



## Defense Department Expands Access to Military Commissaries, Exchanges and Recreation Retail Facilities Privileges

### More veterans and caregivers have eligibility.

The Defense Department is proud to have expanded its eligibility for commissary, exchange and MWR retail privileges to veterans who are:

- Purple Heart recipients
- Former prisoners of war
- Medal of Honor recipients and those with service-connected disabilities rating of 100% documented by the VA

Individuals approved and designated as the primary caregivers or family caregivers for veterans on the same basis as a member of the armed forces entitled to retired or retainer pay under the Department of Veterans Affairs Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers are also eligible for these privileges.

The DOD, VA and Department of Homeland Security have collaborated to implement Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code, for those who are eligible for this benefit.

Facilities open to newly eligible patrons include:

- Commissaries\*
- Military exchanges
- Golf courses
- Bowling centers
- Recreational lodging
- RV campgrounds
- Movie theaters
- AmericanForcesTravel.com

\*The DOD is required to charge a small fee to new users who are eligible solely under Section 1065 of Title 10, to offset any increased expenses incurred by the U.S. Treasury associated with the use of credit or debit cards for customer purchases at commissary stores. The fee is determined in compliance with card network rules and based on current average costs to the U.S. Treasury for processing these types of cards.

# Implementation of the Purple Heart and Disabled Veteran Equal Access Act of 2018 — FAQs

Current as of June 2022



## WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

**Q1: Are disabled veterans eligible for privileges at military commissaries and military exchanges, and for MWR activities privileges?**

A: Yes. Veterans with a Department of Veterans Affairs-documented, service-connected disability rating are eligible for Defense Department and Coast Guard commissary, exchange and MWR retail privileges.

**Q2: If I don't have a service-connected disability, but I meet one of the other new-user categories, am I eligible for privileges?**

A: Yes. If you don't have a service-connected disability, you are eligible for privileges under Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code, if you are:

- A Purple Heart veteran recipient
- A former prisoner of war veteran
- An individual assessed, approved and designated as a primary family caregiver of an eligible veteran under the VA Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers

**Q3: What's the definition of a service-connected disability?**

A: A service-connected disability is an injury or illness incurred or aggravated during active military service, as determined by the VA.

**Q4: I was in the reserves, am I included?**

A: Yes. Reserve members who are veterans with a VA-documented, service-connected disability rating or are a Purple Heart veteran recipient, a former POW or an individual assessed, approved and designated as a primary family caregiver of an eligible veteran under the VA Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers are eligible under Section 1065 of Title 10, USC.

**Q5: Are veterans of the U.S. Public Health Service or the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration eligible for these privileges?**

A: Yes. If a commissioned officer of the regular or Ready Reserve Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service or a commissioned officer of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration meets the requirements for being considered a veteran under Section 101 of Title 38, USC, and was awarded the Purple Heart, is a former POW or has a VA-documented service-connected disability, they are eligible for privileges provided for under Section 1065 of Title 10, USC.

**Q6: Does anything change for veterans who meet one of the new eligibility criteria who are also uniformed service retirees, Medal of Honor recipients, veterans with 100% service-connected disability ratings or veterans with 100% unemployability ratings due to a service-connected condition?**

A: No. These veterans are still authorized to obtain DOD-issued ID cards and broader access to privileges provided for in DOD policy. However, if they choose to use the Veteran Health Identification Card that

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displays “PURPLE HEART,” “FORMER POW” or “SERVICE CONNECTED” instead of their DOD-issued ID card, access will be limited to veterans eligible solely under Section 1065 of Title 10, USC.

## **Q7: Does an authorized caregiver have to be the disabled veteran’s spouse?**

A: No. An authorized caregiver must be the individual assessed, approved and designated as the primary family caregiver of an eligible veteran under the VA Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. Visit <https://www.caregiver.va.gov> for more information.

## **Q8: Do caregivers who get these privileges have to be enrolled in a specific program?**

A: Yes. A caregiver eligible under Section 1065 of Title 10, USC or the Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018 must be the individual assessed, approved and designated as the primary family caregiver of an eligible veteran under the VA Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers to receive these privileges. Visit <https://www.caregiver.va.gov> for information.

## **Q9: How do I enroll my spouse in the caregiver program?**

A: For information on how you can enroll your spouse, visit the VA Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers website at <https://www.caregiver.va.gov>.

## **Q10: Are all veterans eligible for in-person military commissary, military exchange and MWR privileges on military installations?**

A: No. Unless otherwise authorized to receive commissary, exchange and MWR access, the only veterans eligible for in-person privileges are:

- Purple Heart Veteran recipients
- Former POW Veterans
- Those who have a VA-documented, service-connected disability rating from 0%-90%

Veterans eligible for DOD and Coast Guard installation and privilege access through previously-established DOD and Coast Guard policy (i.e., Medal of Honor recipients and veterans with VA-documented service-connected disability ratings of 100%) may obtain a DOD identification card to facilitate installation and privilege access.

While not all veterans are eligible for in-person privileges on DOD and Coast Guard installations, all honorably discharged veterans are eligible for online military exchange shopping through the Veterans Online Shopping Benefit. To access their online shopping benefit, these veterans should follow the instructions to establish an account at any of the following military exchange websites or the VA’s Veterans Canteen Service:

- AAFES: <https://www.shopmyexchange.com>
- CGX: <https://shopCGX.com>
- MCX: <http://www.mymcx.com>

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- NEX: <https://www.mynavyexchange.com>
- Veterans Canteen Service: <https://shopvcs.va.gov>

## **Q11: Why are these privileges not available to all veterans?**

A: Section 1065 of Title 10, USC, recognizes the service of those who endured captivity during conflict, were wounded in combat or sustained a service-connected disability, and the individuals approved and designated as their caregivers, under a formalized VA caregiver program.

DOD infrastructure is not equipped to handle an influx of more than 15 million additional veterans to these types of facilities without severely impacting its ability to provide these critical services to active-duty military personnel and their families, which is why they exist.

## **Q12: Do family members of the eligible veterans and caregivers have the same privileges?**

A: No. Only the veterans and caregivers eligible solely under Section 1065 of Title 10, USC, have these privileges. Eligibility is tied to eligibility for, and enrollment in, specific VA programs. Family members and caregivers who are not eligible for these privileges in their own right are not authorized to receive privileges.

However, family members of veterans who meet one of the eligibility criteria who are also uniformed service retirees, Medal of Honor recipients, veterans with a VA-documented, service-connected disability rating of 100% or veterans with a 100% unemployability rating due to a service-connected condition are eligible for privileges under previously-established DOD policy.

## **Q13: If my deceased spouse was a veteran solely eligible under one of the new veteran eligibility categories, can I use his/her benefit?**

A: No. Unfortunately, this benefit does not extend to family members and cannot be transferred to survivors.

## **WHY?**

### **Q1: Why do these veterans get the same privileges regardless of time served?**

A: Section 1065 of Title 10, USC, recognizes the service of those who endured captivity during conflict, were wounded in combat or sustained a service-connected disability, and the individuals assessed, approved and designated as their caregivers under a formalized VA caregiver program.

### **Q2: Are these new users being authorized to help the DOD boost retail store profits?**

A: No. Section 1065 of Title 10, USC, recognizes the service of those who endured captivity during conflict, were wounded in combat or sustained a service-connected disability, and the individuals assessed, approved and designated as their caregivers under a formalized VA caregiver program.

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**Q3: If the military commissary is required to deliver groceries at a discount over commercial grocery stores, and it relies on appropriated funds to do that, wouldn't it take more appropriated funds to serve more people?**

A: The DOD recognizes that the implementation of Section 1065 of Title 10, USC, will likely increase operating expenses at military commissaries and will analyze the impact on the system and adjust as needed to minimize any negative consequences.

## SHOPPING EXPERIENCE

**Q1: How does this affect the service experience of previously-authorized patrons?**

A: Military commissaries, exchanges and MWR retail facilities are prepared to welcome these patrons without disrupting the current service experience for previously-authorized patrons. Most locations will experience little or no impact on current operations. Installations in high cost-of-living areas may experience low to moderate impact.

**Q2: What level of priority will newly eligible veterans and caregivers be afforded when accessing military commissaries, exchanges and MWR retail privileges?**

A: Users eligible solely under Section 1065 of Title 10, USC, receive the same priority and service levels as military retirees for all activities authorized under this law. They may be prioritized lower than military retirees if authorized by the DOD to receive access to additional MWR activities.

## GAINING ACCESS

**Q1: As a newly eligible veteran or caregiver who does not have any other affiliation with the military services that provides access to military installations, how do I get an ID card that will get me on military installations to access my privileges?**

A: Veterans eligible solely under Section 1065 of Title 10, USC, (Purple Heart recipients, former POWs and those who have a VA-documented, service-connected disability rating from 0%-90%) who are eligible to receive a Veteran Health Identification Card must obtain one from the VA to facilitate DOD and Coast Guard installation access.

The VHIC must display the eligibility status "PURPLE HEART," "FORMER POW" or "SERVICE CONNECTED." Visit <https://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vhic> for information regarding eligibility for the VHIC and the application process. If an eligible veteran with a 0% service-connected condition is ineligible to obtain a VHIC due to having an income too high for VA health care enrollment, the DOD will temporarily accept VA Health Eligibility Center Form H623A (indicating placement in Priority Group 8E), paired with an acceptable credential such as a REAL ID-compliant driver's license or a U.S. passport, until the DOD and VA identify a long-term credential for this small group of veterans.

Initially, caregivers eligible solely under Section 1065 will receive a letter from the VA Office of Community Care indicating that they are the approved and designated primary family caregiver of an eligible veteran

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under the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers and are eligible for these privileges.

For installation access, entry to some commissaries and at the point of sale at commissaries, exchanges and MWR retail facilities, eligible caregivers will need to show an acceptable credential along with their eligibility letter. Acceptable credentials include:

- DOD common access card, when otherwise eligible
- DOD uniformed services identification card, when otherwise eligible
- REAL ID-compliant driver's license issued by a state, territory, possession or the District of Columbia
- REAL ID-compliant non-driver's ID card issued by a state, territory, possession or the District of Columbia
- Enhanced driver's license issued by a state, territory, possession or the District of Columbia
- U.S. passport or passport card
- Foreign passport bearing an unexpired immigrant or non-immigrant visa or entry stamp
- Federal personal identity verification card, when otherwise eligible
- VHIC
- Transportation Worker Identification Card

Veterans who meet one of the new eligibility criteria who are also uniformed service retirees, Medal of Honor recipients, veterans with 100% service-connected disability ratings or veterans with 100% unemployability ratings due to a service-connected condition are eligible for a DOD-issued ID card and privileges broader than those granted under Section 1065. These veterans should obtain and use the DOD-issued credential for access to installations and privileges. DOD credentials are issued at Real-Time Automated Personnel Identification System ID card sites on DOD installations.

**Q2: As a newly eligible veteran or caregiver who has an affiliation with the military services that allows for access to military installations, but not to privileges, how do I get an ID card that will allow me to receive my privileges?**

A: You may use your military service affiliation credentials, such as your DOD civilian ID card, in the United States to continue to access installations. But, if that credential does not authorize privilege access, it cannot be used as such, and eligible veterans and caregivers must use the authorized credentials to access their privileges.

Veterans eligible solely under Section 1065 of Title 10, USC (those who are Purple Heart recipients, former POWs and veterans with a VA-documented, service-connected disability rating from 0%-90%) who are eligible to obtain a VHIC, must obtain one from the VA to facilitate DOD and Coast Guard privileges access.

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The VHIC must display the eligibility status “PURPLE HEART,” “FORMER POW” or “SERVICE CONNECTED.” These eligible veterans must present their VHIC to gain entry to some commissary stores and at the checkout at commissaries, exchanges and MWR retail facilities to complete their transactions.

Visit <https://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vhic> for information regarding eligibility for the VHIC and the application process. If an eligible veteran with a 0% service-connected condition is ineligible to obtain a VHIC due to having an income that is too high for VA health care enrollment, the DOD will temporarily accept VA Health Eligibility Center Form H623A (indicating placement in Priority Group 8E), paired with an acceptable credential such as a REAL ID-compliant driver’s license or a U.S. passport, until the DOD and the VA identify a long-term credential for this small group of veterans.

Initially, caregivers eligible solely under Section 1065 will receive a letter from the VA Office of Community Care that indicates they are approved and designated as the primary family caregiver of an eligible veteran under the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers and are eligible for these privileges. For entry to some commissaries and at the checkout at commissaries, exchanges and MWR retail facilities, eligible caregivers will need to show an acceptable credential along with their eligibility letter.

Acceptable credentials include:

- DOD common access card, when otherwise eligible
- DOD uniformed services ID card, when otherwise eligible
- REAL ID-compliant driver’s license issued by a state, territory, possession or the District of Columbia
- REAL ID-compliant non-driver’s license issued by a state, territory, possession or the District of Columbia
- Enhanced driver’s license issued by a state, territory, possession or the District of Columbia
- U.S. passport or passport card
- Foreign passport bearing an unexpired immigrant or non-immigrant visa or entry stamp
- Federal personal identity verification card, when otherwise eligible
- VHIC
- Transportation Worker ID Card

Veterans who meet one of the new eligibility criteria who are also uniformed service retirees, Medal of Honor recipients, veterans with 100% service-connected disability ratings or veterans with 100% unemployability ratings due to a service-connected condition are eligible for a DOD-issued ID card and privileges broader than those granted under Section 1065. These veterans should obtain and use the DOD-issued credential for access to privileges. DOD credentials are issued at Real-Time Automated Personnel Identification System ID card sites on DOD installations.



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### **Q3: How do I get a VHIC?**

A: The VA currently issues a VHIC to veterans enrolled in VA health care. Visit <https://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vhic> for information regarding eligibility and the application process.

### **Q4: If my only eligibility for these privileges is my 0% VA-documented service-connected condition, but I am not eligible to obtain a VHIC, can I bring another form of VA documentation to access these privileges?**

A: If an eligible veteran with a 0% service-connected condition is ineligible to obtain a VHIC due to having an income too high for VA health care enrollment, the DOD will temporarily accept VA Health Eligibility Center Form H623A (indicating placement in Priority Group 8E), paired with an acceptable credential such as a REAL ID-compliant driver's license or a U.S. passport, until the DOD and the VA identify a long-term credential for this small group of veterans. Contact a VA Health Eligibility Center for a replacement if you have misplaced your Form H623A.

### **Q5: If I meet one of the new veteran eligibility criteria and have a VHIC, but it does not display my eligibility, will I be allowed access to the installation and these privileges?**

A: No. Since there are many veterans with VHICs who are not eligible for military installation or privilege access, the only way personnel monitoring this access will be able to confirm that you are eligible is if your VHIC displays one of the new veteran eligibility categories on the front of the card below the photo: "PURPLE HEART," "FORMER POW" or "SERVICE CONNECTED." Go to your nearest VA Health Eligibility Center to obtain a new VHIC if you meet one of these criteria but have a VHIC that does not display the criteria on the front of the card below your photo.

### **Q6: What's the difference between a Veteran Identification Card and a Veteran Health Identification Card?**

A: The VIC is issued to any honorably or generally discharged veteran. The VHIC is only issued to those veterans who are enrolled in VA health care and display certain veteran status information on the card. Only the VHICs that display "PURPLE HEART," "FORMER POW" or "SERVICE CONNECTED" are eligible for the new privileged at DOD and Coast Guard installations.

### **Q7: Can I use a VIC to get on an installation to access my privileges?**

A: No. The VIC is not an acceptable form of identification to facilitate installation or privilege access at DOD and Coast Guard installations.

### **Q8: If I meet one of the eligibility requirements, but I don't have a VHIC, how can I get on a military installation to access these privileges?**

A: Only eligible veterans who have been issued a VHIC from the VA can present their VHIC to gain entry to DOD and Coast Guard installations and to access commissaries, exchanges and MWR retail activities. The VHIC must display the veteran's eligibility status: "PURPLE HEART," "FORMER POW" or "SERVICE



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CONNECTED.” Visit <https://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vhic> for information regarding eligibility for the VHIC and the application process.

If an eligible veteran with a 0% service-connected condition is ineligible to obtain a VHIC due to having an income too high for VA health care enrollment, the DOD will temporarily accept VA Health Eligibility Center Form H623A (indicating placement in Priority Group 8E), paired with an acceptable credential such as a REAL ID-compliant driver’s license or U.S. passport, until the DOD and VA identify a long-term credential for this small group of veterans.

Initially, caregivers must obtain a letter from the VA Office of Community Care that indicates they are the approved and designated primary family caregiver of an eligible veteran under the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers and are eligible for these privileges. These letters will be mailed to eligible primary family caregivers. For installation access and at checkout, caregivers will need to show an acceptable credential, such as a REAL ID-compliant driver’s license or U.S. passport and their eligibility letter.

Veterans who meet one of the eligibility criteria who are also uniformed service retirees, Medal of Honor recipients, veterans with 100% service-connected disability ratings or veterans with 100% unemployability ratings due to a service-connected condition are eligible for a DOD ID card and privileges broader than those granted under Section 1065 of Title 10, U.S.C. These veterans should obtain and use the DOD-issued credential for access to installations privileges. DOD credentials are issued at Real-Time Automated Personnel Identification System ID card sites on DOD and Coast Guard installations.

## **Q9: Do I need to get a new Veteran Health Identification Card if I got my current VHIC before I became service-connected?**

A: If your current VHIC does not display “PURPLE HEART,” “FORMER POW” or “SERVICE CONNECTED” on the front of the card below your photo, then you will need to get a new VHIC that displays one of these eligibility identifiers if you want to access military installations and these new privileges.

## **Q10: If I am waiting to receive my new VHIC with all the required identifying information, can I bring my VA eligibility letter or my VHIC request receipt to get access instead?**

A: No. If you are eligible to obtain a VHIC, you must use the VHIC to gain access to military installations and privileges. Installation access and facility personnel must be able to verify eligibility and identity quickly and accurately, which the VHIC facilitates.

## **Q11: Will I still have access to these privileges after my eligible VHIC expires?**

A: No. If your VHIC expires or is getting close to its expiration date, visit your nearest VA Health Eligibility Office to obtain a new VHIC to minimize any gap in access to these privileges.

## **Q12: How will newly eligible veterans and caregivers gain access to installations if they do not have any other affiliation with the military services that provide access to military installations?**

A: To access the military installation, veterans eligible solely under Section 1065 of Title 10, USC, who have been issued a VHIC from the VA, can present that card to gain entry to DOD and Coast Guard

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installations, commissaries, exchanges and MWR retail activities to complete their transactions. Their VHIC must display the veteran's eligibility status: "PURPLE HEART," "FORMER POW" or "SERVICE CONNECTED."

Upon the first visit to the installation, eligible veterans must present their VHIC at the visitor control center. If an eligible veteran with a 0% service-connected condition is ineligible to obtain a VHIC due to income too high for VA health care enrollment, the DOD will temporarily accept VA Health Eligibility Center Form H623A (indicating placement in Priority Group 8E), paired with an acceptable credential such as a REAL ID-compliant driver's license or a U.S. passport, until the DOD and the VA identify a long-term credential for this small group of veterans. Driver's licenses that are not REAL ID-compliant will not be accepted for entry.

Initially, eligible caregivers of veterans will receive a letter from the VA Office of Community Care that indicates they are the primary family caregiver of an eligible veteran under the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers and are eligible for these privileges. Upon the first visit to the installation, caregivers will present this letter paired with an acceptable credential at the visitor control center.

Acceptable credentials include:

- DOD common access card, when otherwise eligible
- DOD uniformed services ID card, when otherwise eligible
- REAL ID-compliant driver's license issued by a state, territory, possession or the District of Columbia
- REAL ID-compliant non-driver's ID card issued by a state, territory, possession or the District of Columbia
- Enhanced driver's license issued by a state, territory, possession or the District of Columbia
- U.S. passport or passport card
- Foreign passport bearing an unexpired immigrant or non-immigrant visa or entry stamp
- Federal personal identity verification card, when otherwise eligible
- VHIC
- Transportation Worker ID Card

Depending on the type of installation and the acceptable credential presented, veterans and caregivers may be enrolled for recurring access, which would allow them to proceed to the gate for entry upon subsequent visits without having to stop again at the visitor control center.

As with all other individuals seeking access to DOD installations, all eligible veterans and caregivers must pass a basic on-the-spot check for criminal history or terrorism connections prior to enrolling, and an automated check each time they enter the installation. Veterans and caregivers with felony convictions, felony arrest warrants or anything related to criminal history or terrorism will not be permitted entry.

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## **Q13: What should I do if the installation access scanners cannot read the data on my eligible VHIC?**

A: The DOD has learned that some of the eligible VHICs issued by the VA cannot be read by DOD installation access scanners because the barcode is missing some required data. If you've been issued one of these VHICs, installation access personnel will likely deny access to the installation.

Some installations, at the discretion of the military department, may allow the unscannable VHIC to be used to establish purpose, but another acceptable credential such as a REAL ID-compliant driver's license or U.S. passport, would have to be presented to establish identity. Eligible veterans with VHICs that the DOD is not able to scan cannot be enrolled for recurring access to installations.

Also, any accompanying visitors may be denied entry at the discretion of the military department. If you are one of the veterans affected by this situation, take your VHIC back to a VA medical center to correct the issue by requesting a new one from the Enrollment and Eligibility Office. A new card will be mailed to you within about two weeks.

## **Q14: Will I have to get a decal for my car to get access to the military installations?**

A: No. The DOD does not require vehicle decals to access installations.

## **Q15: Will I have to register my car at the visitor control center?**

A: Depending on the local military installation traffic enforcement policy, newly eligible veterans and caregivers may be required to provide proof of vehicle registration and insurance, and a driver's license, at the visitor control center before being authorized to drive onto the installation. Consider calling ahead to be sure you are prepared to provide any traffic enforcement-related documentation the installation may require.

## **Q16: If I live in an area with multiple military installations, will I have to register at the visitor control center at each one?**

A: Not all installations have identification credential enrollment capabilities, and not all installations share enrollment information. When you stop at the visitor control center on your first visit, ask about enrollment opportunities and what other military installations would recognize your enrollment from.

## **Q17: If I'm a newly eligible veteran or caregiver and I already have an ID card that gets me onto the military installation, can I just use that to access my new privileges?**

A: No. The ID card used to access privileges must be valid for such use. If the ID card that allows you access to the military installation does not already allow you access to privileges, it will not allow you access to privileges based on your eligible veteran or caregiver status.

Eligible veterans must present a VHIC that displays the eligibility status: "PURPLE HEART," "FORMER POW" or "SERVICE CONNECTED." If an eligible veteran with a 0% service-connected condition is ineligible to obtain a VHIC due to having income too high for VA health care enrollment, the DOD will temporarily accept VA Health Eligibility Center Form H623A (indicating placement in Priority Group 8E), paired with an

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acceptable credential such as a REAL ID-compliant driver's license or a U.S. passport, until it and the VA identify a long-term credential for this small group of veterans.

Caregivers must present an eligibility letter from the VA Office of Community Care, paired with an acceptable credential.

**Q18: If I'm a military retiree, a Medal of Honor recipient, a veteran with a 100% service-connected disability rating or a veteran with a 100% unemployability rating due to a service-connected condition, can I continue to use my DOD ID card to access installations and my privileges, or do I need to get a VHIC?**

A: Military retirees, Medal of Honor recipients, veterans with a 100% disability rating and veterans with a 100% unemployability rating due to a service-connected condition, and their dependents, are eligible to obtain DOD ID cards, and are eligible for broader privileges than veterans who are eligible for access solely under Section 1065 of Title 10, USC.

For installation and privilege access, continue to use your DOD ID card. There is no need to obtain or present a VHIC. If you choose to use a VHIC instead of your DOD-issued ID, your access will be limited to that of the veterans eligible solely under Section 1065.

**Q19: As a newly eligible veteran or caregiver, can I bring an accompanying visitor onto the installation and into the facilities with me?**

A: If the installation has not limited visitor access, newly eligible veterans with an eligible VHIC cannot escort or vouch for accompanying visitors that cannot establish their own identity and fitness for installation access. Once the accompanying visitor completes the required checks at the visitor control center, they can accompany the eligible veteran onto the installation, and they can enroll their credential, just like the eligible veteran, to facilitate future visits with the eligible veteran.

Accompanying visitors must present a REAL ID-compliant driver's license, U.S. passport or any other acceptable credential at the visitor control center to initiate the required checks. A driver's license that is not REAL ID-compliant will not be accepted as proof of identity. On the installation, accompanying visitors must always remain with their sponsoring veteran, and they are not permitted to make purchases.

Unfortunately, DOD policy does not currently permit individuals with authorized access to DOD installations with anything other than DOD-issued credentials to bring visitors. But the DOD is pursuing a change that would allow newly eligible veterans with a VA Health Eligibility Center Form H623A or caregivers with an eligibility letter from the VA Office of Community Care to also bring along visitors who can establish their identity and fitness to enter the installation.

Keep in mind that conditions may vary from installation to installation and visitor access may be restricted for a variety of reasons, including during times of heightened threat. In addition, the military departments have the authority to place restrictions on visitor access to installations, including the number of accompanying visitors, time of day or in response to events impacting installation operations.

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## **Q20: Why do installation access procedures vary?**

A: While all military installations operate under the same broad policies, threat conditions, military department-authorized variations, certain events and general discretion can all contribute to differences in the way installations handle access. This is true both at the same installation and when comparing different installations. Access protocols are strict when they need to be and more flexible when they can be.

## **Q21: How do I access my online exchange and MWR retail privileges?**

A: Veterans already have online exchange privileges through the Veterans Online Shopping Benefit. But online MWR retail access is now also available through American Forces Travel for veterans eligible solely under Section 1065 of Title 10, USC.

Individuals assessed, approved and designated as the primary family caregivers of eligible veterans under the VA Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers are also eligible for online exchange and MWR retail privileges. Primary family caregivers enrolled after Jan. 1, 2020, are able to access these online privileges within 30 days of receiving their eligibility letter from the VA Office of Community Care noting these privileges.

To access these online privileges, visit:

- AAFES: <https://www.shopmyexchange.com>
- CGX: <https://shopCGX.com>
- MCX: <http://www.mymcx.com>
- NEX: <https://www.mynavyexchange.com>
- American Forces Travel: [www.AmericanForcesTravel.com](http://www.AmericanForcesTravel.com)



## WHAT FACILITIES AND SERVICES CAN THESE NEWLY ELIGIBLE VETERANS USE?

### Q1: What MWR activities will these newly eligible veterans and caregivers be authorized to use?

A: Veterans and caregivers newly eligible under Section 1065 of Title 10, USC, will have access to DOD and Coast Guard MWR retail activities and services that include:

- Recreational lodging/resorts
- Bowling and golf
- Restaurants
- Marinas
- Equipment rental
- Movie theaters
- Vehicle storage
- Kennels
- AmericanForcesTravel.com

Other basic community support program activities that the military department involved determines to have excess capacity and user fees to cover the majority of the operational expenses may also be authorized. MWR activities primarily funded by appropriations and child development programs are not authorized.

### Q2: Why aren't these newly eligible veterans and caregivers eligible to participate in all MWR activities?

A: Different categories of MWR activities receive appropriated funds to operate, in relation to their necessity for meeting the military mission and the needs of military families. Section 1065 of Title 10, USC, authorizes access to MWR retail activities because these activities are generally self-sustaining and do not rely on appropriations to operate.

### Q3: Are commissary, exchange and MWR retail privileges available at overseas installations?

A: Although new patrons eligible solely under Section 1065 of Title 10, USC, will have in-store commissary, military exchange and MWR retail privileges in the United States and in its territories and possessions, such access is not guaranteed at installations in foreign countries. Applicable host-nation laws and international agreements, such as Status of Forces Agreements, may, and often do, limit or prevent access in foreign countries. Neither the DOD nor the U.S. government has the authority to unilaterally change these agreements.

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## **Q4: Does eligibility extend to newly eligible veterans and caregivers no longer living in the United States?**

A: Access cannot be guaranteed for patrons eligible solely under Section 1065 of Title 10, USC, outside of the United States and its territories and possessions due to applicable host-nation laws and international agreements, such as SOFA.

## **Q5: Are newly eligible veterans and caregivers allowed to shop the military exchange online stores?**

A: Yes. Veterans and caregivers who are eligible for exchange benefits under Section 1065 of Title 10, USC, are eligible for all exchange shopping venues, both in store and online.

## **Q6: Are newly eligible veterans and caregivers eligible for a MILITARY STAR card?**

A: Veterans and caregivers who are eligible for commissary and exchange privileges through Section 1065 of Title 10, USC, are eligible to apply for a MILITARY STAR card, based on the terms of eligibility for this credit program.

## **Q7: Can caregivers apply for a MILITARY STAR card?**

A: Yes. Individuals assessed, approved and designated as the primary family caregivers of eligible veterans under the VA Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers are eligible for commissary and exchange privileges through Section 1065 of Title 10, USC, and are eligible to apply for a MILITARY STAR card.

## **Q8: Are newly eligible veterans and caregivers able to use AmericanForcesTravel.com?**

A: Yes. AmericanForcesTravel.com is an MWR retail program, so veterans and caregivers who are eligible for MWR retail privileges under Section 1065 of Title 10, USC, are eligible to use this exclusive travel-booking website.

## **Q9: What is AmericanForcesTravel.com?**

A: AmericanForcesTravel.com is the DOD's discount leisure travel-booking website. Authorized users can book flights, lodging, rental cars, cruises and more. The site also offers discount event tickets.

## **Q10: Are newly eligible veterans and caregivers able to use military campgrounds?**

A: Yes.

## **Q11: Are newly eligible veterans and caregivers able to use the MWR ticket office on the installation to buy discount attraction tickets?**

A: The MWR ticket office is not an MWR retail activity, so access is at the discretion of the military departments or their designees, subject to location, capacity and revenue-generating ability. Even if a military department authorizes access to the MWR ticket office, newly eligible veterans and caregivers should be aware that when a vendor places a restriction on the sale of a particular ticket, such as it being



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available for purchase only by active-duty service members, it may not be available for purchase or use by all authorized MWR ticket office patrons.

## **Q12: Are newly eligible veterans and caregivers able to use fitness centers and gyms on installations?**

A: No. Fitness centers and gyms are not MWR retail activities. They are primarily funded through appropriations and serve a mission-essential function for service member readiness and resiliency.

## **Q13: Are newly eligible veterans and caregivers able to use the MWR craft shop on installations?**

A: MWR craft and hobby activities are not MWR retail activities, so access is at the discretion of the military departments or their designees, subject to location, capacity and revenue-generating ability.

## **Q14: Are newly eligible veterans and caregivers able to use DOD official temporary duty travel and PCS lodging facilities?**

A: Yes. In addition to MWR recreational lodging such as RV parks, cottages and cabins, destination military recreation facilities and military resorts and hotels, newly eligible veterans and caregivers are authorized to use official DOD lodging facilities intended for TDY and PCS moves for service members and their families on a Space-A basis.

## **Q15: How do I find out where commissary and exchange facilities are located in my area?**

A: Each of the retail organizations features a store locator function on their website:

- Commissaries: <https://www.commissaries.com>
- AAFES: <https://www.shopmyexchange.com>
- CGX: <https://shopCGX.com>
- MCX: <http://www.mymcx.com>
- NEX: <https://www.mynavyexchange.com>

## **PATRON AWARENESS**

### **Q1: Is a user fee charged to these newly eligible veterans and caregivers at commissaries, exchanges and for MWR activities?**

A: No additional user fees or surcharges are added to military exchange or MWR purchases for patrons eligible solely under Section 1065 of Title 10, USC.

The Defense Commissary Agency is congressionally mandated to issue all current and new patrons a 5% surcharge on purchases to pay for commissary construction, equipment and maintenance. Even with the surcharge, patrons receive an average worldwide savings of 23.7% over commercial grocery stores.

In addition to the 5% surcharge and in accordance with Section 1065 of Title 10, USC, veterans and caregivers who are eligible for commissary privileges solely under Section 1065 (Purple Heart recipients, former POWs, veterans with VA-documented service-connected disability ratings from 0%-90% and

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individuals assessed, approved and designated as the primary family caregivers of eligible veterans under the VA Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers) and who use commercial credit and debit cards to make commissary purchases will be charged a small user fee to offset any increased expenses associated with the use of credit or debit cards incurred by the Department of the Treasury.

Patrons making commissary purchases with a commercial credit card or signature debit card, which are accepted and processed as credit, will be charged an additional 1.9% user fee, while purchases with a personal identification number debit card will be charged a 0.5% user fee. The rates for these fees may be adjusted annually.

The user fee will not be refunded for product returns. Patrons who use electronic-benefit transfer cards in the commissary, such as the one for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or the MILITARY STAR card, will not be charged a user fee.

## **Q2: When did the shopping benefit start?**

A: The benefit started on Jan. 1, 2020. Benefit includes in-person and online access to military commissaries, military exchanges and MWR retail activities for:

- Veterans eligible solely under Section 1065 of Title 10, USC (Purple Heart recipients, former POWs and veterans with a VA-documented service-connected disability rating from 0%-90%), who possess and present a VHIC that displays "PURPLE HEART," "FORMER POW" or "SERVICE CONNECTED" on the front below the photo.
- Individuals assessed, approved and designated as the primary family caregiver of an eligible veteran under the VA Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers who possess and present a letter from the VA Office of Community Care that indicates eligibility for these privileges, paired with an acceptable credential such as a REAL ID-compliant driver's license or U.S. passport.

If an eligible veteran with a 0% service-connected condition is ineligible to obtain a VHIC due to having an income too high for VA health care enrollment, the DOD will temporarily accept VA Health Eligibility Center Form H623A (indicating placement in Priority Group 8E), paired with an acceptable credential such as a REAL ID-compliant driver's license or a U.S. passport, until the DOD and the VA identify a long-term credential for this small group of veterans.

Future phases of the rollout will address consideration and criteria for other eligible caregivers.

## **Q3: Is there anything off limits to newly eligible veterans and caregivers?**

A: There are no restrictions on commissary, exchange or MWR retail privilege access unless local military installation policies or conditions impose a restriction on all eligible patron groups. Where certain restrictions apply to the military retiree patron group, such restrictions will also apply to the newly eligible veteran and caregiver patron groups.

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Veterans and caregivers who are eligible for military commissary, military exchange and MWR retail privileges under Section 1065 of Title 10, USC, are allowed access to the same products and services that military retirees have in the United States and in the U.S. territories and possessions. In foreign countries overseas, restrictions may apply based on applicable host-nation laws or international agreements, such as SOFA.

#### **Q4: Does the exchange charge a surcharge for shopping?**

A: No surcharges or user fees are added to military exchange purchases.

#### **Q5: Why does the commissary charge a surcharge for shopping?**

A: The Defense Commissary Agency [GS23] is statutorily required by Section 2484 of Title 10 to charge a 5% surcharge on all purchases to pay for commissary construction, equipment and maintenance. Even with the surcharge, patrons receive an average worldwide savings of 23.7% over commercial grocery store shopping.

In addition to the 5% surcharge, the Defense Commissary Agency is statutorily required to charge an additional user fee to veterans and caregivers who are eligible for commissary privileges solely under Section 1065 of Title 10, U.S.C. (Purple Heart recipients, former POWs, veterans with VA-documented, service-connected disability ratings from 0%-90% and individuals assessed, approved and designated as the primary family caregivers of eligible veterans under the VA Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers) to offset the increased expense to the Department of the Treasury for processing commercial credit and debit cards used at military commissaries as a result of Section 1065.

#### **Q6: Is there a fee associated with using the MILITARY STAR card?**

A: No. There will not be an additional fee assessed when customers use the MILITARY STAR card to pay for their purchases. As with any credit card, however, interest charges will apply whenever a balance is carried over on the card month-to-month.

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

#### **Q1: Does opening military installations up to these new users compromise the safety and security of our installations?**

A: The DOD has processes and procedures in place to vet all visitors to DOD military installations, including regular workforce personnel, residents and other visitors. The individuals included in Section 1065 of Title 10, USC, must comply with the same installation access processes and procedures as any visitor to a DOD installation.

#### **Q2: How could obtaining a VHIC impact me?**

A: If you receive financial assistance for a health plan purchased in the health insurance marketplace established by the Affordable Care Act, including premium assistance tax credits, enrollment in the VA health care system could impact the financial assistance you receive. The VHIC is a secure ID card issued to and used by veterans enrolled in VA health care to check in to appointments at VA medical centers.

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This secure ID card keeps your personal information safe while giving the VA the information needed to easily access your VA health record. To obtain a VHIC, veterans first need to enroll in VA health care. If you're not already enrolled, find out how to apply for VA health care at <https://www.va.gov/health-care/how-to-apply/>.

## EFFECT ON OTHER RETAIL OUTLETS

### **Q1: What impact will this initiative have on the Veterans Canteen Service or the VA?**

A: The financial impact to the Veterans Canteen Service should be minimal, if any.

Veterans Canteen Service users who also qualify for these DOD privileges under Section 1065 of Title 10, USC, will have additional choices for their shopping needs.

The VA may see an increase in the number of veterans requesting consideration for service-connected disability ratings and applying for VA health care benefits to obtain a VHIC.