair for veterans benefits every month. These “musters” are held at different locations around the State.

Veterans and their families are able to stop in at anytime during the musters to collect information on the benefits and services offered to Maryland veterans by federal, state, local and nonprofit organizations.

At the musters, the MDVA has a Veterans Benefit Specialist available to assist with filing claims for disability and compensation. A Veterans Analyst from Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) is on hand to answer questions regarding GI Bill education benefits, including the new Chapter 33 - Post 9/11 GI Bill. Representatives from other state agencies, including ODHH, Veteran Service Organizations, Veteran Employment Representatives and members of local

community organizations are also present to provide information on their various veterans programs. Finally, a personal financial advisor is available to answer veterans' questions related to financing and personal credit.

For more information about the MDVA Veteran Musters:

- call 410-260-3838 (V);
- email [cconroy@mdva.state.md.us](mailto:cconroy@mdva.state.md.us); or
- visit [www.mdva.state.md.us](http://www.mdva.state.md.us).

You can also find information about upcoming musters at <http://www.odhh.maryland.gov/> or <http://www.twitter.com/odhh>.



Assistant Director Julie Anne Schafer at an MDVA Muster



## Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

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**Martin O'Malley**  
Governor

**Anthony G. Brown**  
Lieutenant Governor

**Lisa H. Kornberg**  
Director

**Julie Anne Schafer**

# ODHH on the Move

## November 2009

*MRA/DORS Training Conference*

Weds-Fri, November 4-6

Wisp Resort Hotel

McHenry, MD

*ODHH Town hall Meeting*

Friday, November 6, 6-8 PM

Grantsville Senior Center

Grantsville, MD

*ODHH Town hall Meeting*

Thursday, November 12, 6-8 PM

Hearing and Speech Agency

Baltimore, MD



\*\* ODHH will be closed on 11/11 in observance of Veterans Day, and 11/25-27 for Thanksgiving\*\*

## December 2009

*Maryland Advisory Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Quarterly Meeting*

Tuesday, December 1, 2-5 PM

Deaf Independent Living Association

Salisbury, MD

*ODHH Town Hall Meeting*

Tuesday, December 1, 6-8PM

Deaf Independent Living Association

Salisbury, MD

\*\* Please note that ODHH will be closed on 12/24 – 12/25 in observance of Christmas and 12/31 for New Year's Eve\*\*



## HLAA Reaches Out to Veterans With Hearing Loss

The Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) was founded in 1979 by Howard "Rocky" Stone, a retired CIA agent, who endured hearing loss from his service in the Army. Rocky was well-known in the agency for both his skill and his hearing loss. Rocky earned the Agency's highest honor and went on to establish an organization for people who have hearing loss and want to stay in the hearing world with technology and strategies.

If you have a hearing loss due to military service, HLAA wants to help. They have promotions and information specifically for veterans with hearing loss. Please check their website periodically, as they are adding content as available. As of now, HLAA offers:

- **Complimentary Membership in HLAA for Vets of OIF and OEF:** Membership includes a subscription to *Hearing Loss Magazine*, a helpful resource on the latest in technology, medical issues, legislation, personal stories, and more. For more information



about a free one-year membership, contact the Membership Department at: <http://www.hearingloss.org/aboutus/membership.asp>.

### • Free HLAA Convention 2010

**Registration:** HLAA would like to show its support of veterans of Operation Iraqi

Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom by offering convention registration at no charge. HLAA's Convention 2010 is June 17 - 20 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. For more information about registering for the convention,

contact Nancy Macklin, Director of Events by visiting <http://www.hearingloss.org/staffcontact4.asp>.

The convention has workshops, a trade show with all the latest technology and services and is communication accessible (real-time captioning and assistive technology in all sessions).

Visit <http://www.hearingloss.org/veterans/index.asp> for more information about HLAA.



### Some Quick Facts about Veterans with Hearing Loss

- According to military audiology reports, 60% of US personnel exposed to the powerful roadside blasts suffer permanent hearing loss and 49% also suffer from tinnitus.
- The number of service men and women on disability because of hearing damage is expected to grow 18% per year according to analysis of VA data by the American Tinnitus Association.
- Currently, there are more than 445,000 veterans receiving compensation for hearing loss associated with military service, and 395,000 receiving compensation for service-related tinnitus.