# Department of Defense Expanding Access to Military Commissaries, Exchanges and Recreation Facilities

## More veterans and caregivers to have eligibility.

**The Department of Defense is proud to expand commissary, exchange and morale, welfare and recreation retail eligibility to:**

- Purple Heart recipients
- Former prisoners of war
- All veterans with service-connected disabilities
- Individuals approved and designated as the primary family caregivers of eligible veterans under the Department of Veterans Affairs Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers

The DoD, VA and the Department of Homeland Security are collaborating to implement the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018 for those who will be eligible for this benefit on Jan. 1, 2020.

**Facilities like these will be open to the newly eligible patrons starting Jan. 1, 2020:**

- Commissaries*
- Military service exchanges
- Golf courses
- Bowling centers
- Recreational lodging
- RV campgrounds
- Movie theaters
- And more!

**DoD is required to charge a small fee to new users who are eligible solely under the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018, to cover any increase in costs to the U.S. Treasury for processing commercial credit and debit cards.*

**Want to know more? Check out the FAQs on the following pages.**

## WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

**Q: Are disabled veterans eligible for privileges at commissaries, military exchanges and morale, welfare and recreation activities?**

A: Yes. Veterans with a Department of Veterans Affairs-documented service-connected disability rating will be eligible for Department of Defense and Coast Guard commissary, exchange and MWR retail privileges beginning Jan. 1, 2020, under the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018. During the first phase of rollout of these privileges, veterans eligible solely under this act (Purple Heart recipients, former prisoners of war, or veterans with VA-documented service-connected disability ratings of 0-90 percent) who have been issued a Veteran Health Identification Card from VA can present their VHIC to gain entry to DoD and Coast Guard installations and some commissary stores; and at point of sale at commissaries, exchanges and MWR retail activities to complete their transactions. The VHIC must display the veteran's eligibility status (i.e., PURPLE HEART, FORMER POW or SERVICE CONNECTED).

Veterans eligible solely under this act who are not enrolled in or are not eligible to enroll in VA health care, or who are enrolled in VA health care, but do not possess a VHIC will not have access to DoD and Coast Guard installations for in-person commissary, exchange, and MWR retail privileges, but will have full access to online exchanges and American Forces Travel. Visit **https://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vhic** for information regarding eligibility for the VHIC and the application process.

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

A: Yes. If you don't have a service-connected disability, but you are a veteran who was awarded the Purple Heart, a veteran who was a former prisoner of war, or an individual approved and designated as the primary family caregiver of an eligible veteran under the Department of Veterans Affairs Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers, you will be eligible for privileges provided for under the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018. During the first phase of rollout of these privileges, veterans who are Purple Heart recipients or former prisoners of war who have been issued a Veteran Health Identification Card from VA can present their VHIC to gain entry to DoD and Coast Guard installations and some commissary stores; and at point of sale at commissaries, exchanges and morale, welfare and recreation retail activities to complete their transactions, The VHIC must display the veteran's eligibility status (i.e., PURPLE HEART, FORMER POW or SERVICE CONNECTED).

Veterans eligible solely under this act who are not enrolled in or are not eligible to enroll in VA health care, or are enrolled in VA health care, but do not possess a VHIC will not have access to DoD and Coast Guard installations for in-person commissary, exchange, and MWR retail privileges, but will have full access to online exchanges and American Forces Travel. Visit **https://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vhic** for information regarding eligibility for the VHIC and the application process.

Primary family caregivers must present an eligibility letter to facilitate Department of Defense and Coast Guard installation and privilege access. Eligibility letters will be mailed to enrolled primary family caregivers from the VA's Office of Community Care.

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

A: A service-connected disability is an injury or illness that was incurred or aggravated during active military service, as determined by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

**Q: I was in the Reserves, am I included?**

A: Yes. Reserve members who are veterans who were awarded the Purple Heart, veterans who are former prisoners of war, or veterans with a Department of Veterans Affairs-documented service-connected disability will be eligible for privileges provided for under the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018. During the first phase of rollout of these privileges, veterans eligible solely under this act (Purple Heart recipients, former prisoners of war, or veterans with VA-documented service-connected disability ratings of 0-90 percent) who have been issued

a Veteran Health Identification Card from VA can present their VHIC to gain entry to Department of Defense and Coast Guard installations and some commissary stores; and at point of sale at commissaries, exchanges and morale, welfare and recreation retail activities to complete their transactions, The VHIC must display the veteran's eligibility status (i.e., PURPLE HEART, FORMER POW or SERVICE CONNECTED).

Veterans eligible solely under this act who are not enrolled in or are not eligible to enroll in VA health care, or who are enrolled in VA health care, but do not possess a VHIC will not have access to DoD and Coast Guard installations for in-person commissary, exchange, and MWR retail privileges, but will have full access to online exchanges and American Forces Travel. Visit **https://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vhic** for information regarding eligibility for the VHIC and the application process.

**Q: 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 Reserve Corps of the 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, United States Code, and was awarded the Purple Heart, is a former prisoners of war, or has a Department of Veterans Affairs-documented service-connected disability, they are eligible for privileges provided for under the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018. During the first phase of rollout of these privileges, veterans eligible solely under this act (Purple Heart recipients, former prisoners of war, or veterans with VA-documented service-connected disability ratings of 0-90 percent) who have been issued a Veteran Health Identification Card from VA can present their VHIC to gain entry to Department of Defense and Coast Guard installations and some commissary stores; and at point of sale at commissaries, exchanges and morale, welfare and recreation retail activities to complete their transactions, The VHIC must display the veteran's eligibility status (i.e., PURPLE HEART, FORMER POW or SERVICE CONNECTED).

Veterans eligible solely under this act who are not enrolled in or are not eligible to enroll in VA health care, or who are enrolled in VA health care, but do not possess a VHIC will not have access to DoD and Coast Guard installations for in-person commissary, exchange, and MWR retail privileges, but will have full access to online exchanges and American Forces Travel. Visit **https://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vhic** for information regarding eligibility for the VHIC and the application process.

**Q: Does an authorized caregiver have to be the disabled veteran's spouse?**

A: No. An authorized caregiver eligible solely under the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018 does not have to be the disabled veteran's spouse. During the first phase of rollout of these privileges, an authorized caregiver must be the individual approved and designated as the primary family caregiver of an eligible veteran under the Department of Veterans Affairs Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. Visit **https://www.va.gov/health-care/family-caregiver-benefits/comprehensive-assistance/** for information regarding the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. When the VA formalizes approval and designation of general caregivers under the Program of General Caregiver Support Services, the Department of Defense will consider expansion of caregiver privileges to this group.

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

A: Yes. During the first phase of rollout of these privileges, a caregiver eligible solely under the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018, must be the individual approved and designated as the primary family caregiver of an eligible veteran under the Department of Veterans Affairs Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers to receive these privileges. Visit **https://www.va.gov/health-care/family-caregiver-benefits/comprehensive-assistance/** for information regarding the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. When the VA formalizes approval and designation of general caregivers under the Program of General Caregiver Support Services, the Department of Defense will consider expansion of caregiver privileges to this group.

**Q: Are all veterans eligible for in-person commissary, exchange and morale, welfare and recreation privileges on Department of Defense installations?**

A: No. Unless otherwise authorized commissary, exchange and MWR access, only veterans who are Purple Heart recipients, veterans who are former prisoners of war or veterans who have a Department of Veterans Affairs-documented service-connected disability rating of 0-90 percent are authorized in-person privileges beginning on Jan. 1, 2020, as provided for in the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018. During the first phase of rollout of these privileges, veterans eligible solely under this act who have been issued a Veteran Health Identification Card from VA can present their VHIC to gain entry to DoD and Coast Guard installations and some commissaries, exchanges and MWR retail activities to complete their transactions. The VHIC must display the veteran's eligibility status (i.e., PURPLE HEART, FORMER POW or SERVICE CONNECTED).

Veterans eligible solely under this act who are not enrolled in or are not eligible to enroll in VA health care, or who are enrolled in VA health care, but do not possess a VHIC will not have access to DoD and Coast Guard installations for in-person commissary, exchange and MWR retail privileges, but will have full access to online exchanges and American Forces Travel. Visit **https://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vhic** for information regarding eligibility for the VHIC and the application process.

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 your online shopping benefit, veterans not eligible for in-person privileges should follow the instructions to establish an account at any of the following military exchange websites, or the VA's Veterans Canteen Service:

- Army and Air Force Exchange System: **https://www.shopmyexchange.com**
- Coast Guard Exchange: **https://shopCGX.com**
- Marine Corps Exchange: **http://www.mymcx.com**
- Navy Exchange: **https://www.mynavyexchange.com**
- Veterans Canteen Service: **https://shopvcs.va.gov**

**Q: Why can't all veterans get these privileges?**

A: The Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018 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 Department of Veterans Affairs caregiver program.

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

- Army and Air Force Exchange System: **https://www.shopmyexchange.com**
- Coast Guard Exchange: **https://shopCGX.com**
- Marine Corps Exchange: **http://www.mymcx.com**
- Navy Exchange: **https://www.mynavyexchange.com**
- Veterans Canteen Service: **https://shopvcs.va.gov**

**Q: Will family members of the eligible veterans and caregivers also have the same privileges?**

A: No. Only the veterans and caregivers eligible solely under the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018 will have these privileges. The veterans and caregivers eligible are veterans who were awarded the Purple Heart, veterans who are former prisoners of war, veterans with a Department of Veterans Affairs-documented service-connected disability rating of 0-90 percent and individuals approved and designated as the primary family caregiver of an eligible veteran under the VA Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. Eligibility for these privileges is tied to eligibility for and enrollment in specific VA programs. Family members of these eligible veterans and caregivers who are not eligible for these privileges in their own right are not authorized privileges.

Veterans who are Medal of Honor recipients and veterans with a VA-documented service-connected disability rating of 100 percent, as well as their authorized family members are eligible for privileges in previously established Department of Defense policy.

## WHY?

**Q: Why do these veterans get these privileges regardless of time served?**

A: The Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018 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 Department of Veterans Affairs caregiver program.

**Q: Are these new users being authorized to help the Department of Defense boost retail store profits?**

A: No. The Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018 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 Department of Veterans Affairs caregiver program.

**Q: If the 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: While the Department of Defense recognizes that implementation of the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018 will likely increase operating expenses at commissaries, the Department will comply with this act. The Department will analyze the impact on the commissary system and make adjustments as needed to minimize any negative consequences.

## SHOPPING EXPERIENCE

**Q: How is this going to affect the service experience of previously authorized patrons?**

A: Commissary, exchange and morale, welfare and recreation retail facilities are preparing to welcome home these patrons without disrupting the current service experience for authorized patrons. Most locations will experience little to no impact on current operations. Installations in high cost-of-living areas may experience low to moderate impact. We are committed to delivering a high-quality experience for all patrons.

**Q: What level of priority will newly-eligible veterans and caregivers be afforded when accessing commissary, exchange and morale, welfare and recreation retail privileges?**

A: New users eligible solely under the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018, will receive the same priority and service levels as military retirees for activities authorized under this law. These new patrons may be prioritized lower than military retirees if authorized access to additional MWR activities by the Department of Defense.

## GAINING ACCESS

**Q: Can I use a Veterans Identification Card 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 Department of Defense and Coast Guard installations. During the first phase of rollout of these privileges, veterans eligible solely under the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018 (veterans who are Purple Heart recipients, veterans who are former prisoners of war and veterans with a Department of Veterans Affairs-documented service-connected disability rating of 0-90 percent) who have been issued a Veteran Health Identification Card from VA can present their VHIC to gain entry to DoD and Coast Guard installations and some commissary stores; and at point of

sale at commissaries, exchanges and morale, welfare and recreation retail activities to complete their transactions. The VHIC must display the veteran's eligibility status (i.e., PURPLE HEART, FORMER POW or SERVICE CONNECTED).

Veterans eligible solely under this act who are not enrolled in or are not eligible to enroll in VA health care, or who are enrolled in VA health care, but do not possess a VHIC will not have access to DoD and Coast Guard installations for in-person commissary, exchange and MWR retail privileges, but will have full access to online exchanges and American Forces Travel. Visit **https://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vhic** for information regarding eligibility for the VHIC and the application process.

Upon the first visit to an installation, these eligible veterans must stop at the visitor control center. Depending on the type of installation, veterans 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 must pass a basic on-the-spot background check prior to enrolling and an automated check each time they enter the installation. Veterans with felony convictions, felony arrest warrants or other types of derogatory information related to criminal history or terrorism will not be permitted entry.

Veterans who are Medal of Honor recipients and veterans with VA-documented service-connected disability ratings of 100 percent are eligible for a DoD-issued identification card that will facilitate installation and privilege access.

**Q: How do I get an identification card that will get me on installations to access my privileges?**

A: Veterans eligible solely under the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018 (veterans who are Purple Heart recipients, veterans who are former prisoners of war, veterans with a Department of Veterans Affairs-documented service-connected disability rating of 0-90 percent) who are eligible to obtain a Veteran Health Identification Card must obtain a VHIC from the VA to facilitate Department of Defense and Coast Guard installation and privilege access. The VHIC must display the eligibility status (i.e., PURPLE HEART, FORMER POW, SERVICE CONNECTED). These eligible veterans must present their VHIC to gain entry to DoD and Coast Guard installations and some commissary stores; and at point of sale at commissaries, exchanges and morale, welfare and recreation retail facilities to complete their transactions. Visit **https://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vhic** for information regarding eligibility for the VHIC and the application process.

During the first phase of rollout of these privileges, caregivers eligible solely under this act 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 installation access, entry to some commissary stores and at 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 may 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 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 Identification Card

Upon the first visit to an installation, eligible veterans and caregivers must stop at the visitor control center. 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 background check prior to enrolling and an automated check each time they enter the installation. Veterans and caregivers with felony convictions, felony arrest warrants or other types of derogatory information related to criminal history or terrorism will not be permitted entry.

Veterans who are Medal of Honor recipients and veterans with VA-documented service-connected disability ratings of 100 percent are eligible for a DoD-issued identification card that will facilitate installation and privilege access.

**Q: How do I get a Veteran Health Identification Card, or VHIC?**

A: The Department of Veterans Affairs currently issues the VHIC to veterans enrolled in VA health care. Visit **https://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vhic** for information regarding eligibility for the VHIC and the application process.

**Q: If my only eligibility for these privileges is my zero percent Department of Veterans Affairs-documented service-connected condition, but I am not eligible to obtain a Veteran Health Identification Card, can I bring another form of VA-documentation to access these privileges?**

A: No. On Jan. 1, 2020, only veterans with a secure, scannable VA-issued VHIC will be authorized access to in-person commissary, military exchange and morale, welfare and recreation privileges on DoD and Coast Guard installations. When DoD and VA identify a credentialing solution for all Veterans eligible under the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018, DoD will roll out a new phase of access to accommodate current veterans who are not eligible to obtain a VHIC but are eligible for these privileges.

Until a credentialing solution is identified, you are eligible for online military exchange and American Forces Travel privileges.

**Q: 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 Department of Veterans Affairs health care and displays the veterans' eligibility status on the card (e.g., PURPLE HEART, FORMER POW, SERVICE CONNECTED).

**Q: If I meet one of the new eligibility requirements, but I don't have a Veteran Health Identification Card, how can I get on an installation to access these privileges?**

A: During the first phase of rollout of these privileges, only eligible veterans who have been issued a VHIC from VA can present their VHIC to gain entry to DoD and Coast Guard installations and to access commissaries, exchanges and morale, welfare and recreation retail activities. The VHIC must display the veteran's eligibility status (i.e., 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.

During the first phase of rollout of these privileges, 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 automatically mailed to eligible primary family caregivers before Jan. 1. For installation access and at point of sale, caregivers will need to show an acceptable credential (e.g., REAL ID-compliant driver's license or U.S. passport) and their eligibility letter.

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 percent) may obtain a DoD identification card to facilitate installation and privilege access.

**Q: How will newly eligible veterans and caregivers get access to installations?**

A: To access the installation, veterans eligible solely under the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018, who have been issued a Veteran Health Identification Card from VA can present their VHIC to gain entry to DoD and Coast Guard installations and some commissary stores; and at point of sale at commissaries, exchanges and morale, welfare and recreation retail activities to complete their transactions. The VHIC must display the veteran's eligibility status (i.e., 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.

During the first phase of rollout of these privileges, 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 may 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 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 Identification 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 background check prior to enrolling and an automated check each time they enter the installation. Veterans and caregivers with felony convictions, felony arrest warrants or other types of derogatory information related to criminal history or terrorism will not be permitted entry.

**Q: How do I access my online exchange and morale, welfare and recreation retail privileges?**

A: Veterans already have online exchange privileges through the Veterans Online Shopping Benefit. Online MWR retail access (American Forces Travel) will be available Jan. 1, 2020, for veterans eligible solely under the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018.

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

To access these online privileges, visit:

- Army and Air Force Exchange System: **https://www.shopmyexchange.com**
- Coast Guard Exchange: **https://shopCGX.com**
- Marine Corps Exchange: **http://www.mymcx.com**
- Navy Exchange: **https://www.mynavyexchange.com**
- American Forces Travel: **https://www.AmericanForcesTravel.com**

## WHAT FACILITIES AND SERVICES CAN BE USED?

**Q: What morale, welfare and recreation activities will these newly eligible veterans and caregivers be authorized to use?**

A: Newly eligible veterans and caregivers under the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018, will have access to Department of Defense and Coast Guard MWR retail activities, including: entertainment, clubs, recreational lodging/resorts, special interest activities, bowling, golf, restaurants, marinas, equipment rental, movie theaters, vehicle storage, kennels, **AmericanForcesTravel.com** and more. Use of MWR activities primarily funded by appropriations and child development programs are not authorized.

**Q: Why won't these newly eligible veterans and caregivers be allowed to use all of the morale, welfare and recreation 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. The Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018 authorizes access to MWR retail activities, because these activities are generally self-sustaining and do not rely on appropriations to operate.

**Q: Will commissary, exchange and morale, welfare and recreation retail privileges be available at overseas installations?**

A: Although new patrons eligible solely under the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018, will have in-store commissary, military exchange and MWR retail privileges in the United States and in the U.S. territories and possessions, such access is not guaranteed at installations in foreign countries. Status of forces agreements and other host nation and international laws and agreements may limit or prevent access in foreign countries.

**Q: Will 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 the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018, outside of the United States and outside of the U.S. territories and possessions due to status of forces agreements, local laws and other agreements with host countries.

**Q: Will newly eligible veterans and caregivers also be allowed to shop the military exchange online stores?**

A: Yes. Veterans and caregivers who are eligible for exchange benefits under the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018, will be eligible for all exchange shopping venues, in-store and online.

**Q: Will newly eligible veterans and caregivers be eligible for a MILITARY STAR card?**

A: Veterans and caregivers who are eligible for commissary and exchange privileges through the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018, are eligible to apply for a MILITARY STAR card, based on the terms of eligibility for this credit program.

**Q: Can caregivers apply for a MILITARY STAR card?**

A: Yes. During the first phase of rollout of these privileges, individuals approved and designated as the primary family caregivers of eligible veterans under the Department of Veterans Affairs Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers are eligible for commissary and exchange privileges through the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018, and are eligible to apply for a MILITARY STAR card.

**Q Will newly eligible veterans and caregivers be able to use AmericanForcesTravel.com?**

A: Yes. **AmericanForcesTravel.com** is a morale, welfare and recreation retail program, so veterans and caregivers who are eligible for MWR retail privileges under the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018, are eligible to use this exclusive travel-booking website.

## PATRON AWARENESS

**Q: Will there be a user fee charged to these newly eligible veterans and caregivers at commissaries, exchanges and morale, welfare and recreation activities?**

A: No additional user fees or surcharges will be added to military exchange or MWR purchases for new patrons eligible solely under the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018.

The Defense commissary system is congressionally mandated to charge all current and new patrons a five percent 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 percent over commercial grocery stores.

In addition to the five percent surcharge, and in accordance with the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018, veterans and caregivers who are eligible for commissary privileges solely under this Act (Purple Heart recipients, former prisoners of war, veterans with Department of Veterans Affairs-documented service-connected disability ratings of 0-90 percent and individuals 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 incurred by the Department of the Treasury associated with the use of credit or debit cards. Patrons making commissary purchases with a commercial credit card or Signature debit card, which is accepted and processed as credit, will be charged an additional 1.9 percent user fee, while purchases with a personal identification number (PIN) debit card will be charged a 0.5 percent 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 (e.g., Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) or the MILITARY STAR card in the commissary will not be charged a user fee.

**Q: When does the shopping benefit start?**

A: Jan. 1, 2020.

Phase one includes access to commissaries, military exchanges and morale, welfare and recreation retail activities (in-person and online) for:

- Veterans eligible solely under the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018 (Purple Heart recipients, former prisoners of war, and veterans with a Department of Veterans Affairs-documented service-connected disability rating of 0-90 percent) who possess and present a Veteran Health Identification Card
- Individuals 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 (e.g., REAL ID-compliant driver's license or U.S. passport)

Future phases of rollout will address acceptable credentials for eligible veterans and caregivers and consideration and criteria for other eligible caregivers.

**Q: Are any items off limits to new users?**

A: Other than military uniform items at military service exchanges, child development programs, and morale, welfare and recreation activities that primarily rely on appropriations to operate, there are no restrictions on commissary, exchange or MWR privileges for new patrons authorized access under the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018. Veterans and caregivers who are eligible for commissary, exchange and MWR retail privileges under this act will be allowed access to the same products, services and activities that active duty service members and military retirees may access in the United States and in the U.S. territories and possessions. In foreign countries overseas, restrictions may apply based on status of forces agreements, local laws, or other agreements with the host country.

**Q: Will the exchange charge a surcharge for shopping?**

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

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

A: The Defense commissary system is statutorily required to charge a five percent 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 percent over commercial grocery store shopping.

In addition to the five percent surcharge, the Defense commissary system has been statutorily required to charge an additional user fee to veterans and caregivers who are eligible for commissary privileges solely under the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018 (Purple Heart recipients, former prisoners of war, veterans with Department of Veterans Affairs-documented service-connected disability ratings of 0-90 percent, and individuals 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 commissary stores as a result of this act.

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

A: No. There will not be a point of sale 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

**Q: Will opening military installations up to these new users compromise the safety and security of our installations?**

A: The Department of Defense has processes and procedures in place to vet all visitors to Department of Defense installations including regular workforce personnel, residents and other visitors. The individuals included in the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018 will have to comply with the same installation access processes and procedures as any visitor to a DoD installation.

**Q: How could obtaining a Veteran Health Identification Card 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 Department of Veterans Affairs health care system could impact the financial assistance you receive. The VHIC is a secure identification card issued to and used by veterans enrolled in VA health care to check in to appointments at VA medical centers. This secure identification card keeps your personal information safe while giving 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

**Q: What impacts will this initiative have on the Veterans Canteen Service or the Department of Veterans Affairs?**

A: Veterans Canteen Service users who also qualify for this Department of Defense privileges under the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018 will have additional choices for their shopping needs. The financial impact to the Veterans Canteen Service should be minimal, if any.

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 in order to obtain a Veteran Health Identification Card.