

# Eligible veterans get easier access to military bases under new rules

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Wednesday, Nov 20, 2024

The more than 4 million veterans who are eligible for certain on-base benefits may have an easier time getting into military installations, under new rules announced by the departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs.

The new procedures allow these [veterans and their eligible caregivers](#) to enroll for

recurring access to an installation, so that once they've completed that process, they can go directly to the installation gate and present the same credential to enter the installation at subsequent visits.

These are veterans who don't have access to base otherwise, for example, as retirees or as 100% disabled veterans.

About 4 million veterans with at least a 0% VA-documented service-connected disability [became eligible by law in 2020 for commissary, exchange and certain MWR benefits](#). For a variety of reasons, and varying from one installation to another, veterans and caregivers have sometimes encountered difficulty getting through the gate to use those benefits. Over the last four years, there have been fewer complaints about difficulties, but the new rules should

simplify the process, said Jon Retzer, deputy national legislative director for health for Disabled American Veterans.

Under the new rules that took effect Nov. 1, veterans can use their VA-issued [Veteran Health Identification Card, VHIC](#) or their [REAL ID](#) to enroll for recurring installation access. Those who don't have a VHIC, as well as eligible caregivers, can use their REAL ID Act-compliant driver's license or non-driver's identification card to enroll for installation access at the installation visitor center.

The law that took effect in 2020 extended eligibility to veterans with VA-documented service-connected disability ratings from 0% to 90%; Purple Heart recipients, former prisoners of war; and individuals approved and designated as the primary family

caregivers of eligible veterans under the VA Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. Medal of Honor recipients and veterans with 100% service-connected disability ratings documented by the VA already had access to DoD installations and commissary, exchange and MWR facilities.

There may be additional identification requirements once the veterans and caregivers get to the commissary, exchange or MWR facility, because those facilities can't electronically verify eligibility. Eligible veterans who don't have a VHIC must still provide a copy of their VA-issued service-connected disability letter, or VA Health Eligibility Center Form H623A, and caregivers must provide their VA-issued

caregiver patronage letter, to show their eligibility.

“Our veterans and their caregivers deserve a smooth experience in accessing installations,” said Ashish S. Vazirani, acting under secretary of defense for personnel and readiness, in an announcement about the new rules.

Officials “look forward to continuing to welcome eligible veterans and VA caregivers to military exchanges and commissaries, and at eligible facilities like golf courses, movie theaters and clubs,” he said.

“DOD installations provide numerous benefits and critical services to our nation’s veterans, including health care,” said VA Deputy Secretary Tanya Bradsher, in the announcement.

The VA has been working on partnerships with some installations around the country to allow veterans to use military medical facilities.

“We are grateful for our partnership with DOD and the ability to implement these updates to make military installation access easier for veterans and their caregivers,” Bradsher said.

Enrollment is generally valid for one to three years, or for one year after the last visit to the installation.

To enroll, veterans and caregivers must visit each installation’s visitor center where they plan to visit. They will be required to:

\*Present a VHIC or REAL ID to establish identity.

\*Undergo an on-the-spot criminal record and terrorism check.

\*Have their eligibility for on-installation benefits verified electronically. If the purpose of their visits is for health care, and the installation doesn't have a commissary, exchange or authorized MWR service, then the veteran or caregiver will need to provide proof of an appointment for health care.