



# 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 have expanded 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 have collaborated to implement Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code, for those who are eligible for this benefit.

**Facilities like these are open to newly eligible patrons:**

- 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 Section 1065, 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 are eligible for Department of Defense and Coast Guard commissary, exchange and MWR retail privileges as of Jan. 1, 2020.

**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 assessed, approved and designated as a primary family caregiver of an eligible Veteran under the Department of Veterans Affairs Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers, you are eligible for privileges provided for under Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code.

**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 are eligible for privileges provided for under Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code.

**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 Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code.

**Q: 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. Veterans who are uniformed service retirees, Medal of Honor recipients, veterans with 100% service-connected disability ratings, and Veterans with 100% unemployability ratings due to a service-connected condition are still authorized to obtain DoD-issued identification cards and broader access to privileges provided for in DoD policy. However, if these veterans choose to use the Veteran Health Identification Card that displays "PURPLE HEART," "FORMER POW" or "SERVICE CONNECTED" instead of their DoD-issued identification card, access will be limited to that of the veterans eligible solely under Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code.

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

A: No. An authorized caregiver eligible solely under Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code, 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 assessed, 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.caregiver.va.gov> for information regarding the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers.

**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 Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code, must be the individual assessed, 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.caregiver.va.gov> for information regarding the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers.

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

A: For information on the Department of Veterans Affairs Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers, visit <https://www.caregiver.va.gov>.

**Q: Are all veterans eligible for in-person commissary, exchange, and morale, welfare and recreation privileges on military 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 between 0-90% are authorized in-person privileges as of Jan. 1, 2020, as provided for in Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code.

In addition, 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 Department of Defense-issued identification card and privileges broader than those granted under Section 1065.

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: Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code, 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.

DoD infrastructure is not equipped to handle an influx of over 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

**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 Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code, will have these privileges. 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.

However, family members of veterans who meet one of the new 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 in previously established Department of Defense policy.

**Q: If my deceased spouse was a veteran solely eligible in one of the new veteran eligibility categories - Purple Heart recipient, former prisoner of war or service-connected disability rating between 0-90% - can I use his/her benefit?**

A: While we are deeply sorry for your loss, this benefit does not extend to family members and cannot be transferred to survivors.

### WHY?

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

A: Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code, 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 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. Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code, 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 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 Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code, will likely increase operating expenses at commissaries, the Department will comply with Section 1065. The Department will analyze the impact on the commissary system and adjust 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 have prepared 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 Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code, will receive the same priority and service levels as military retirees for all 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: As a newly eligible veteran or caregiver who does not have any other affiliation with the military services that provides access to installations, how do I get an identification card that will get me on installations to access my privileges?**

A: Veterans eligible solely under Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code, (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 between 0-90%) who are eligible to obtain a Veteran Health Identification Card must obtain a VHIC from the VA to facilitate DoD and Coast Guard installation and privilege 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 income too high for VA health care enrollment, DoD will temporarily accept the VA Health Eligibility Center Form H623A, indicating placement in Priority Group 8E, paired with an acceptable credential, like a REAL ID-compliant driver's license or a U.S. passport, until DoD and the VA identify a long-term credential for this small group of veterans.

During the first phase of rollout of these privileges, caregivers eligible solely under Section 1065 will receive 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. 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:

- REAL ID-compliant driver's license issued by a state, territory, possession, or the District of Columbia
- REAL ID-compliant non-driver's identification 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 identification 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 identification card sites on DoD installations.

**Q: As a newly eligible veteran or caregiver who has an affiliation with the military services that provides access to installations, but not to privileges, how do I get an identification card that will get me access to my privileges?**

A: Newly eligible veterans and caregivers who have an affiliation with the military services that allows them access to installations may use their military service affiliation credentials, such as their DoD civilian identification 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, United States Code, (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 between 0-90%) who are eligible to obtain a Veteran Health Identification Card must obtain a VHIC from the VA to facilitate DoD and Coast Guard privilege access. 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 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. 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, DoD will temporarily accept the VA Health Eligibility Center Form H623A, indicating placement in Priority Group 8E, paired with an acceptable credential, like a REAL ID-compliant driver's license or a U.S. passport, until DoD and the VA identify a long-term credential for this small group of veterans.

During the first phase of rollout of these privileges, caregivers eligible solely under Section 1065 will receive 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. For 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

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 identification 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 identification card sites on DoD installations.

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

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: 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, DoD will temporarily accept the VA Health Eligibility Center Form H623A, indicating placement in Priority Group 8E, paired with an acceptable credential, like a REAL ID-compliant driver's license or a U.S. passport, until DoD and the VA identify a long-term credential for this small group of veterans. Contact a VA Health Eligibility Center for replacement if you have misplaced your Form H623A.

**Q: If I meet one of the new veteran eligibility criteria and have a Veteran Health Identification Card, but it does not display my eligibility on the front of the card, will I be allowed access to the installation and these privileges?**

A: No. Because 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 Department of Veterans Affairs health eligibility office to obtain a new VHIC if you meet one of these criteria and have a VHIC that does not display the criteria on the front of the card below your photo.

**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 certain veteran status information on the card. Only the VHICs that display "PURPLE HEART," "FORMER POW" or "SERVICE CONNECTED" are eligible for the new privileges at DoD and Coast Guard installations.

**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 DoD and Coast Guard installations.

**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: 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: "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 income too high for VA health care enrollment, DoD will temporarily accept the VA Health Eligibility Center Form H623A, indicating placement in Priority Group 8E, paired with an acceptable credential, like a REAL ID-compliant driver's license or a U.S. passport, until DoD and the VA identify a long-term credential for this small group of veterans.

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 mailed to eligible primary family caregivers. For installation access and at point of sale, 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 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 identification card and privileges broader than those granted under Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code. 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 identification card sites on DoD installations.

**Q: 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.

**Q: If I am waiting to receive my new Veteran Health Identification Card with all of 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 quickly and accurately verify eligibility and identity, which the VHIC facilitates.

**Q: Will I still have access to these privileges after my eligible Veteran Health Identification Card expires?**

A: No. If your VHIC expires or is getting close to its expiration date, visit your nearest Department of Veterans Affairs health eligibility office to obtain a new VHIC to minimize any gap in access to these privileges.

**Q: As a newly eligible veteran or caregiver who does not have any other affiliation with the military services that provides access to installations, how will newly eligible veterans and caregivers get access to installations?**

A: To access the installation, veterans eligible solely under Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code, 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: "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, DoD will temporarily accept the VA Health Eligibility Center Form H623A, indicating placement in Priority Group 8E, paired with an acceptable credential, like a REAL ID-compliant driver's license or a U.S. passport, until 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.

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:

- REAL ID-compliant driver's license issued by a state, territory, possession or the District of Columbia
- REAL ID-compliant non-driver's identification 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

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 other types of derogatory information related to criminal history or terrorism will not be permitted entry.

**Q: What should I do if the installation access scanners cannot read the data on my eligible Veteran Health Identification Card?**

A: DoD has learned that some of the eligible VHICs issued by the Department of Veterans Affairs 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. At the discretion of the military department, some installations may allow the unscannable VHIC to be used to establish purpose, but another acceptable credential would have to be presented to establish identity, like a REAL ID-compliant driver's license or a U.S. passport. Eligible veterans with VHICs that DoD is not able to scan cannot be enrolled for recurring access to installations. Also, the ability to bring accompanying visitors may be denied at the discretion of the military department. If you are one of the veterans affected by this situation, please 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 in about two weeks.



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

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

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

A: Depending on the local installation traffic enforcement policy, newly eligible veterans and caregivers may be required to provide proof of vehicle registration and insurance, and a motor vehicle operator's license at the visitor control center before being authorized to drive onto the installation. Be prepared to provide any traffic enforcement-related documentation the installation requires. You may want to call ahead to make sure you know what is required.

**Q: If I live in an area with multiple 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 which other installations would recognize your enrollment from that installation.

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

A: No. The identification card used to access privileges must be valid for such use. If the identification card that allows you access to the 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 Veteran Health Identification Card that display 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 income too high for VA health care enrollment, DoD will temporarily accept the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Eligibility Center Form H623A, indicating placement in Priority Group 8E, paired with an acceptable credential, like a REAL ID-compliant driver's license or a U.S. passport, until DoD 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.

**Q: 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 identification card to access installations and my privileges, or do I need to get a Veteran Health Identification Card?**

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 identification cards and are eligible for broader privileges than veterans who are eligible for access solely under Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code. For installation and privilege access, please continue to use your DoD identification card. There is no need to obtain or present a VHIC. If you choose to use a VHIC instead of your DoD-issued identification card, your access will be limited to that of the veterans eligible solely under Section 1065.

**Q: 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 Veteran Health Identification Card cannot escort or vouch for accompanying visitors that cannot establish their own identity and fitness for installation access, but 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 as 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 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 remain with their sponsoring veteran at all times. In the facilities, accompanying visitors may not make any purchases.

Unfortunately, DoD policy does not currently authorize other individuals authorized access to DoD installations with other-than DoD-issued credentials to bring accompanying visitors. DoD is actively pursuing a policy change that will allow newly eligible veterans with a Department of Veterans Affairs Health Eligibility Center Form H623A or caregivers with an eligibility letter from the VA Office of Community Care to also bring visitors who can establish identity and fitness to enter the installation with them onto an installation.

Please understand that conditions may vary from installation to installation and visitor access may be restricted as a result of a variety of factors, including heightened threat conditions. In addition, the military departments have the authority to place restrictions on visitor access to installations, like the number of accompanying visitors, time of day or in response to events impacting installation operations.

**Q: Why do installation access procedures vary?**

A: While all military installations operate under the same broad policies, threat conditions, military department-authorized variations, events, and the human factor can all contribute to differences in the way installations handle access, whether it's at the same installation, or when comparing different installations. Installation access protocol is strict where it needs to be, but also allows for some flexibilities at the discretion of the military departments, which can allow for some deviations from certain DoD policy, or the ability to be more restrictive when it needs to be.

**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, is now available for veterans eligible solely under Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code.

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, will be able to access these online privileges within 30 days of receiving their eligibility letter noting these privileges 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: [www.AmericanForcesTravel.com](http://www.AmericanForcesTravel.com)

### WHAT FACILITIES AND SERVICES CAN THEY USE?

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

A: Newly eligible Veterans and caregivers under Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code, will have access to DoD 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](http://AmericanForcesTravel.com) and more. In addition, access to the following MWR basic community support programs may be authorized: camping, equipment check-out, boating programs and other basic community support program activities that the military department concerned authorizes when there is excess capacity and user fees cover the majority of operational expenses. Use of MWR activities primarily funded by appropriations and child development programs are not authorized.

**Q: Why won't these new 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. Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code, authorizes access to MWR retail activities, because these activities are generally self-sustaining and do not rely on appropriations to operate.

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

A: Although new patrons eligible solely under Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code, 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. Applicable host nation laws and applicable international agreements, such as status of forces agreements, may and often do, limit or prevent access in foreign countries. Neither the Department of Defense nor the United States Government has the authority to unilaterally change these agreements.

**Q: 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, United States Code, outside of the United States and outside of the U.S. territories and possessions due to applicable host nation laws and applicable international agreements, such as status of forces agreements.

**Q: 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, United States Code, are eligible for all exchange shopping venues, in-store and online.

**Q: 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, United States Code, 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 assessed, 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 Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code, and are eligible to apply for a MILITARY STAR card.

**Q Are newly eligible veterans and caregivers able to use [AmericanForcesTravel.com](https://www.AmericanForcesTravel.com)?**

A: Yes. [AmericanForcesTravel.com](https://www.AmericanForcesTravel.com) is a morale, welfare and recreation retail program, so veterans and caregivers who are eligible for MWR retail privileges under Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code, are eligible to use this exclusive travel-booking website.

**Q: What is [AmericanForcesTravel.com](https://www.AmericanForcesTravel.com)?**

A: [AmericanForcesTravel.com](https://www.AmericanForcesTravel.com) is DoD's discount leisure travel booking website. Authorized users can book flights, lodging, rental cars, cruises and more. It also offers some discount event tickets.

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

A: Yes.

**Q: Are newly eligible veterans and caregivers able to use the morale, welfare and recreation 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 active duty purchase only, it may not be available for purchase or use by all authorized MWR ticket office patrons.

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

A: No. Fitness centers and gyms are not morale, welfare and recreation retail activities. Fitness centers and gyms are primarily funded with appropriations and serve a mission-essential function for service member readiness and resiliency.

**Q: Are newly eligible veterans and caregivers able to use the morale, welfare and recreation craft shop on the installation?**

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.

**Q: Are newly eligible veterans and caregivers able to use DoD official temporary duty and permanent change of station lodging facilities?**

A: Yes, on a space available basis. In addition to morale, welfare and recreation recreational lodging like 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 temporary duty travel and permanent change of station moves for service members and their families on a space-available basis.

**Q: 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>
- 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>

### PATRON AWARENESS

**Q: Is 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 are added to military exchange or MWR purchases for new patrons eligible solely under Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code.

The Defense commissary system is congressionally mandated to charge all current and new patrons 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 stores.

In addition to the 5% surcharge, and in accordance with Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code, veterans and caregivers who are eligible for commissary privileges solely under Section 1065 (Purple Heart recipients, former prisoners of war, veterans with Department of Veterans Affairs-documented service-connected disability ratings between 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) 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% 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, such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or the MILITARY STAR card in the commissary will not be charged a user fee.

**Q: When did 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 Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code (Purple Heart recipients, former prisoners of war and veterans with a Department of Veterans Affairs-documented service-connected disability rating between 0-90%) who possess and present a Veteran Health Identification Card that displays "PURPLE HEART," "FORMER POW" or "SERVICE CONNECTED" on the front below the photo
- 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, DoD will temporarily accept the VA Health Eligibility Center Form H623A, indicating placement in Priority Group 8E, paired with an acceptable credential, like a REAL ID-compliant driver's license or a U.S. passport, until DoD and the VA identify a long-term credential for this small group of veterans
- 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

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

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

A: There are no restrictions on commissary, exchange, or morale, welfare and recreation retail privilege access, unless local installation policy or conditions impose a restriction on all eligible patron groups, such as quantities. Where certain restrictions apply to the military retiree patron group, such restrictions will also apply to the newly eligible veteran and caregiver patron groups. Veterans and caregivers who are eligible for commissary, exchange and MWR retail privileges under Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code, are allowed access to the same products and services of these activities 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 applicable international agreements, such as status of forces agreements.

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

A: No surcharges or user fees are 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 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 system has been 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, United States Code, (Purple Heart recipients, former prisoners of war, veterans with Department of Veterans Affairs-documented service-connected disability ratings between 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 commissary stores as a result of Section 1065.

**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: Does 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 DoD installations including regular workforce personnel, residents and other visitors. The individuals included in Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code, 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 Section 1065 of Title 10, United States Code, will have additional choices for their shopping needs. The financial impact to the Veterans Canteen Service should be minimal, if any.

The Department of Veterans Affairs 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.