

Veterans with Veteran Health ID Card can shop at Military Exchange, Commissaries and MWR starting Jan. 1

Military installations including Navy installations are ready to support authorized veterans and their caregivers who will soon be able to shop at base commissaries, exchanges and enjoy certain Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) programs.

Starting Jan. 1, 2020, the expanded benefit applies to veterans with a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)-documented service-connected disability rating, Purple Heart recipients, former prisoners of war, and primary family caregivers for veterans enrolled in the VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers.

This expanded access for authorized veterans and caregivers is specified in the Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018 and included in the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019.

"Navy MWR proudly welcomes our newly eligible veterans, as we honor their service and sacrifice and those who care for them," said Ed Cannon, director, Navy Fleet and Family Readiness, Commander, Navy Installations Command. "Our MWR professionals are excitedly waiting to serve our new customers, and we welcome them to take advantage of the excellent recreational programs and services that Navy MWR offers."

This patronage expansion applies to Navy MWR Category C and B programs at Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) installations in the United States and in the U.S. territories and possessions.

These programs include golf, bowling, movie theaters, car washes, arts and crafts centers, auto skills, vehicle storage, marinas, community recreation (outdoor recreation equipment rentals, and tickets and travel), RV park rentals and Navy Gateway Inns & Suites (NGIS), Navy Getaways, and special events/entertainment where open to all rate categories. It does not apply to MWR Category A activities that are funded primarily with appropriations or otherwise restricted, such as fitness centers, libraries, and child development programs.

"Our newly eligible veterans also can use AmericanForcesTravel.com, MWR's exclusive travel-booking website," added Cannon. Patrons can access the website at www.americanforcetravel.com/?refclickid=navyvetarticle.

Along with some MWR activity use, the benefit expansion includes commissary shopping privileges as well as military resale and Navy lodging. Lodging reservations start on Dec. 31, 2019 for stay dates beginning Jan. 1, 2020 and can be made at www.dodlodging.net or 1-877-NAVYBED. This new initiative is expected to extend eligibility to about 4.1 million new patrons, comprised of nearly 1.5 million veterans who live within an hour of a military installation, of which 406,546 are U.S. Navy veterans.

To access DoD installations and obtain expanded privileges starting Jan. 1, 2020, veterans must present a Veteran Health Identification Card (VHIC) from VA that displays their eligibility category: "Purple Heart, former POW or service-connected." Caregivers must present an eligibility letter from the VA Office of Community Care that indicates they are the primary family caregiver for an eligible veteran under the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers and are eligible for these privileges, paired with an acceptable identification

credential, such as a REAL ID-compliant driver's license or a U.S. passport. These credentials will need to be presented at MWR facilities and point-of-sale locations.

For more information about obtaining a VHIC or a letter from Veterans Affairs, visit your local VA medical facility or call 1-877-222-VETS (8387), Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. until 8 p.m., Eastern Standard Time.

Those who want to learn more about base access requirements should contact or visit the nearest Navy Visitors Control Center, said William Holdren, deputy director for CNIC's force protection program.

"As we continue to focus on our number one priority of ensuring the safety of our people and the security of our installations," Holdren noted, "we are dedicated to providing top-notch customer service to our veterans as they come into the Visitors Control Centers to process their base access."

For more information about Navy MWR, visit www.navymwr.org.