

Three VAs in One

The Veterans Administration is a branch in the federal government, and like most federal organizations it can be quite confusing. Most people do not understand the structure of the Department of Veterans Affairs. It is made up of three divisions that are responsible for specific activities — VA Health Care, Veterans Benefits Administration and Burial and Cemeteries. Each division is independent and can often be like a stove pipe, where communication does not necessarily exist with the other two.

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) handles all health care for veterans. It is responsible for the medical centers, outpatient clinics, community based outpatient clinics, and the vet centers. They provide care, medications, and prosthetic devices as needed. They are responsible for setting the veteran's health care priority and eligibility based on information provided by the benefits section. To enroll to receive treatment, the veteran can visit a VA hospital, community-based outpatient clinic or county veterans service office.

The Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA) is responsible for the payment of all VA gratuitous benefits. It handles claims for disability, compensation, pension, and education, including vocational rehabilitation, burials, home loans, life insurance and just about any other monetary benefit that comes from the VA.

The National Cemetery Association (NCA) operates the National Cemetery system. It is responsible for the establishment and construction of new cemeteries and the care and maintenance of existing cemeteries. It provides flags for burials of veterans and issues Presidential Memorial Certificates.

The Kings County Veterans Service Office can complete the DMV Veteran Status Verification Form for the new California Veteran Designation on your driver's license. We can also issue Veteran I.D. cards to honorably discharged veterans. Contact Scott Holwell if you would like to receive periodic veteran's information by email. There are many state and federal benefits and programs available to veterans and their dependents. To find out if you are eligible for any of these benefits, visit or call our office. We can and will assist you in completing all required application forms. You can get information on the Web from the Kings County Veterans Service Office webpage at www.countyofkings.com/vets.

Scott Holwell, retired Navy Master Chief Petty Officer, is the Deputy Veterans Service Officer for Kings County. Send your questions to the Veterans Service Office, 1400 W. Lacey Blvd, Hanford, CA 93230; call (559)852-2669; or e-mail scott.holwell@co.kings.ca.us.