

## **Scams Against Veterans on the Rise**

According to the U.S. Veterans Compensation Programs, the Federal Trade Commission reports there have been more than 20,300 COVID-19 complaints carrying an estimated \$15.6 million in losses since the start of 2020 - and that's just the scams reported. U.S. service members and veterans should take particular notice, because the scammers have tailored their fake pitches to mix the pandemic with top concerns of those who've worn a military uniform.

AARP's Fraud Watch Network and Operation Protect Veterans initiative have received reports of COVID-19 treatment scams, fake charity pitches claiming to help veteran and military families, as well as a number of phishing scams trying to steal one's personal identity, financial information and even Veterans Affairs benefits.

For example, the government's health program for uniformed service members and retirees has been of particular interest to scammers. TRICARE officials say fraudsters are offering "free" coronavirus test kits in exchange for a beneficiary's personal information, Social Security numbers, bank or credit card information.

With business slowed and money tight, some scammers falsely claim to be raising money for charities to help those most in need - including veterans and military families. Don't fall for it. Before donating, AARP's fraud prevention specialists warn to always research the charity using a site like [charitynavigator.org](https://www.charitynavigator.org) or [give.org](https://www.give.org) to ensure they're legitimate. And don't willingly share your credit card or banking information over the phone, email or text, even if you've verified the charity.

The American Legion also reminds veterans and their families that the Veteran's Affairs will not call seeking personal information. They already have your information, such as Social Security numbers and date of birth. Do not provide any information over the phone.