

# ***VA Benefits & Services***

## **2021 Desk Reference Guide – Volume 1**

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## OVERVIEW: VOLUME-1

The **VIST Desk Reference Guide: Volume-1** concentrates on U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Benefits & Services that impact the lives and well-being of blind and visually impaired Veterans served by VIST and BRS programs. The VA is an enormous bureaucracy with layers and layers of programs and benefits authorized by law or regulation that recognize the importance of Veterans in our society. It is impossible to list everything. Luckily, VA has developed and maintains a highly resourceful website for staff and the general public at [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) that covers almost everything VA has to offer and more.

Volume-1 is filled with many hyperlinks back to official VA web addresses that describe each benefit or service in greater detail. Volume-1 is just the starting point to search for additional information and specific details. The benefits and services listed in Volume-1 are presented in alphabetical order and not necessarily in order of importance or frequency of use. Some benefits are grouped together (i.e. Medical or Prosthetics) because of the nature of the benefit or service provided.

Every effort was made to select and highlight VA benefits and services that might impact the blind and visually impaired Veteran population. Did we miss some topics that should be included, probably! But the VIST Desk Reference Guide is designed to be updated periodically as benefits and services can and do change. Expect updates in the future, similar to the Quick Reference Guide.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The VIST Desk Reference Guide is an online version of the original VIST Desk Reference Manual series that was produced over several years in the early 1990s. The original edition was 4 separate volumes in length, each volume containing over 100 pages of material. The Blinded American Veterans Foundation (BAVF) provided funding to purchase specially printed 3-ring binders for each volume of the VIST Desk Reference Manual. Every VIST program in the VA received a complete set of binders and a printed copy of each volume. All 4 volumes were made available in accessible format, as much as possible, using the e-mail system at that time (known as Forum). As VIST Coordinators have relocated or retired many VIST programs have lost or misplaced their copy of the original volumes.

Prior to the VIST Desk Reference Manual being published Blind Rehabilitation Service (BRS) provided comprehensive face-to-face training for new VIST Coordinators each year. This was done through National Consultant site visits to the local VA facility as well as week-long training programs at VA Education Centers (called RMECS). BRS used the Northport VAMC RMEC for many of these training programs. The VIST education and training programs relied on many handouts and sometimes old copies of copies of useful charts or benefits information. The VIST Desk Reference Manual volumes were meant to bring all the various educational material together in one location with each page laser printed in easy to read and copy typeface. This made them excellent training tools for new VIST Coordinators and outstanding reference tools for experienced VIST Coordinators.

Over time, the Augusta VIST Quick Reference Guide was developed and shared annually with the latest updates on Compensation & Pension rates and other useful benefits information. The Augusta VIST Quick Reference Guide has been published annually for over 25 years and has grown over the years in both length and complexity.

The Augusta VIST Quick Reference Guide is a very useful tool for experienced VIST, but it lacks a detailed description of what various benefits and services are. An example of this is the reference to the VA Automobile Allowance (or Auto Grant). The Quick Reference Guide identifies the current Automobile Allowance, but it doesn't explain what the benefit is or who might be eligible.

As I have worked with many new VIST Coordinators over the years, it became clear that the original VIST Desk Reference Manual is still needed in some form to help provide more context about benefits and services. Unfortunately, the original volumes were created using older word processing software from Apple and pre-dated our current VA computer protocols. Enter the VIST Desk Reference Guide, a completely rewritten online tool designed to provide detailed description of benefits and services with links to online reference points for further learning and research. The new Volumes are:

- Volume 1 is about VA Benefits & Services that impact Blind and Visually Impaired Veterans.
- Volume 2 (still in development) is about VA Compensation & Pension Benefits.
- Volume 3 is about Non-VA Benefits & Services for Blind & Visually Impaired.
- Volume 4 is the VIST Quick Reference Guide.

Todd Turansky  
VIST – Augusta

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## AUTOMOBILE: AUTOMOBILE ALLOWANCE

**Type of Benefit:** Disability Compensation – Special Claims

A *one-time* payment to help buy a specially equipped vehicle.

**VIST NOTE:** This benefit is actually combined by VA with the Adaptive Equipment Benefit (next page) and is referred to in VBA rating decisions as VA Automobile Allowance and Adaptive Equipment. Since the benefits are similar, but different they have been separated out in this document.

**2021 Rate:** **\$21,795.57**

**Eligibility:** Must be rated service-connected for at least 1 of the conditions below:

- Loss, or permanent loss of use, of 1 or both feet, **or**
- Loss, or permanent loss of use, of 1 or both hands, **or**
- Permanent decreased vision in both eyes: 20/200 vision or less in the better eye with glasses, or greater than 20/200 vision but with visual field defect that has reduced the peripheral vision to 20 degrees or less in the better eye, **or**
- A severe burn injury, **or**
- Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS)

**Managed By:** VBA (VA Regional Office)

**Application Procedure:** File a claim with VBA using form 21-4502

**VIST Tips:**

- The veteran does **not** have to be a driver to qualify or require a special adaptation.
- This is a one-time payment therefore veterans are encouraged to purchase a vehicle up to the full amount of the Automobile Allowance.
- The amount of the benefit is the Allowance rate at the time the benefit is used, not the rate at time of approval.
- VA pays the vehicle's seller directly.
- Many people refer to this benefit as the Auto Grant.
- Veterans awarded compensation based on Paired Organ for vision loss do **NOT** qualify for this benefit.

**More Information:**

- [VA Automobile Allowance](#)
- [M21-1, Part IX, Subpart i, Chapter 2 - Automobile and Adaptive Equipment](#)

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## AUTOMOBILE: ADAPTIVE EQUIPMENT

**Type of Benefit:** Vehicle Adaptations – Special Claims

Prosthetics manages the Automobile Adaptive Equipment (AAE) program. The AAE program permits physically challenged persons to enter, exit, and/or operate a motor vehicle or other conveyance.

VA provides necessary equipment such as platform wheelchair lifts, UVLs (under vehicle lifts), power door openers, lowered floors/raised roofs, raised doors, hand controls, left foot gas pedals, reduced effort and zero effort steering and braking, and digital driving systems.

The AAE program also provides reimbursements for standard equipment including, but not limited to, power steering, power brakes, power windows, power seats, and other special equipment necessary for the safe operation of an approved vehicle. adaptive equipment to alter a vehicle so it has features such as power steering, brakes, seats, windows, or lift equipment to help a veteran get into and out of the vehicle.

**Eligibility:** Must be rated service-connected for at least 1 of the conditions below:

- Same criteria as Automobile Allowance above, or
- Ankylosis in one or both knees or hips (only qualifies for Adaptive Equipment)
- **NOTE:** Non-Service-Connected (NSC) Veterans are eligible for equipment/modifications that will allow ingress and egress from a vehicle only.

**Managed By:** VHA (local Prosthetics Service)

**Application Procedure:** File a request with Prosthetics using form 10-1394 (Application for Adaptive Equipment Motor Vehicle)

**VIST Tips:**

- Eligible SC Veterans, who are non-drivers, are **NOT** eligible for reimbursement for operational equipment.
- Normally the AAE program covers 2 vehicles in a 4-year period (there are exceptions).
- VA may pay the Veteran, or the VA may pay the equipment seller directly.

**More Information:** <https://www.prosthetics.va.gov/psas/AAE.asp>

**FAQ:** <https://www.prosthetics.va.gov/psas/FAQ-AAE.asp>

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## **BLIND REHAB: VA Blind Rehabilitation Services**

**Type of Benefit:** Health care – Blind Rehabilitation & Low Vision Services

VA provides a comprehensive program of blind rehabilitation and low vision services to eligible veterans. This includes lifetime care coordination services through VIST, in-home assessment and training through BROS, low vision services and blind rehabilitation assessment/training at Intermediate, Advanced, VISOR clinics and inpatient BRC programs. BRS program elements include:

- VIST (Visual Impairment Services Team)
- Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialist (BROS) Programs
- Intermediate Low Vision Clinics (ILVC) Programs
- Advanced Low Vision Clinics (ALVC) Programs
- Vision Impairment Services in Outpatient Rehabilitation (VISOR) Programs
- Inpatient Blind Rehabilitation Centers (BRC)
- TeleHealth Blind Rehabilitation
- Community Care (non-VA) – Blind Rehabilitation/Low Vision Services

**Eligibility:** Have a visual impairment requiring low vision or blind rehabilitation services.

**Managed By:** VHA (Blind Rehabilitation Service – BRS)

**Application Procedure:** Contact nearest VIST Coordinator or VA Low Vision Clinic program.

**VIST Tips:**

- Veterans coordinated by VIST should be offered annual reviews by VIST to determine current adjustment to vision loss, need for additional assessment/training or need for issuance of Prosthetic devices to maintain independence.
- BRS Programs are currently guided by a VHA Directive 1174 (April 19, 2021) which replaced and updated a series of different VHA Handbooks Directives (see below for a link to the new VHA Directive).
- All BRS staff should familiarize themselves with VHA Directive 1174.

**More Information:** [VA Blind And Low Vision Rehabilitation | Veterans Affairs](#)

**Additional Information:**

- [About Blind Rehabilitation Services - Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services \(va.gov\)](#)
- [VHA Directive 1174, Blind and Visual Impairment Rehabilitation Continuum of Care](#)

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## BLIND REHAB: Key VA Definitions

**Type of Benefit:** Health care – Blind Rehabilitation & Low Vision Services

**VHA Directive 1174: Blind and Visual Impairment Rehabilitation Continuum of Care** is the key resource and guidance provided to VHA field programs regarding the provision of services to blind and visually impaired veterans.

Every BRS staff member should familiarize themselves to VHA Directive 1174 and how it impacts their current role within the BRS Continuum of Care.

**KEY DEFINITIONS:** As found in VHA Directive 1174, some of the key definitions that impact Blind Rehabilitation Service (BRS) are included here:

- **ACTIVITIES OF DAILY LIVING/INSTRUMENTAL ACTIVITIES OF DAILY LIVING:** Activities of daily living/instrumental activities of daily living (ADL/IADL) is the therapeutic instructional area focused on fundamental skills that are required to independently care for oneself and those activities that allow an individual to live independently in a community. ADL/IADLs include, but are not limited to, self-care management, medication management, hygiene/grooming, dressing, cooking, eating, home management, cleaning, personal management, communication, managing finances.
- **COMPUTER ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY TRAINING:** Computer Assistive Technology (CAT) training provides training in the use of specialized access technology devices necessary for a Veteran with visual impairment to independently operate computers, tablets, smartphones and other digital electronic devices to achieve their computing and communication goals.
- **DEVICE:** For the purpose of this directive, a device is an item of equipment or animal used in assisting a Veteran with a visual impairment in overcoming the functional deficits associated with vision loss.
- **EXCESS DISABILITY:** Excess disability refers to problems and task performance difficulties related to vision loss that impact the Veteran's functional independence or personal safety and that are out of proportion to the degree of visual impairment as measured by visual acuities or visual fields.
- **LEGAL BLINDNESS:** VHA defines legal blindness using the definition found in 42 U.S.C. § 416(i)(1)(B). Legal blindness is central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with the use of a correcting lens. An eye which is accompanied by a limitation in the fields of vision such that the widest diameter of the visual field subtends an angle no greater than 20 degrees shall be considered for purposes of this paragraph as having a central visual acuity of 20/200 or less.

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- **LOW VISION:** For the purpose of this directive (1174), low vision defined as a condition in which there is significant loss of vision uncorrectable by conventional means (eyeglasses, contact lenses, medicines or surgery) that negatively impacts patient safety or impairs or restricts one or more activities of daily living (ADLs and/or Instrumental ADLs). Low Vision can encompass loss of visual acuity or visual field loss or a combination of loss of visual acuity, visual field loss, contrast sensitivity loss, loss of stereopsis or eye motility impairment.
- **STATUTORY BLINDNESS:** VHA defines statutory blindness according to criteria used by the Social Security Administration (SSA). Statutory blindness is evaluated by the following methodology. Most test charts that use Snellen methodology do not have lines that measure visual acuity between 20/100 and 20/200. Newer test charts, such as the Bailey-Lovie or the Early Treatment Diabetic Retinopathy Study (ETDRS), do have lines that measure visual acuity between 20/100 and 20/200. If a patient's visual acuity is measured with one of these newer charts and they cannot read any of the letters on the 20/100 line, it will be determined that they have statutory blindness based on a visual acuity of 20/200 or less. For example, if a patient's best-corrected visual acuity for distance in the better eye was determined to be 20/160 using an ETDRS chart, it will be determined that the patient has statutory blindness. Regardless of the type of test chart used, a patient does not have statutory blindness if they can read at least one letter on the 20/100 line. For example, if a patient's best corrected visual acuity for distance in the better eye was determined to be 20/125+1 using an ETDRS chart, it will be determined that the patient does not have statutory blindness as the patient is able to read one letter on the 20/100 line.

**VIST Tips:**

- VHA Directive 1174 is the first time that VA and Social Security Administration have used the exact same definition for Legal Blindness.
- BRS Programs are currently guided by a VHA Directive 1174 (April 19, 2021) which replaced and updated a series of different VHA Handbooks Directives (see below for a link to the new Directive).

**More Information:**

- [VHA Directive 1174, Blind and Visual Impairment Rehabilitation Continuum of Care](#)

**Additional Information:**

- [About Blind Rehabilitation Services - Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services \(va.gov\)](#)
- [42 U.S. Code § 416 \(Public Health & Welfare\)](#)

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## CHAMPVA: Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs

**Type of Benefit:** Family Health Benefit

Health insurance program for eligible dependents and survivors that covers certain health care services and supplies.

**Benefits:** VA shares the cost of certain health care services and supplies for eligible beneficiaries. Operates similar to Medicare and TRICARE.

**Eligibility:** At least 1 of the criteria below must be met:

- The spouse or child of a Veteran who's been rated permanently and totally disabled (100%) for a service-connected disability by VBA, or
- The surviving spouse or child of a Veteran who died from a VA-rated SC disability, or
- The surviving spouse or child of a Veteran who was at the time of death rated permanently and totally disabled from an SC disability, or
- The surviving spouse or child of a service member who died in the line of duty, not due to misconduct (in most of these cases, family members qualify for TRICARE, not CHAMPVA).

**Managed By:** VHA (Office of Community Care)

**Application Procedure:** File a request with Office of Community Care – CHAMPVA Eligibility using form 10-10d and form 10-7959c.

### VIST Tips:

- A Veteran may qualify for CHAMPVA benefits (separate of VA healthcare) if the veteran's spouse is also a Veteran who qualifies as a CHAMPVA sponsor.
- Some CHAMPVA participants may receive services at a VA facility depending on the service needed and availability at the local VHA facility (see CITI link below). This does not include eligibility for Prosthetics devices, just medical treatment.

**More Information:** [CHAMPVA Benefits | Veterans Affairs](#)

### Additional Information:

- [Frequently Asked Questions About CHAMPVA - Community Care](#)
- [CHAMPVA: In-House Treatment Initiative \(CITI\)](#)

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## CLOTHING ALLOWANCE

**Type of Benefit:** Disability Compensation – Special Claims

**2021 Rate:** **\$830.56**

VA provides money each year to help eligible Veterans buy new clothes that might have been damaged by a prosthetic or orthopedic device or by medicine taken to treat a skin condition.

**Eligibility:** Must meet both criteria below:

- Prosthetic or orthopedic device or skin medicine causes damage to the clothes, **AND**
- Veteran needs this device or skin medicine because of an injury or illness related to a service-connected condition.

**Managed By:** VHA (local Prosthetics Service)

**Application Procedure:** File a request with Prosthetics using form 10-8678 (Application for Annual Clothing Allowance) on or before August 1 of each calendar year.

**VIST Tips:**

- A Veteran may apply for more than 1 Clothing Allowance if specific criteria is met.
  - Has more than 1 prosthetic or orthopedic device, or
  - Has more than one skin medicine, and/or
  - Device or skin medicine affects more than one type of clothing
- Veteran's must apply each year (before the deadline of August 1<sup>st</sup>).
- Payment is made between September 1<sup>st</sup> and October 31<sup>st</sup> each year.

**More Information:** [VA Clothing Allowance | Veterans Affairs](#)

**Additional Info:** [Clothing Allowance - Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services \(va.gov\)](#)

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## COMPENSATION: Disability Compensation (SC) and Veterans Pension (NSC)

**Type of Benefit:** Disability Compensation and Pension – Monetary

The VA pays monetary compensation to eligible veterans and survivors who have been adjudicated to have injuries, illnesses or disabilities that are related to active military service. The amount of compensation paid varies depending on the level of disability and the number of dependents. Veterans must have service-connected disabilities in order to receive VA disability compensation benefits.

The VA also pays monetary benefits to eligible veterans and survivors with non-service-connected disabilities. Veterans must have served during a recognized wartime period, have 90 days of continuous active duty service, be over 65 and/or disabled, and have an income and net worth under specified limits. The income limits vary each year.

### **BENEFIT - Compensation:**

- Monetary payment each month based on overall SC disability rating.
- All VA disability compensation benefits are **non-taxable** and not counted as income.
- Veterans with only a 0% SC rating are considered SC, but non-compensable.
- Compensation rate increases based on percentage disability rating (in 10% increments).
- Two levels of disability compensation: Basic and Special Monthly Compensation (SMC).
- Additional payment is available if veterans determined to be Housebound or in need of A&A.

### **BENEFIT – Veterans Pension:**

- Provides monthly payments for NSC disabilities to wartime Veterans who meet the eligibility criteria and have income and net worth within set limits.
- Additional payment is available if veterans determined to be Housebound or A&A.

**Eligibility:** See more information link below for detailed findings:

**Managed By:** VBA (local VA Regional Office)

**Application Procedure:** File a claim with VBA.

### **VIST Tips:**

- VIST should review annually each VIST Roster patients current rating and identify any action needed.
- Please see separate publications for detailed findings on VA Compensation and Pension benefits: VIST Quick Reference Guide and Volume-2: VA Compensation and Pension Benefits.

**More Information:** [VA Disability Compensation | Veterans Affairs](#)  
[VA Pension Benefits | Veterans Affairs](#)

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## COMPENSATION: Increased Disability Rating for Time in a Hospital

**Type of Benefit:** Disability Compensation – Special Claims

VA provides additional disability compensation or benefits for Veterans who spend time in a VA hospital or a VA-approved hospital for treatment of an SC condition.

**BENEFIT:** Compensation would be increased to temporary 100% disability rating for the time Veteran spent in the hospital.

**Eligibility:** Must meet one of the criteria below:

- Veteran spent more than 21 days in a VA hospital or other approved hospital for treatment of an SC condition, **or**
- Veteran was under hospital observation for more than 21 days at VA expense for treatment of an SC condition.
- **NOTE:** This benefit only applies when veterans are rated less than 100% SC.

**Managed By:** VBA (local VA Regional Office)

**Application Procedure:** File a claim with VBA using [VA Form 21-526EZ](#).

### VIST Tips:

- In some situations, VBA may be notified automatically by VHA of an admission that might qualify. However, a claim should be filed as a precaution in case there was no notification.
- If veteran's hospital stay was in a non-VA facility, veteran/caregiver will need to provide a copy of the hospital discharge showing length of stay and cause.
- This is a temporary rating for a specified period of hospitalization.
- An example of this benefit would be a veteran is rated 70% SC for vision loss and is hospitalized in a VAMC for 8 weeks while attending a Blind Rehabilitation Center (BRC) program. VA would temporarily increase the rating to 100% during the hospital stay. After discharge from the BRC the disability rating would return to 70% SC.

**More Information:** [Increased Disability Rating For Time In A Hospital | Veterans Affairs \(va.gov\)](#)

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## COMPENSATION: K-Award

**Type of Benefit:** Disability Compensation – Special Monthly Compensation (SMC)

**2021 Monthly Rate:**     **\$111.74**

VA provides additional disability compensation known as Special Monthly Compensation (SMC) for veterans with disability ratings for amputations or loss of use of a body part(s) or function(s). This rate applies to each body part that is lost or has loss of use. VA refers to the loss or loss-of-use as a K-Award.

**BENEFIT:** Compensation is increased by the K-Award rate.

**Eligibility:** SMC-K Award is payable for each Service-Connected rating for anatomical loss or loss of use of:

- One hand
- One foot
- Both buttocks
- Creative organ
- **Blindness of one eye with light perception only**
- Deafness of both ears
- Constant inability to communicate by speech
- Loss of breast tissue

**Managed By:** VBA (local VA Regional Office) 38 CFR § 3.350 Special Monthly Compensation

**Application Procedure:** File a claim with VBA using [VA Form 21-526EZ](#).

### VIST Tips:

- VIST should monitor eye exam reports for latest findings indicating veteran may qualify for a K-Award based on vision loss in 1 eye.
- Veterans can only have 1-K Award for vision loss. If both eyes meet the eligibility criteria identified above, the additional payment for K-Award for blindness in one eye is stopped and Veteran's compensation rate is increased to a higher SMC level.
- VIST should monitor overall healthcare of service-disabled VIST veterans that may qualify for a K-Award based on other losses due to their SC conditions. An example would be a veteran with SC diabetic condition who loses the use of a foot and/or creative organ due to the diabetic condition.

### More Information:

- [38 CFR § 3.350 Special Monthly Compensation](#)
- [VA Special Monthly Compensation Factsheet](#)

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## COMPENSATION: Paired Organ Rule

**Type of Benefit:** Disability Compensation – Paired Organs or Extremities

Compensation is payable under 38 U.S.C. 1160 for disabilities involving certain paired organs or extremities, one service-connected (SC) and the other non-service-connected (NSC), provided the NSC disability is not the result of the Veteran's own willful misconduct.

**BENEFIT:** Compensation is payable for qualifying combinations of SC and NSC disabilities as if both disabilities were SC. Creates eligibility for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC), and Dependent's Educational Assistance (DEA) – Chapter 35.

**Eligibility:** The Paired Organ rule applies for the following SC/NSC combined disabilities, provided the NSC disability is not the result of the veteran's own willful misconduct:

- Impairment of vision in one eye as a result of SC disability and impairment of vision in the other eye as a result of NSC disability and
  - The impairment of vision in each eye is rated at a visual acuity of 20/200 or less; or
  - The peripheral field of vision for each eye is 20 degrees or less.
- Loss or loss of use of one kidney as a result of SC disability and involvement of the other kidney as a result of NSC disability.
- Hearing impairment in one ear compensable to a degree of 10 percent or more as a result of SC disability and hearing impairment as a result of NSC disability in the other ear.
- Loss or loss of use of one hand or one foot as result of SC disability and loss or loss of use of the other hand or foot as a result of NSC disability.
- Permanent SC disability of one lung, rated 50% or more disabling, in combination with a NSC disability of the other lung.

**Managed By:** VBA (local VA Regional Office)

**Application Procedure:** File a claim with VBA using [VA Form 21-526EZ](#).

**VIST Tips:**

- VIST should monitor eye exam reports for latest findings indicating veteran may qualify for a rating based on paired organ finding.
  - An example would be right eye is rated 30% SC (for light perception) due to trauma while on active military service, left eye is rated NSC or not rated. Veteran functions as monocular for many years and later develops macular degeneration that is not related to military service. When vision in the NSC eye reaches 20/200 or less or 20 degrees or less in the visual field a claim should be filed for increased SC rating due to Paired Organ
- Paired Organ cases are **NOT** eligible for:
  - Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) – 2101a **OR** Special Home Adaptation (SHA) – 2101b
  - Automobile and Adaptive Equipment Allowance if based on visual impairment

**More Information:** [38 U.S.C. 1160](#)  
[38 CFR 3.383](#)  
[M21-1, Part IV, Subpart ii, Chapter 2, Section K - Other Compensation Considerations](#)  
[M21-1, Part IX, Subpart i, Chapter 2 - Automobile and Adaptive Equipment](#)

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## COMPENSATION: Unemployability (called: Individual Unemployability (IU))

**Type of Benefit:** Disability Compensation – Special Claims

If a Veteran is unable to work because of a service-connected (SC) disability, VA can award an Individual Unemployability (IU) rating. This entitles a Veteran to disability compensation or benefits at the same level as a Veteran who has a 100% SC disability rating.

**BENEFIT:** Compensation is increased to 100% disability rating level based on IU finding.

**Eligibility:** Must meet both criteria below:

- Veteran has at least 1 SC disability rated at 60% SC or more disabling, or 2 or more SC disabilities – with at least 1 rated at 40% SC or more disabling and combined rating of 70% or more, **and**
- Veteran can't hold down a steady job that provides financial support (known as substantially gainful employment) because of the SC disability. Odd jobs (marginal employment) doesn't count.
- **NOTE:** In certain cases (i.e. frequent hospitalization or epilepsy) a Veteran may qualify for IU at a lower disability rating.

**Managed By:** VBA (local VA Regional Office)

**Application Procedure:** File a claim with VBA using [VA Form 21-526EZ](#).

### VIST Tips:

- IU is not an automatic statutory rating; it is *individualized* to the specific Veteran.
- Veterans rated 60-90% for vision loss are excellent candidates for consideration of an IU rating if they are not working.
- VBA will not provide a favorable IU rating if Veteran is still gainfully employed. Veterans must stop working/retire for VBA to consider an IU claim.
- Veterans awarded IU are not only entitled to increased monthly compensation, but may also become eligible for certain dental benefits, CHAMPVA and Chapter 35 Education benefits.
- With IU cases the compensation is increased to the 100% SC rate, but the veteran's VBA rating stays the same (60, 70, 80 or 90%).

**More Information:** [VA Individual Unemployability If You Can't Work | Veterans Affairs](#)

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## **DEATH: Burial Benefits and Services**

**Type of Benefit:** Burial Benefits and Memorial Items

VA offers Veterans and their family members assistance with planning and paying for a burial or memorial service in a VA national cemetery. Family members can also order memorial items to honor the service of a Veteran.

**BENEFIT:**

- Burial in a VA national cemetery
- Veterans burial allowance
- Memorial items (grave markers, headstones, Presidential Memorial Certificates, and other memorial items to honor a Veteran's service.
- Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) for surviving spouse or a dependent child or parent.
- VA Survivors pension
- Bereavement counseling
- Spousal burial/internment in a National Cemetery

**Eligibility:** Varies depending on the burial benefit. Please check the link in More Information below for more detailed information.

**Managed By:** VBA and NCA (National Cemetery Administration)

**Application Procedure:** Contact VA benefits hotline (800) 827-1000.

**VIST Tips:**

- States may have separate burial benefits and services available, check with your State's Department of Veterans Affairs for more information.
- This topic can be very useful at VIST educational and support groups

**More Information:** <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/>

**Additional Information:**

- <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/memorial-items/>
- [2021 VA DIC Rates For Spouses And Dependents | Veterans Affairs](#)

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## DENTAL: Dental Insurance Program (VADIP)

**Type of Benefit:** Healthcare – Dental Insurance

VHA offers private insurance coverage through the VA Dental Insurance Program (VADIP) to Veterans and their eligible beneficiaries.

**BENEFIT:** Discounted dental insurance coverage that includes diagnostic services, preventative services, endodontic and other restorative services, surgical services and emergency services. Individuals select the plan that provide benefits and premiums that meet their dental needs and budget.

**Eligibility:** Enrollment is open to Veterans who are enrolled in the VA health care system and Civilian and Medical Program of the VA (CHAMPVA) beneficiaries.

**Managed By:** VHA in partnership with Delta Dental of California and MetLife

**Application Procedure:** Enroll online in the Veterans Affairs Dental Insurance Program (VADIP) by contacting:

- **Delta Dental of California:** <https://feds.deltadentalins.com/vadip/index.php>
- **Metlife:** <https://www.metlife.com/vadip/>

**NOTE:** The Department of Veterans Affairs Dental Insurance Reauthorization Act of 2016 extends VADIP until December 31, 2021.

**VIST Tips:**

- VADIP is for non-VA dental care.
- The individual covered by VADIP will pay the entire premium under the dental insurance plan, in addition to the full cost of any copays.

**More Information:** <https://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vadip/>

**Additional Information:**

[https://www.va.gov/HEALTHBENEFITS/resources/publications/IB10-580\\_VADIP\\_factsheet.pdf](https://www.va.gov/HEALTHBENEFITS/resources/publications/IB10-580_VADIP_factsheet.pdf)

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## DENTAL: VA Dental Care

**Type of Benefit:** Healthcare – Dental Care

VHA offers eligible Veterans dental care services at VHA facilities or through prior authorization from non-VA providers in the community.

**BENEFIT:** The scope of dental care offered varies depending on eligibility (see below). The range is from any needed dental care to limited care or time frame.

**Eligibility:** Veteran may qualify for VA Dental Care if the one of the following apply, please see **more information** link below for detailed description).

- Service-connect (SC) compensated dental disability: Class I; any needed dental care.
- Former Prisoner-of-War (POW): Class IIC; any needed dental care.
- Service-connected (SC) at 100% rate: Class IV; any needed dental care.\*
- Served on Active Duty for 90 days or more during Persian Gulf War Era: Class II; one-time dental care, if qualifying requirements are met (see more information link)
- Non-compensable dental condition or a disability that's the result of combat wounds or service trauma: Class IIA; limited dental care
- VA dental care provider has concluded that dental condition is linked to a service-connected health condition and is making that condition worse: Class III; limited dental care.
- 38 U.S.C. Chapter 31 Veteran Readiness and Employment Program participant: Class V; limited dental care.
- Receiving VA care or is scheduled for inpatient care for a health condition and dental care is needed for a dental issue that's making the health condition harder to treat: Class VI; limited dental care.
- Signed up for Homeless Veterans Dental Program (VHA Directive 2007-039): Class IIB; limited dental care.
- Receiving inpatient care in a hospital, nursing home, or other supervised homelike care setting (domiciliary care): limited dental care.

\* Includes Veterans rated Unemployable, but NOT those with a temporary rating at 100%.

**Managed By:** VHA (Dental Service)

**Application Procedure:** Veteran contact directly or VA Provider consult Dental Service.

**VIST Tips:**

- VIST should monitor Veterans ratings for any changes that might impact VA Dental Care Eligibility (i.e. increased rating to 100% SC or award of Individual Unemployability – IU).
- Veterans with no or limited VA dental care eligibility may still participate in the VA Dental Insurance Program (see previous page).

**More Information:** <https://www.va.gov/health-care/about-va-health-benefits/dental-care/>

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## EDUCATION: Chapter 35

**Type of Benefit:** Education and Training – For Dependents and Survivors

VA provides education benefits for dependents and survivors (children and spouse) of eligible Service Members and Veterans.

**BENEFIT:** Pays for Education and Training for eligible beneficiaries and survivors.

**Eligibility (Service Member):** A child or spouse of a **Service Member** if one of these is true. The Service Member:

- Died in the line of duty after September 10, 2001, **or**
- Is missing in action or was captured in the line of duty by a hostile force, **or**
- Was detained (held) by force while in the line of duty by a foreign government or power, **or**
- Is in the hospital or getting outpatient treatment for a service-connected permanent and total disability and is likely to be discharged for that disability. A service-connected permanent and total disability resulting from service that doesn't go away.

**Eligibility (Veteran):** A child or spouse of a **Veteran** if one of these is true. The Veteran:

- Is permanently and totally disabled due to a service-connected disability, **or**
- Died while on active duty or as a result of a service-connected disability

**Managed By:** VBA (local VA Regional Office)

**Application Procedure:** File a claim with VBA.

### VIST Tips:

- Most universities and colleges have dedicated staff to assist students maximize their VA education benefits.
- A stepchild may also qualify for the Chapter 35 benefit, but a grandchild that Veteran is the legal guardian for would not, unless the Veteran formally adopts the grandchild prior to age 18.
- A total disability rating is a 100% rating. A Veteran rated 90% SC or less will generally not qualify for Chapter 35 benefits, until the rating is increased to 100% or Individual Unemployability (IU) is awarded.
- Several organizations may have scholarships for children of blinded veterans. Check out Volume-3 for more information and see Consumer Groups and Education sections.

**More Information:** [VA Education Benefits For Survivors And Dependents | Veterans Affairs](#)

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## **EDUCATION: GI Bill**

**Type of Benefit:** Education and Training

Established in 1944 the GI Bill benefit helps pay for college, graduate school, and training programs for qualifying Veterans and their family members. The GI Bill is an umbrella term for many different education and training programs. Please explore the link below to learn more about the wide range of programs available.

The GI Bill has helped provide education and training to millions of Veterans and their family members over the years and has played an important role in the success of the United States since it was founded.

**BENEFIT:** Pays for Education and Training for eligible Veterans and beneficiaries.

**Eligibility:** Will vary depending on the specific program. Please refer to the link below for more detailed information regarding the various VA Education benefits available.

**Managed By:** VBA (local VA Regional Office)

**Application Procedure:** File a claim with VBA.

**VIST Tips:**

- Most universities and colleges have dedicated staff to assist students maximize their VA education benefits.
- Veterans may be eligible for education benefits from their State of residence. Check Volume-3 of the Desk Reference Guide for more details.

**More Information:** [VA Education Benefits | Veterans Affairs](#)

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## HOMELESS VETERANS PROGRAMS

**Type of Benefit:** Services for Veterans Experiencing Homelessness

VA has established specialized programs for homeless and at-risk Veterans. These programs serve hundreds of thousands of Veterans each year and are designed to reduce and eliminate homelessness among the Veteran population. VA is the only Federal agency that provides substantial hands-on assistance directly to homeless persons making VA's approach the largest integrated network of homeless treatment and assistance services in the country.

**BENEFITS:** The VA programs for homeless and at-risk Veterans are:

- **Housing: HUD-VASH:** A collaborative program between HUD (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and VA Supportive Housing). It combines HUD housing vouchers with VA supportive services to help Veterans who are homeless, and their families find and sustain permanent housing.
- **Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF):** For very low income Veterans, SSVF provides case management and supportive services to prevent the imminent loss of a Veteran's home or identify a new, more suitable housing situation.
- **Domiciliary Care for Homeless Veterans (DCHV) Program:** The Domiciliary Care Program is VA's oldest health care program dating back to the late 1860's when the purpose was to provide a home for disabled volunteer soldiers of the Civil War. The Domiciliary programs are now integrated with the Mental Health Residential Rehabilitation and Treatment Programs (MH RRTPs) in the VA.
- **Homeless Veterans Community Employment Services (HVCES):** Designed to improve employment outcomes for Veterans who have experienced homelessness. See [Community Employment Coordinators'](#) for a CEC at your VAMC.
- **Compensated Work Therapy (CWT):** A clinical vocational rehabilitation program located at all VAMC facilities. CWT programs partner with business and government agencies to promote employment opportunities for Veterans with physical and mental health challenges.
- **Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) Program:** HCHV programs target chronically homeless Veterans, especially those with serious mental health diagnoses and/or substance use disorders. HCHV works to lower barriers and maintain easy access for Veterans to receive services in VA and the community. The Stand Downs for Homeless Veterans is one well known tool used by HCHV to outreach to the target population.
- **Homeless Patient Aligned Care Teams (HPACT) Program:** An innovative treatment model implemented across VHA that brings together key medical staff, social workers, mental health and substance use counselors, nurses, and homeless program staff to better serve the homeless Veteran and at-risk population.

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- [Homeless Veterans Dental Program \(HVDP\)](#): Provides Veterans who are homeless with dental treatment.
- [Veterans Justice Outreach \(VJO\) Program](#): The VJO program provides outreach to justice-involved Veterans in various settings, including jails and courts.

**Eligibility:** Will vary depending on the specific program. Essentially targeting Veterans who are homeless or at-risk.

**Managed By:** VHA (Chief of Staff, Social Work Service)

**Application Procedure:** Consult to Homeless Program or self-referral

**VIST Tips:**

- Homelessness combined with vision loss creates a critical case that requires immediate attention from VIST and VA healthcare staff. The good news for VIST is that VA has a comprehensive team at each VAMC dedicated to addressing homeless and at-risk Veterans. VIST should partner with VA HUD-VASH team to assist them in every way possible to serve veterans in their program.
- Being homeless is not an acceptable reason to decline to refer to a BRC program. At one time, BRCs required applicants to have a stable or reliable housing option at discharge before the BRC would agree to admit. BRC were reluctant to admit because finding a discharge placement can be very difficult in certain cases. In the mid-2000s VACO-BRS notified the field that homelessness could **not** be a bar to admission to a BRC program as this population is at high risk. Veteran's must still be medically and psychologically stable so they can benefit from assessment and training provided at a BRC.
- BRS programs need to be mindful of homeless Veterans or at-risk Veterans in terms of amount and type of prosthetics issued. An example would be issuance of a CCTV system, desktop computer system or other large non-portable device. The housing situation would make it impossible for a veteran to adequately maintain and support heavy or numerous items.

**More Information:** [VA Programs For Homeless Veterans](#)

**Additional Information:**

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## HOUSING: HISA (Home Improvements and Structural Alterations)

**Type of Benefit:** Housing Adaptation

**2021 Lifetime Rate:**     **\$6,800 (SC)**  
                                     **\$2,000 (NSC)**

The HISA Grant provides medically necessary improvements and structural alterations to Veterans/Service Members primary residence.

**Eligibility:** To provide Veterans and Service Members access to the home or to essential lavatory and sanitary facilities for the treatment of:

- A service-connected disability, **or**
- A nonservice-connected (NSC) disability of a veteran with service-connected (SC) disabilities rated at 50% or more

**NOTE:** NSC veterans may also qualify for HISA benefits at a lower lifetime rate

**Managed By:** VHA (local Prosthetics Service)

**Application Procedure:** File a request with Prosthetics using form 10-0103 (Application for Assistance in Acquiring Home Improvements and Structural Alterations).

**VIST Tips:**

- Prosthetics will provide education and counseling to veterans applying for HISA.
- Veteran's may qualify for additional housing grants (see below) which can be used in coordination or separate of HISA.
- HISA can be used to adapt rental housing.
- Some adaptations can be made through Prosthetic device issuance and may not require use of the HISA grant.

**More Information:** [Home Improvements and Structural Alterations \(HISA\) - Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services \(va.gov\)](#)

**Additional Info:** [PSAS Videos - Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services \(va.gov\)](#)

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## HOUSING: Home Loans

**Type of Benefit:** Housing Assistance

VA is one of the largest lenders of home loans in the United States. VA direct and VA-backed Veterans home loans have helped millions of Veterans, Service Members, and their survivors to buy, build, improve, or refinance a home.

**BENEFIT:** Provides financing for the purchase of a home.

**Eligibility:** Will vary depending on the specific program. Please refer to the link below for more detailed information regarding the various VA Home Loans available.

**Managed By:** VBA (local VA Regional Office)

**Application Procedure:** File a claim with VBA (to regional loan center) using form 26-1880 (Request for A Certificate of Eligibility).

**More Information:** [VA-Backed Veterans Home Loans | Veterans Affairs](#)

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## HOUSING: Specially Adapted Housing (2101a)

**Type of Benefit:** Housing Assistance – Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) Grant

**2021 Rate:** **\$100,896** (total maximum amount)

VA offers housing grants for eligible Veterans and Service Members so they can buy or change a home to meet their needs and live more independently.

**Eligibility:** Must meet both criteria below:

- Own or will own the home, **and**
- Have a qualifying service-connected (SC) disability, which includes:
  - The loss or loss of use of more than one limb
  - The loss or loss of use of a lower leg along with the residuals (lasting effects) of an organic (natural) disease or injury
  - **Blindness in both eyes (with 20/200 visual acuity or less, including visual field loss of 20 degrees or less)**
  - Certain severe burns
  - The loss, or loss of use, of one lower extremity (foot or leg) after September 11, 2001, which makes it so Veteran can't balance or walk without the help of braces, crutches, canes, or a wheelchair.

**NOTE:** Only 120 veterans and service members each fiscal year can qualify for a grant based on loss of one extremity after September 11, 2001, as set by Congress. If the cap has been reached for a particular fiscal year, qualifying veterans may be able to use the benefit in future years.

**Managed By:** VBA (Loan Guaranty)

**Application Procedure:** File a claim with VBA: [Download VA Form 26-4555 \(PDF\)](#)

### VIST Tips:

- Veterans may be eligible for both HISA Grant (Prosthetics) and SAH (VBA).
- Some adaptations can be made through Prosthetic device issuance and may not require use of the adaptive housing grants.
- Eligible veterans can use the SAH money from their grant up to 6 different times in their lifetime up to the total maximum amount.
- Eligible veterans will need to work closely with VBA Loan Guaranty Specialist in order to maximize use of the SAH grant.
- Eligible veterans should consider applying for Veterans' Mortgage Life Insurance (see separate section below).
- Paired Organ cases are **NOT** eligible for SAH 2101a or SHA 2101b benefits.

**More Information:** [Disability Housing Grants For Veterans | Veterans Affairs \(va.gov\)](#)

**Additional Info:** [Guide for Specially Adapted Housing and Special Housing Adaptation Projects \(PDF\)](#)

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## **HOUSING: Special Home Adaptation (2101b)**

**Type of Benefit:** Housing Assistance – Special Home Adaptation (SHA) Grant

**2021 Rate:** **\$20,215** (total maximum amount)

VA offers housing grants for eligible Veterans and Service Members so they can buy or change a home to meet their needs and live more independently.

**Eligibility:** Must meet both criteria below:

- Own or will own the home, **and**
- Have a qualifying service-connected (SC) disability, which includes:
  - The loss or loss of use of both hands
  - Certain severe burns
  - Certain respiratory or breathing injuries.

**Managed By:** VBA (Loan Guaranty)

**Application Procedure:** File a claim with VBA: [Download VA Form 26-4555 \(PDF\)](#)

**VIST Tips:**

- Veterans may be eligible for both HISA Grant (Prosthetics) and SHA (VBA).
- Some adaptations can be made through Prosthetic device issuance and may not require use of the adaptive housing grants.
- Eligible veterans can use the SHA money from their grant up to 6 different times in their lifetime up to the total maximum amount.
- Eligible veterans will need to work closely with VBA Loan Guaranty Specialist in order to maximize use of the SHA grant.
- Until late 2020, Veterans with service-connected blindness qualified for the 2101b SHA Grant. This was changed with new legislation and those veterans are now eligible for the larger 2101a SAH grant (see previous page).
- Paired Organ cases are **NOT** eligible for SAH 2101a or SHA 2101b benefits.

**More Information:** [Disability Housing Grants For Veterans | Veterans Affairs \(va.gov\)](#)

**Additional Info:** [Read the Guide for Specially Adapted Housing and Special Housing Adaptation Projects \(PDF\)](#)

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## **HOUSING: Temporary Residence Adaptation (TRA)**

**Type of Benefit:** Housing Assistance – Special Home Adaptation (SHA) Grant

**2021 Rate:** **\$40,637** (SAH-2101a Grant)

**2021 Rate:** **\$7,256** (SHA-2101b Grant)

VA offers housing grants for eligible Veterans and Service Members so they can change a temporary residence to meet their needs and live more independently.

**Eligibility:** Must meet both criteria below:

- Qualify for a Specially Adapted Housing (SAH-2101a) or a Special Home Adaptation (SHA-2101b) grant (see previous pages), **and**
- Are living temporarily in a family member's home that needs changes to meet the Veteran's needs (to use a TRA grant, the veteran does not have to own the house):

**Managed By:** VBA (Loan Guaranty)

**Application Procedure:** File a claim with VBA.

**VIST Tips:**

- Veterans may be eligible for both HISA Grant (Prosthetics) and SAH/SHA grants (VBA).
- Some adaptations can be made through Prosthetic device issuance and may not require use of the adaptive housing grants.

**More Information:** [Disability Housing Grants For Veterans | Veterans Affairs \(va.gov\)](#)

**Additional Info:** [Read the Guide for Specially Adapted Housing and Special Housing Adaptation Projects \(PDF\)](#)

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## INSURANCE: Service-Disabled Veterans Life Insurance (S-DVI)

**Type of Benefit:** Insurance –Life Insurance

Service-Disabled Veterans Life Insurance (S-DVI) provides low cost coverage to eligible service members and disabled veterans.

**2021 Benefit:** Up to **\$10,000** in life insurance coverage and up to **\$30,000** in supplemental coverage

**Eligibility:** Veteran or Service Member must meet ALL requirements below:

- Released from active duty on or after April 25, 1951, and didn't receive a dishonorable discharge, **and**
- Rated for a service-connected disability (even if only 0%), **and**
- Are in good health except for any service-connected conditions, **and**
- Apply within 2 years from the date VA grants a new SC disability
- **NOTE:** Veterans who become totally disabled and unable to work can apply for the supplemental S-DVI coverage, but they must be younger than 65.

**Managed By:** VBA (Regional Office & Insurance Center)

**Application Procedure:** File a claim with VBA by submitting VA Form 29-4364 Application for S-DVI.

**VIST Tips:**

- The eligibility for this benefit is time sensitive so VIST should monitor possible eligibility for this benefit during the Annual VIST Review.
- Veterans that are SC for blindness should request premium waiver, if totally disabled and not working.

**More Information:** <https://www.va.gov/life-insurance/options-eligibility/s-dvi/>

**Additional Info:**

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## INSURANCE: Veterans' Mortgage Life Insurance (VMLI)

**Type of Benefit:** Insurance – Mortgage Life Insurance

Veterans' Mortgage Life Insurance (VMLI) offers mortgage protection insurance to the families of Veterans with severe service-connected (SC) disabilities who have adapted a home to fit their needs.

**2021 Benefit:** Up to **\$200,000** in mortgage life insurance

**Eligibility:** Veteran or Service Member must meet ALL requirements below:

- Have a severe disability that VA concluded was caused – or made worse – by military service, **and**
- Received a Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) 2101a grant to buy, build, or make changes (like installing ramps or widening doorways) to a home so the veteran can live more independently, **and**
- Have title of the home, **and**
- Have a mortgage on the home, **and**
- Are under 70 years old

**Managed By:** VBA (Regional Office & Insurance Center)

**Application Procedure:** File a claim with VBA by submitting VA Form 29-357 Claim for Disability Insurance – Government Life Insurance.

**VIST Tips:**

- Money is paid directly to the bank or other lender that holds the mortgage – not to a life insurance beneficiary (a person chosen to receive the money from a policy when the insured dies).
- The amount of coverage equals the amount still owed on the mortgage up to \$200,000.

**More Information:** [Veterans' Mortgage Life Insurance \(VMLI\) | Veterans Affairs \(va.gov\)](#)

**Additional Info:**

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## INSURANCE: Waiver of Premiums Due to Disability

**Type of Benefit:** Insurance – Waiver of premiums for policyholders who become totally disabled

VA is one of the largest providers of life insurance in the United States. One insurance benefit offered through VA that might be impacted by severe vision loss is a waiver on any policy premium payments when a policy holder becomes totally disabled.

**Eligibility:** Must meet ALL criteria below:

- Veteran has a mental or physical disability that prevents them from being able to hold a job, **and**
- Veteran is covered under the Service-Disabled Veterans Life Insurance (S-DVI), **and**
- The total disability happens before the age of 65 years old – BUT after the effective date of the life insurance policy, **and**
- The total disability continues for at least 6 months in a row.

**Managed By:** VBA (Regional Office & Insurance Center)

**Application Procedure:** File a claim with VBA by submitting VA Form 29-357 Claim for Disability Insurance – Government Life Insurance.

**VIST Tips:**

- This waiver may also apply to non-VA life insurance policies.
- Blinded veterans may be eligible for a free extension of their Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) policy. Check out the link below for more information.

**More Information:** [Totally Disabled Or Terminally Ill Policyholders | Veterans Affairs \(va.gov\)](#)

**Additional Info:** [Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance \(SGLI\) | Veterans Affairs \(va.gov\)](#)

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## MEDICAL: Benefits Package

**Type of Benefit:** Medical – VA Health Benefits

VA provides a comprehensive medical benefits package that is unique to each Veteran based on their overall eligibility and need. All Legally Blind veterans and most veterans with severe vision loss are entitled to enrollment in VA medical care and related services, including primary care, home health care, home-based primary care, surgical – including eye care, mental health services, rehabilitation services and special programs. Veterans are encouraged to establish a primary care provider in order for the VA and VIST to provide effective services.

**Benefits:** Comprehensive healthcare benefits package including primary care, home health care, specialty care, mental health services, rehabilitation programs, vision care, dental care, long term care and care in the community.

**Eligibility:** All Veterans receive coverage for most care and services, but only some will qualify for added benefits like dental care or long-term care. The full list of covered benefits depends on:

- Priority Group assignment, and
- Advice of the assigned VA Primary Care Provider, and
- Medical standards for treating various health conditions

**Managed By:** VHA

**Application Procedure:** Veterans may apply online, in person at VA healthcare facilities, by mail and by phone. They will need to complete VA Form 10-10EZ.

**VIST Tips:**

- All veterans served by VIST should be encouraged to establish a VA Primary Care Provider.

**More Information:** [About VA Health Benefits | Veterans Affairs](#)

**Additional Info:** [Geriatrics and Extended Care Home \(va.gov\)](#)

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## MEDICAL: Audiology & Hearing Aids

**Type of Benefit:** Medical – VHA Audiology Benefits and Services

VA offers comprehensive healthcare services to Veterans with hearing loss, tinnitus (ringing in the ears), and balance disorders. VA is the largest employer of audiologists in the U.S. Many blind and visually impaired Veterans may also experience some level of hearing loss, especially as they grow older.

**Benefits:** VA audiologists provide a range of comprehensive services, including:

- Diagnostic Hearing Evaluations and Hearing Aid Fittings
- Aural, Tinnitus and Vestibular Assessment and Rehabilitation
- Virtual TeleHealth Services
- State of the art technology issued to Veterans, including:
  - Hearing Aids
  - Assistive/Alerting Devices
  - FM Systems
  - Cochlear Implants
  - Bone-anchored Hearing Aids
  - Tinnitus Maskers/Sound Generators

**Eligibility:** All Veterans enrolled in VA's health care system are eligible for comprehensive audiology diagnostic evaluations and prescribed hearing aids.

**Managed By:** VHA (Chief of Staff – Prosthetics, Audiology & Speech Service)

**Application Procedure:** Veterans may apply online, in person at VA healthcare facilities, by mail and by phone. They will need to complete VA Form 10-10EZ.

**VIST Tips:**

- All veterans served by VIST should be encouraged complete an updated hearing evaluation in order to maximize their sense of hearing.
- Audiologist play a key role in helping many blind and visually impaired Veterans maintain a safe and independent lifestyle. The Chief, Audiology & Speech Pathology should be an active member of the local VIS Team.

**More Information:** [VHA Audiology Services](#)

**Additional Info:**

- [VHA Audiology Fact Sheet](#)
- [PSAS: Hearing Aids](#)
- [VHA Directive 1034: Prescribing and Providing Eyeglasses, Contact Lenses, and Hearing Aids](#)

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## MEDICAL: Caregiver Support Program – PGCSS

**Type of Benefit:** Family Member Benefits – Program of **General Caregiver Support Services** (PGCSS)

VA offers Caregiver Support Services for family caregivers to help support them in caring for the Veteran in the home and community environment. There are 2 VA Caregiver Support Programs available to eligible veterans and caregivers:

1. Program of General Caregiver Support Services (**PGCSS**)
2. Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (**PCAFC**)

This section describes the **PGCSS** (General Caregiver Support Services) program and the next section describes in detail the **PCAFC** (Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers) program.

**Benefits:** The Program of General Caregiver Support Services (**PGCSS**) includes the following support programs and resources:

- VA Caregiver Support Line (1-855-260-3274)
- Peer Support Mentoring Program
- Building Better Caregivers (free online workshop)
- Comprehensive assistance for family members, including 1:1 mental health counseling
- REACH VA (work with trained and certified REACH VA Program Coach)
- Respite care

**Eligibility:** Available to Veterans of all eras. The PGCSS services are available to support all caregivers, where the Veteran is enrolled for care in Veterans Health Administration (VHA), regardless of illness or injury.

**Managed By:** VHA (Caregiver Support Program at local VA facility)

**Application Procedure:** Submit VA Form 10-10CG (Application for the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers).

**VIST Tips:**

- Many blind and visually impaired veterans and their caregivers can benefit from services offered through the PGCSS. VIST should work with the local Caregiver Support team to help educate them about the impact of vision loss and need for caregiver support.

**More Information:** [VA Family Caregiver Assistance Program | Veterans Affairs](#)

**Additional Info:** [VA Caregiver Support Home](#)

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## MEDICAL: Caregiver Support Program – PCAFC

**Type of Benefit:** Family Member Benefits – Program of **Comprehensive Assistance** for Family Caregivers (PCAFC)

VA recognizes the critical role family caregivers have in supporting Veterans who are seriously injured. To address this need VA created the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC). The PCAFC offers eligible caregivers monthly stipend and other support benefits.

**Eligibility:** Must meet ALL 7 criteria below:

1. Veteran or qualified Member of Armed Forces, **and**
2. The individual has a serious injury (including serious illness), incurred or aggravated in the line of duty in the active military, naval or air service:
  - On or after September 11, 2001; or
  - On or before May 7, 1975; or
  - Effective October 1, 2022, after May 7, 1975 and before September 1, 2001,
  - **NOTE:** Serious injury is defined as a single or combined service-connected (SC) disability rating of 70% or more
3. The individual is in need of in-person personal care services for a minimum of six (6) continuous months based on any one of the following:
  - An inability to perform an activity of daily living ; or
  - A need for supervision, protection or instruction
4. It is in the best interest of the individual to participate in the program.
5. Personal care services that would be provided by the Family Caregiver will not be simultaneously and regularly provided by or through another individual or entity.
6. The individual receives care at home or will do so if VA designates a Family Caregiver.
7. The individual receives ongoing care from a Primary Care Team or will do so if VA designates a Family Caregiver.

**Managed By:** VHA (Caregiver Support Program at local VA facility)

**Application Procedure:** Submit VA Form 10-10CG (Application for the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers).

**VIST Tips:**

- Many eligible blinded veterans will feel that their blindness qualifies them for this program. Which may not be the case depending on their overall independence and need.
- The blindness can be NSC as long as veteran meets the 70% SC criteria.

**More Information:** [VA Family Caregiver Assistance Program | Veterans Affairs](#)

**Additional Info:** [VA Caregiver Support Home](#)

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## MEDICAL: Catastrophically Disabled (CD) Veteran

**Type of Benefit:** Medical – Priority Group 4 Assignment; No copays

VA recognizes that certain medical conditions, such as legal blindness, impacts the ability to carry out the activities of daily living to such a degree that the individual requires personal or mechanical assistance to leave home or bed or requires constant supervision to avoid physical harm to self or others. The Catastrophically Disabled Veteran designation is used to identify these cases.

**Benefit:** Catastrophically Disabled Veteran designation waives co-pays for VA outpatient appointments, inpatient admissions and VA authorized medications. It also places the Veteran in Priority Group-4, if not eligible for a higher Priority Group placement.

**Eligibility:** There are many physical, medical and mental conditions that may qualify as Catastrophically Disabled, including:

- Quadriplegia and quadriparesis
- Paraplegia
- Legal blindness defined as visual impairment of 20/200 or less visual acuity in the better seeing eye with corrective lenses, or a visual field restriction of 20 degrees or less in the better seeing eye with corrective lenses.
- Persistent vegetative state.
- 16 different conditions resulting in amputation or detachment of a limb
- Deficiencies of physical or mental function based on the Katz scale, FIM or GAF.

**Managed By:** VHA (Chief of Staff/Health Administration Service)

**Application Procedure:** Submit VA Form 10-0383 (Catastrophically Disabled Veteran Evaluation).

**VIST Tips:**

- Use VIST Roster to identify any Legally Blind cases that should be designated as Catastrophically Disabled (CD) due to assignment to Priority Groups 5-8.
- Veterans assigned to Priority Groups 2 and 3 that are Legally Blind should also submit a CD request form as they may be subject to medication co-pays.
- Beneficiary Travel allows for Veterans designated as CD to use the higher A&A pension income levels when calculating eligibility for Beneficiary Travel benefits.

**More Information:** <https://www.va.gov/find-forms/about-form-10-0383/>

**Additional Info:** [https://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/assets/documents/publications/IB-10-435\\_Catastrophically\\_Disabled\\_Veterans.pdf](https://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/assets/documents/publications/IB-10-435_Catastrophically_Disabled_Veterans.pdf)

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## MEDICAL: Community Care Referral

**Type of Benefit:** Health care – Using non-VA Providers

VA provides care to Veterans through community providers when VA cannot provide the care needed. Community care is based on specific eligibility requirements, availability of VA care and the needs and circumstances of individual Veterans.

**Benefit:** VA provides health care for Veterans from providers in the local community outside of VA. The care is provided on behalf of and paid for by VA. Types of care include:

- General Community Care
- Urgent Care
- Emergency Medical Care
- Foreign Medical Care
- Home, Health and Hospice Care

**Eligibility:** Veterans must meet one (1) of the following criteria:

1. Veteran needs a service not available at a VA medical facility.
2. Veteran lives in a U.S. state or territory without a full-service VA medical facility.
3. Veteran qualifies under the “Grandfather” provision related to distance eligibility for VCPO.
4. VA cannot provide care within certain designated access standards.
5. It is in the Veteran’s best medical interest.
6. A VA Service Line does not meet certain quality standards.

**Managed By:** VHA (Community Care Program at local VA facility)

**Application Procedure:** Contact VA Primary Care Team or Community Care staff.

**VIST Tips:**

- Community Care can include certain blind rehabilitation and low vision services.
- VIST Veterans residing out of country should be directed to the Foreign Medical Care program.

**More Information:** <https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/programs/veterans/index.asp>

**Additional Info:**

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## MEDICAL: Community Care – Urgent Care

**Type of Benefit:** Healthcare – Using non-VA Providers for Urgent Care

VA offers urgent care services to eligible Veterans at VA medical facilities OR at in-network urgent care clinics closer to a veteran's home. Urgent care can be used to treat minor injuries and illnesses that are not life threatening, such as colds, sore throat, sprained muscles, skin and ear infections.

**Benefit:** The urgent care benefit covers services provided by urgent care centers and walk-in retail health clinics. Types of care include:

- Treatment of colds, minor injuries, skin and ear infections, pink eye, sore throat, etc. and other non-life-threatening conditions.
- Diagnostic services like X-rays, some lab testing and some medications (with limitations).
- Therapeutic vaccines when these are required for the treatment of certain covered conditions.
- No limit to number of times a veteran can use urgent care.
- Urgent care copayments may apply depending on eligibility (see separate section on copays).
- **NOTE:** Veterans enrolled in VA health care can receive a flu shot at more than 60,000 site of care, including in-network retail care and pharmacies and urgent care locations.

**Eligibility:** Veterans must meet both criteria:

- Be enrolled in the VA health care system AND
- Have received care through VA from either a VA or community provider within the past 24 months.

**Managed By:** VHA (Community Care Program at local VA facility)

**Application Procedure:** Be eligible and go to an in-network urgent care provider.

**VIST Tips:**

- Veterans and family members need to educate themselves about location of VA in-network urgent care locations near their home.

**More Information:** [Urgent Care - Community Care \(va.gov\)](https://www.va.gov/urgent-care-community-care/)

**Additional Info:**

- Use the VA facility locator and search for in-network Urgent Care providers
- [Urgent Care Assistance Cards](#)

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## MEDICAL: Co-Payments for VA Healthcare

**Type of Benefit:** Health care – Co-Payments

The VA is required to charge a co-payment to certain veterans for different types of medical care provided. These co-payments are for inpatient care, urgent care, outpatient care, medications, and geriatrics and extended care. The co-payments do not apply to all veterans and include many exemptions. In addition, the rates vary depending on the type of care provided. Please refer to next section for the current Co-Payment for VA Healthcare Rates.

### Priority Group 1

- ◆ Inpatient Co-payment: No
- ◆ Urgent Care Co-payment: No – for first 3 visits in each year\*
- ◆ Outpatient Co-payment: No
- ◆ Medication Co-payment: No
- ◆ Extended Care Services Co-payment: No

### Priority Groups 2 & 3

- ◆ Inpatient Co-payment: No
- ◆ Urgent Care Co-payment: No – for first 3 visits in each year\*
- ◆ Outpatient Co-payment: No
- ◆ Medication Co-payment: Yes (if less than 50% SC and medication is for NSC Condition or income is within certain limits, then exempt)
- ◆ Extended Care Services Co-payment: No

### Priority Group 4\*\*

- ◆ Inpatient Co-payment: No
- ◆ Urgent Care Co-payment: No – for first 3 visits in each year\*
- ◆ Outpatient Co-payment: No
- ◆ Medication Co-payment: No\*\*
- ◆ Extended Care Services Co-payment: Yes

\*Will be subject to copay for urgent care for each additional urgent care visit in the same year.

\*\* **Note:** Veterans determined by the VA to be Catastrophically Disabled are placed in Priority Group 4. These veterans are no longer subject to the medical and medication/pharmacy co-payments. However, they may be subject to co-pay for Extended Care Services, depending on income.

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**Priority Group 5**

- ◆ Inpatient Co-payment: No
- ◆ Urgent Care Co-payment: No – for first 3 visits in each year\*
- ◆ Outpatient Co-payment: No
- ◆ Medication Co-payment: Yes
- ◆ Extended Care Services Co-payment: Yes

**Priority Group 6 (Veterans Receiving Care for Exposure or Experience)**

- ◆ Inpatient Co-payment: No \*\*
- ◆ Urgent Care Co-payment: No and Yes
- ◆ Outpatient Co-payment: No \*\*
- ◆ Medication Co-payment: No \*\*
- ◆ Extended Care Services Co-payment: Yes \*\*

*\*\* All applicable co-payments will be assessed to veterans when the care is for conditions not related to their exposure or experience.*

**Priority Group 7\***

- ◆ Inpatient Co-payment: Yes
- ◆ Urgent Care Co-payment: Yes
- ◆ Outpatient Co-payment: Yes
- ◆ Medication Co-payment: Yes
- ◆ Extended Care Services Co-payment: Yes

**Note:** Priority 7 veterans are charged 20% of the inpatient co-payment that a Priority 8 veteran will be charged. This includes admission to a BRC program. This is a lower co-payment that Priority Group 8 is subject to.

**Priority Group 8\***

- ◆ Inpatient Co-payment: Yes
- ◆ Urgent Care Co-payment: Yes
- ◆ Outpatient Co-payment: Yes
- ◆ Medication Co-payment: Yes
- ◆ Extended Care Services Co-payment: Yes

**Note:** Veterans determined by the VA to be Catastrophically Disabled are placed in Priority Group 4. These veterans are no longer subject to the medical and medication/pharmacy co-payments.

**Managed By:** VHA (Health Administration Service and Fiscal/Business Office Service)

**Application Procedure:** Co-pays are applied automatically based on Priority Group assignment.

**VIST Tips:**

- Legally blind veterans should not be subject to co-pays except for Geriatrics and Extended Care services when applicable.

- **Reminder:** It is important to periodically review VIST Roster cases that are assigned to Priority Groups 5, 6, 7 and 8 to determine if they can be re-assigned to a higher eligibility group.
- **Medication Co-Payment Cap:** The VA has established a medication co-payment cap for veterans enrolled in priority groups 2-6. Medications will continue to be dispensed when the co-payment cap is met. This cap was not established for Priority Group 7 and 8.
- **VA Outpatient Clinics with No Co-payments:** VHA Directive 2011-022 (April 19, 2011) identifies various outpatient clinic stop codes that should have no co-payment charges. In BRS the list includes the following clinic stop codes:
  - **209** VIST Coordinator
  - **220** VISOR and Advanced Blind Rehab
  - **221** Telephone/VIST
  - **229** Telephone/Blind Rehab Program
  - **437** VICTORS & Advanced Low Vision
  - **438** Intermediate Low Vision Care
  - **439** Low Vision Care

**More Information:** <http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/cost/copays.asp>

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## MEDICAL: Co-Payments Rates for VA Healthcare

Type of Benefit: Health care – Co-Payment Rates

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**NOTICE:** Due to passage of the American Rescue Plan in March 2021, copayments for medical care and prescriptions provided by VHA during the period of **April 6, 2020 through September 30, 2021** will be CANCELLED. All copayments paid to VA for medical care and prescriptions during the period of April 6, 2020 will be refunded.

Source: [COVID-19 Medical Debt Relief - Community Care \(va.gov\)](#)

#####

Enrolled Veterans will be assessed copayments for care or services (including urgent care) based on their eligibility and/or income on file in the VA healthcare system. Many veterans will have no copayments for care, while certain others may have copays for certain types of care provided by or authorized by VA.

The same copayment requirements apply to care or services provided through the Veterans Community Care Program.

**2021 Copayment Rates:** See next pages for table outlining current copay rates.

**Eligibility:** See previous section for details on when copayments apply.

**Managed By:** VHA (Health Administration Service and Fiscal Service)

**Application Procedure:** Assignment of Co-pays is based on registration for VA healthcare.

**VIST Tips:**

- VIST should ensure that every blind and visually impaired veteran served by VIST is rated properly and assigned to the appropriate Healthcare Priority Group.
- VIST should assist legally blind veterans that are currently subject to copays for care with applying for Catastrophic Disability (CD) designation. This will waive most applicable co-pays.

**More Information:** [Your Health Care Costs | Veterans Affairs \(va.gov\)](#)

**Additional Info:**

- [2021 VA Health Care Copay Rates | Veterans Affairs](#)
- [Copayments for VA Maternity Benefit](#)

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**CO-PAYMENT RATES FOR VA HEALTHCARE**

TYPE OF CARE & VA PRIORITY GROUP	NOTES	COPAY
<b>MATERNITY CARE</b>	See link for VA Maternity Benefit on previous page	
<b>URGENT CARE</b>	In-Network Community Urgent Care Provider	
<b>VA Priority Group 1-5</b>		
First 3 visits	Per calendar year	<b>\$0</b>
Fourth and greater visits	Per calendar year	<b>\$30/visit</b>
<b>VA Priority Group 6</b>	Per calendar year	
First 3 visits	If related to a condition covered by special authority. Per calendar year	<b>\$0</b>
Fourth and greater visits	If related to a condition covered by special authority. Per calendar year	<b>\$30/visit</b>
Per visit	If NOT related to a condition covered by a special authority	<b>\$30/visit</b>
<b>Priority Group 7-8</b>		
Per visit		<b>\$30/visit</b>
<b>Priority Group 1-8</b>		
Annual Flu Shot	Visit is for FLU SHOT ONLY	<b>\$0</b>
<b>OUTPATIENT CARE</b>	There are 2 outpatient copay rates, basic care rate and specialty care rate	
Basic Care Services	Services provided by a primary care clinician	<b>\$15/Visit</b>
Specialty Care Services	Services provided by a clinical specialist such as a surgeon, radiologist, audiologist, optometrist, cardiologist, and specialty tests such as magnetic resonance imagery (MRI), computerized axial tomography (CAT) scan, and nuclear medicine studies	<b>\$50/Visit</b>
<b>INPATIENT CARE</b>	There are 2 inpatient copay rates, the full rate and the reduced rate	
<b>Priority Group 7 Reduced Rate</b>	Priority Group 7 and certain other Veterans are responsible for paying 20% of VA's inpatient copay rate	
First 90 Days	Inpatient Copay for the first 90 days of care during a 365-day period	<b>\$296.<sup>80</sup></b>
Additional 90 Days	Inpatient Copay for each additional 90 days of care during a 365-day period	<b>\$148.<sup>40</sup></b>
Daily Charge	For each day of admission	<b>\$2/day</b>
<b>Priority Group 8 Full Rate</b>	Priority Group 8 and certain other Veterans are responsible for VA's full inpatient copay rate	
First 90 Days	Inpatient Copay for the first 90 days of care during a 365-day period	<b>\$1,484</b>
Additional 90 Days	Inpatient Copay for each additional 90 days of care during a 365-day period	<b>\$742</b>
Daily Charge	For each day of admission	<b>\$10/day</b>

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CO-PAYMENT RATES FOR VA HEALTHCARE		
TYPE OF VA CARE	NOTES	COPAY
<b>GERIATRICS AND EXTENDED CARE</b>	Long term care copays are based on 3 levels of care  Copayments for Long Term Care services start on the 22 <sup>nd</sup> day of care during any 12-month period – there is no copayment requirement for the first 21 days.	
Inpatient Care	Community Living (Nursing Home), Respite, Geriatric Evaluation	<b>\$97/day</b>
Outpatient Senior Care	Adult Day Health Care, Respite, Geriatric Evaluation	<b>\$15/day</b>
Domiciliary Care for Homeless	Admitted to a VA Domiciliary program	<b>\$5/day</b>
<b>MEDICATIONS</b>	Veterans in Priority Group 1 do <u>NOT</u> pay for medications  Veterans in Priority Groups 2-8 are required to pay for each 30-day or less supply of medication for treatment of NSC conditions (unless otherwise exempt).	
<b>Tier 1</b> (preferred Generics)	1-30 day supply	\$5
	31-60 day supply	\$10
	61-90 day supply	\$15
<b>Tier 2</b> (Non-Preferred Generics and some OTCs)	1-30 day supply	\$8
	31-60 day supply	\$16
	61-90 day supply	\$24
<b>Tier 3</b> (Brand Name)	1-30 day supply	\$11
	31-60 day supply	\$22
	61-90 day supply	\$33
Medication Copayment Cap	Veterans in Priority Groups 2 through 8 are limited to this annual medication copayment amount	<b>\$700</b>
<b>Blind Rehabilitation Services Outpatient Copays</b>	Source: VHA Directive 1731 (see note below) NOTE: All legally blind Veterans should be identified as Catastrophically Disabled and therefore not subject to any co-pays below.	
VIST Coordinator	Stop Code 209 (Non-Billable)	\$0
BROS	Stop Code 217 (Outpatient Basic Care Rate)	\$15
Blind Rehabilitation Center	Stop Code 218 (Outpatient Basic Care Rate)	\$15
VISOR and Advanced Blind Rehabilitation	Stop Code 220 (Non-Billable – with Override flag)	\$0
Telephone-VIST	Stop Code 221 (Non-Billable – with Override flag)	\$0
Telephone-Blind Rehab Program	Stop Code 229 (Non-Billable – with Override flag)	\$0
VICTORS & Advanced Low Vision	Stop Code 437 (Non-Billable – with Override flag)	\$0
Intermediate Low Vision Care	Stop Code 438 (Non-Billable)	\$0
Low Vision Care	Stop Code 439 (Non-Billable – with Override flag)	\$0
Current List and References for DSS Stop Codes	VA Intranet site (not available to the public): <a href="#">VHA Office of Community Care - Outpatient Copayments</a>	

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## MEDICAL: Diabetes Education and Supplies

**Type of Benefit:** Medical – Management of Diabetes

Diabetic retinopathy is a leading cause of blindness among blind and visually impaired Veterans. Recent studies indicate that 25% of Veterans enrolled in VHA have diabetes. To address this medical condition, VA is committed to optimizing diabetes management and takes a dedicated healthcare team approach to empower, equip, and encourage Veterans to take charge of their health and to adopt healthy living practices.

**Benefits:** While the overall approach VA takes can vary from one VAMC to another the general benefits offered are quite similar and include:

- Diabetes, nutrition education and training
- Diabetic management supplies, including glucometers, testing strips, insulin, lancets, and syringes
- Diabetic socks (for patients at high risk for foot ulcers)
- Footcare and adaptive orthotics or shoes when clinically indicated
- Adaptive supplies such as talking glucometers, test strips, special lancets, and medication management solutions (i.e. ScripTalk, adaptive pill boxes, etc.)

**Eligibility:** Any Veteran enrolled with VHA that meets the medical criteria for diabetes management. Veterans need to work with their Primary Care Team to determine if diabetic education/training services are indicated.

**Managed By:** VHA (Chief of Staff; Primary Care)

**VIST Tips:**

- VIST should identify the key staff members at your VAMC who are responsible for diabetes education and training and verify that the needs of blind and visually impaired diabetics are being met.
- Blind and visually impaired veterans should be encouraged to participate in the MOVE! program (see separate section below).
- BRC programs have dedicated medical, nursing and ancillary staff that can provide comprehensive diabetes management training for blind and visually impaired Veterans served by their program. Augusta BRC has implemented a TeleHealth based Self Care Diabetes Education and Training program to address this critical need.

**More Information:** [VA Nutrition and Food Services: Diabetes Information](#)

**Additional Info:**

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## MEDICAL: Emergency Medical Care – SC

**Type of Benefit:** Medical – Service-Connected (SC) Emergency Care at Community Facilities

During a medical emergency, Veterans should immediately seek care at the nearest medical facility to their location. VA considers a medical emergency to be an injury, illness or symptom so severe that without immediate treatment, the veteran or caregiver believes life or health is in danger. Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away. VA can pay for medical emergency care at community emergency departments (ED). The coverage is different for SC-Emergency Care and is described below.

**Benefit:** VA can pay for medical emergency care at a community emergency department for a service-connected (SC) condition, or if the care is related to a Veteran's SC condition.

- Payment Rate for SC Condition is generally 100% Medicare rates.
- Emergency medical care for a Veteran's SC or related condition is eligible for VA payment as long as the VA wasn't reasonably available to provide the care.
- VA can pay for emergency medical care outside the U.S. if the emergency is related to a Veteran's SC condition. See separate section on Foreign Medical Program in this Volume.
- **Ambulance Transportation:** VA may cover ambulance transportation if certain conditions are met. Please see link on next page in Additional Information section.

### Eligibility for SC-Emergency Care:

1. A veteran who receives emergency treatment of an SC or adjunct condition in a community emergency department, OR
2. A veteran who is Permanently and Totally disabled (P&T) as the result of an SC condition is eligible for emergency treatment of ANY condition, OR
3. A veteran who is participating in a VA Vocational Rehabilitation Program, and who requires emergency treatment to expedite their return to the program, is eligible for emergency treatment for any condition; **AND** (scenarios 1-3 **MUST** all meet #4)
4. The emergency was of such a nature that the Veteran (or other prudent layperson without medical training) would reasonably believe that any delay in seeking immediate medical attention would cause their life or health to be placed in jeopardy.

**Managed By:** VHA (Chief of Staff; Community Care)

**Filing A Claim:** Claims for emergency medical care should be submitted to VA as soon as possible after care has been provided. Claims are usually submitted by providers to VA, but Veterans or their personal representatives may file a claim for reimbursement of emergency treatment costs that they have incurred and paid to the provider.

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- The claim should be submitted to the closest VA medical facility to where the emergent treatment was provided.
- **Filing Deadline:** Claims for SC Emergency Care must be submitted to VA within two (2) years of the date emergency medical care was received.

**After Emergency Care:** Once a Veteran's immediate emergency medical care needs have been addressed, the Veteran, a family member, friend or hospital staff member should contact the nearest VA medical facility within 72 hours. Once notified, VA staff will assist the Veteran or representative(s) in understanding eligibility and how eligibility relates to services rendered in the community. VA staff will also ensure that, if desired, the Veteran is transferred to a VA medical center upon stabilization and that the veteran is set up to receive additional care, post discharge, without interruption.

**VIST Tips:**

- Veterans should discuss emergency department options that they might need in the future with their Primary Care Team.

**More Information:** [Emergency Medical Care - Community Care \(va.gov\)](#)

**Additional Info:**

- [VA Community Emergency Care Fact Sheet](#)
- [Emergency Medical Care—Information for Providers - Community Care \(va.gov\)](#)
- [VA OCC Ambulance Transportation Fact Sheet](#)
- VA Emergency Care Centralized Notification Center: **(844) 724-7842**

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## MEDICAL: Emergency Medical Care – NSC

**Type of Benefit:** Medical – Non-Service-Connected (NSC) Emergency Care at Community Facilities

During a medical emergency, Veterans should immediately seek care at the nearest medical facility to their location. VA considers a medical emergency to be an injury, illness or symptom so severe that without immediate treatment, the veteran or caregiver believes life or health is in danger. Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away. VA can pay for medical emergency care at community emergency departments (ED) for a Veteran's nonservice-connected (NSC) condition. The coverage is different for NSC-Emergency Care and is described below.

**Benefit:** VA can pay for medical emergency care at a community emergency department for a nonservice-connected (NSC) condition however there are several requirements and factors that affect the extent to which VA can cover those services.

- Payment rate is generally, 70% Medicare rates
- **Ambulance Transportation:** VA may cover ambulance transportation if certain conditions are met. Please see link on next page in Additional Information section.

### Eligibility for NSC-Emergency Care:

1. Care was provided in a hospital emergency department (or similar public facility held to provide emergency treatment to the public); **AND**
2. The emergency was of such a nature that the Veteran (or other prudent layperson without medical training) would reasonably believe that any delay in seeking immediate medical attention would cause their life or health to be placed in jeopardy; **AND**
3. A VA medical facility or another Federal facility was not reasonably available to provide the care; **AND**
4. The veteran is enrolled and has received care within a VA facility during the 24 months before the emergency care; **AND**
5. The veteran is financially liable to the provider of emergency treatment.

**Managed By:** VHA (Chief of Staff; Community Care)

**Filing A Claim:** Claims for emergency medical care should be submitted to VA as soon as possible after care has been provided. Claims are usually submitted by providers to VA, but Veterans or their personal representatives may file a claim for reimbursement of emergency treatment costs that they have incurred and paid to the provider.

- The claim should be submitted to the closest VA medical facility to where the emergent treatment was provided.

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- **Filing Deadline:** Claims for NSC Emergency Care must be submitted to VA within 90 days of the date of discharge, or 90 days from the date that all attempts to receive required payments from a liable third party are completed and not successful in eliminating the veteran's personal liability to the provider. A liable third party includes other health insurers, worker's compensation, civil litigation, etc.

**After Emergency Care:** Once a Veteran's immediate emergency medical care needs have been addressed, the Veteran, a family member, friend or hospital staff member should contact the nearest VA medical facility within 72 hours. Once notified, VA staff will assist the Veteran or representative(s) in understanding eligibility and how eligibility relates to services rendered in the community. VA staff will also ensure that, if desired, the Veteran is transferred to a VA medical center upon stabilization and that the veteran is set up to receive additional care, post discharge, without interruption.

**VIST Tips:**

- Veterans should discuss emergency department options that they might need in the future with their Primary Care Team.

**More Information:** [Emergency Medical Care - Community Care \(va.gov\)](#)

**Additional Info:**

- [VA Community Emergency Care Fact Sheet](#)
- [VA OCC Ambulance Transportation Fact Sheet](#)
- VA Emergency Care Centralized Notification Center: **(844) 724-7842**

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## MEDICAL: Foreign Medical Program (FMP)

**Type of Benefit:** Medical – Medical Services at Foreign Locations

VA offers, through the Foreign Medical Program (FMP), certain medical services to eligible Veterans living or traveling abroad.

**Benefit:** VA will pay for health care services, medications, and durable medical equipment for veterans covered by the Foreign Medical Program (FMP). FMP benefits are limited to services that are medically necessary to treat a VA-rated, service-connected disability.

**Eligibility:** VA may authorize foreign medical services for Veterans only for a VA-rated, service-connected (SC) disability, or any disability that is associated with and held to be aggravating a VA-rated SC disability.

**Managed By:** VHA (Chief of Staff; Community Care – Foreign Medical Program)

**Filing A Claim:** Veteran can be reimbursed for any eligible medical services paid for by veteran or the foreign medical provider, if willing, may submit a bill and medical documentation to the FMP for payment.

**VIST Tips:**

- There are a number of blind and visually impaired veterans who reside in foreign countries. Some of these veterans may live along the border of Canada or Mexico and can easily cross the border to receive VA care in the United States. Others may reside overseas and only travel back to the U.S. periodically or never. This is important because Prosthetics will not mail/ship equipment overseas. To get around this many veterans residing outside the U.S. either maintain a U.S. mailing address or use the address of a family member living in the U.S.
- VIST veterans who reside overseas and do not use VA healthcare in the U.S. should be inactivated from the VIST Roster. If they return to the U.S. and re-establish VA healthcare, they can be re-activated.

**More Information:** [Foreign Medical Program \(FMP\) - Community Care \(va.gov\)](#)

**Additional Info:**

- [Foreign Medical Program \(FMP\) \(va.gov\)](#)
- [FMP Guide \(va.gov\)](#)
- [2018 VA Manila Benefits Fact Sheet](#)
- FMP Assistance: (303) 331-7590

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## MEDICAL: Home Based Primary Care (HBPC)

**Type of Benefit:** Medical – Primary Care Team Travels to Veteran

VA provides a comprehensive program of Primary Care at VA facilities across the country, including the option of health care services provided to Veterans in their home (called Home Based Primary Care – HBPC). Blind and visually impaired veterans are ideal candidates for the HBPC program due to transportation issues they often face in traveling to the VA for appointments.

**Benefit:** The Primary Care Team members travel to the Veteran's home to provide care.

**Eligibility:** since HBPC is part of the VHA Standard Medical Benefits Package, all enrolled Veterans are eligible IF they meet the clinical need for the service and it is available.

**Managed By:** VHA (Chief of Staff; Geriatrics and Extended Care)

**Application Procedure:** Veterans/Caregivers should ask their Primary Care Provider at the local VA for referral to the HBPC program.

**VIST Tips:**

- The HBPC program has proven over the years to be an ideal fit for many blind and visually impaired veterans. The HBPC staff generally know and understand the needs of the patients they serve far better than the general Primary Care Team members based at VAMC and CBOC facilities.
- VIST/BROS should coordinate closely with HBPC Teams as often HBPC patients may have need of low vision and/or blind rehab services.
- VIST should have the capability to consult directly to HBPC when a VIST patient indicates an interest in establishing assignment to an HBPC provider.

**More Information:** [Home Based Primary Care \(va.gov\)](https://www.va.gov)

**Additional Info:** [Geriatrics and Extended Care Home \(va.gov\)](https://www.va.gov)

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## MEDICAL: Homemaker Home Health Aide Care

**Type of Benefit:** Medical – Homemaker or Home Health Aide Assistance

A Homemaker or Home Health Aide is a trained person who can come to a Veteran's home and help the Veteran take care of themselves and their daily activities. They are not nurses but are supervised by a registered nurse.

This program can be used as an alternative to nursing home care, and to get Respite Care at home for Veterans and their family caregiver.

**Benefit:** VA contracts for Homemaker and Home Health Aide Care through a community agency. Services through this program include help with:

- Eating
- Getting dressed
- Personal grooming
- Bathing
- Using the bathroom
- Moving from one place to another
- Grocery shopping
- Amount of assistance can vary from several times per week or just once in a while.
- **NOTE:** Veterans can continue to receive an aide's services for as long as needed to help with daily activities

**Eligibility:** All enrolled Veterans are eligible for Homemaker Home Health Aide Care IF they are eligible for community care and meet the clinical criteria for the service AND it is available. Services may vary from one VA location to another.

**Managed By:** VHA (Chief of Staff; Geriatrics and Extended Care)

**Application Procedure:** Veterans/Caregivers should ask their Primary Care Provider at the local VA for referral to Homemaker Home Health Aide Care program.

**VIST Tips:**

- Veterans or family members should work with their Primary Care Team to learn about available services and to arrange for an assessment.

**More Information:** [VA Homemaker Home Health Aide Care](#)

**Additional Info:** [Geriatrics and Extended Care Home \(va.gov\)](#)

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## MEDICAL: Mental Health Services

**Type of Benefit:** Medical – Mental Health Services

VA provides a comprehensive range of mental health services to veterans in need and employs thousands of mental health professionals (psychiatry, psychology, social work, nursing and peer support) across VHA to address that need. Services range from:

- Emergency mental health & Veterans Crisis Line
- Short-term, inpatient care for Veterans with severe or life threatening mental illnesses
- Outpatient care with group and individual treatment
- Rehabilitation treatment and residential (live-in) programs
- Primary care specialized for mental and behavioral problems
- Supported work settings

The importance of VA Mental Health Services for blind and visually impaired veterans cannot be overstated. Severe vision loss is a recognized catastrophic disability that not only impacts overall independence and daily living, but also impacts emotional health and psychological well-being.

**Benefits:** VA provides comprehensive Mental Health Services throughout VHA. Services are designed to promote Veteran-centered, coordinated care to support recovery through an interdisciplinary team of providers. Mental Health Services include:

- **Emergency** mental health care 24 hours a day, 7 days a week through VAMCs. VAMCs that do not have a 24-hour emergency room must provide these services through a local, non-VA hospital in the community.
- **Veterans Crisis Line 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1** (available 24/7)
- **National Call Center for Homeless Veterans: 1-877-424-3838** (available 24/7)
- **Quit VET** (Quitting Tobacco): **1-855-QUIT-VET (784-8838)** (9-9, ET, M-F)
- **Outpatient Mental Health Services** delivered in group or individual settings.
- **Inpatient Mental Health Treatment Programs** aimed at treating Veterans at risk of harming themselves or others, or who require hospitalization to stabilize their condition. Outpatient follow-up is provided upon discharge.
- **Mental Health Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Programs (MH RRTP) – Domiciliary Program** provide intensive specialty treatment for mental health and substance abuse disorders as well as for co-occurring medical needs, homelessness, and unemployment.

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- **Substance Use Disorder** (SUD) Treatment.
- **PTSD** (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) Treatment.
- **Vet Centers** are community-based counseling centers, within VHA's Readjustment Counseling Service (RCS), that provide a wide range of social and psychological services.
- **Integrated Geriatric Mental Health Services**
- **Suicide Prevention**
- **Military Sexual Trauma Treatment**
- **Women's Mental Health**
- **Telehealth Therapy**
- **NOTE:** Each VA Blind Rehabilitation Center (BRC) program in BRS employs a psychologist and social worker to assist veterans served by the BRC program to address any mental health issues or concerns during the blind rehabilitation program.

**Eligibility:** Any veteran needing access to mental health services can complete an initial evaluation.

**Managed By:** VHA (Chief of Staff; Mental Health Service)

**Application Procedure:** Request a mental health consultation through VA Primary Care or directly with Mental Health Service.

**VIST Tips:**

- VIST should annually screen each blind and visually impaired veteran to determine if there is a need for a VA mental health referral. Some veterans may already be closely followed by a mental healthcare provider, while others may not be. As life circumstances change a veteran may have a need to speak with a mental health provider. Further loss of vision, changes in overall health, changes in family dynamics or loss of a partner or caregiver can all potentially impact health and well-being.
- VIST should work with mental health care providers to verify that a veteran seeking referral for admission to a BRC is stabilized in terms of any ongoing mental health treatment.
- VIST should become familiar with a condition known as *Charles Bonnet Syndrome* (see link below) as symptoms of this condition can periodically appear in a small number of VIST cases.

**More Information:** <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/>

**Additional Info:**

- [VA Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Guidebook](#)
- Vet Center Call Center: **1-877-WAR-VETS** (927-8387)
- [AAO: Charles Bonnet Syndrome](#)

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## MEDICAL: MOVE! Weight Management Program

**Type of Benefit:** Medical – Weight management program.

MOVE! Is VA's national weight management, health promotion program developed to improve the lives of Veterans by the National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention (NCP).

**Benefit:** The MOVE! Program is a highly successful program for motivating and educating Veterans about losing weight. MOVE! offers the following care options:

- **Group sessions:** Time limited, clinician-led groups meet regularly and follow a structured format for weight loss.
- **Telephone Lifecycle Coaching:** For Veterans who prefer or need one-to-one contact via telephone with a designated weight management coach.
- **TeleMOVE!** Frequent reminders to stay on track with weight management goals using in-home messaging technologies.
- **[MOVE! Coach](#)** is a mobile app for Veterans who prefer to manage their weight on their own. Available for iOS and Android devices.
- **Weight Loss Medications and Bariatric Surgery:** May be offered to Veterans who have tried MOVE! but continue to struggle with overweight or weight-related issues.
- **NOTE:** Treatment options vary by VA facility.

**Eligibility:** MOVE! is available to all Veterans at each VAMC and many CBOC facilities.

**Managed By:** VHA (Chief of Staff; MOVE! Coordinator)

**Application Procedure:** Veterans/Caregivers should notify VA Primary Care team of interest in the MOVE! Program and then complete the [MOVE!11 Getting Started Questionnaire](#).

### VIST Tips:

- Blind and visually impaired veterans participating your local VAMC MOVE! Program may need adaptive devices or adaptive printed materials in order for them to fully participate in this valuable program. This may include adaptive pedometers and talking scales as well as possible home exercise equipment from Prosthetics. BRS training programs may be able to assist with assessment and training of these adaptive devices through face-to-face or telehealth encounters.

**More Information:** [MOVE! Weight Management Program](#)

### Additional Info:

- [MOVE! FAQ](#)
- [MOVE! Veteran Workbook](#)

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## MEDICAL: My HealtheVet (MHV)

**Type of Benefit:** Medical – Online access through internet for Veterans to manage their health care.

VA established a tool through the internet called My HealtheVet so that Veterans can manage their health-related needs. This includes refilling and tracking prescription medicines, tracking and reminders for future appointments, secure communications with VA providers and access to personal VA medical records.

**Benefits:** Quick and easy access to important personal medical information and the ability to electronically communicate with VA providers 24/7.

- **Pharmacy:** Refills, track delivery, view list of medications
- **Appointments:** Track, schedule/cancel future appointments
- **Communication with VA Providers:** Safe and Secure web-based messaging service
- **Health Record Access:** Patients can view, print or download a copy of their VA medical record information.

**Eligibility:** My HealtheVet is available to all Veterans.

**Managed By:** VHA (Chief of Staff; My HealtheVet Coordinator)

**Application Procedure:** Veterans/Caregivers can sign up online at <https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/user-registration/> or they can request assistance from staff at the local VA facility. There are 3 account types within MHV: Basic, Advanced and Premium.

### VIST Tips:

- Many blind and visually impaired Veterans have been issued computer and/or smart phone technology through VA that can easily be connected to a My HealtheVet account. VIST should encourage these Veterans to sign up for and use the My HealtheVet tool.
- If a veteran is not a candidate for accessing the internet, they can still have their family member or caregiver assist. The advantage of using the internet is that the family member/caregiver does not have to live with or near the Veteran.
- BRS instructional staff at BRCs, VISORs and Low Vision Clinics can assist with training on how to maximize My HealtheVet through computer and assistive technology.

**More Information:** [About MHV - My HealtheVet \(va.gov\)](#)

**Additional Info:** [Home - My HealtheVet \(va.gov\)](#) and [My HealtheVet Account Types - My HealtheVet \(va.gov\)](#)

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## MEDICAL: ScripTalk

**Type of Benefit:** Medical – Audible Prescription Reading Device (APRD)

ScripTalk is a system, developed and sold by En-Vision America, Inc., that is used by VA Pharmacy Service to enable blind, visually impaired or print impaired Veterans to listen to an audible reading of the VA medication label and additional medication information.

The pharmacy places an electronic tag or label on the medication bottle or medication package. The ScripTalk label/tag relies on RFID and text-to-speech technology. To read the label the user can use a free APP for their smart phone, or a device issued by Prosthetics called a ScripTalk Station.

**Benefit:** Enables Veterans unable to read medications labels the ability to read information on the medication label and related medication information provided by Pharmacy Service.

**Eligibility:** ScripTalk is available to any Veteran who is unable to read the printed medication label AND can demonstrate an ability to use and benefit from ScripTalk.

**Managed By:** VHA (Chief of Staff; Pharmacy Service)

**Application Procedure:** Medical Providers or Veterans can request ScripTalk. The specific procedures may vary from one VA facility to another but will usually involve VIST concurrence or coordination.

**VIST Tips:**

- Veterans should complete an updated Low Vision Clinic evaluation first to determine if a low vision device or reading Rx will meet the need.
- Ability to use ScripTalk does not mean the Veteran should be self-medicating or managing their medications. ScripTalk candidates should complete a thorough assessment to determine if ScripTalk will be beneficial or other strategies are needed.
- Veteran's residing in nursing homes or assisted living facilities should not be issued a ScripTalk system as their facility provides medication management.

**More Information:** [ScripTalk Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\) \(va.gov\)](#)

**Additional Info:** [ScripTalk Talking Labels | En-Vision America](#)

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## MEDICAL: Secure Messaging (SM)

**Type of Benefit:** Medical – Secure, web-based message service

Secure Messaging is a secure, web-based message service that allows Veterans to communicate non-urgent, non-emergency health-related information with their VA health care team and other VA staff.

**Benefit:** Web and mobile-based service with encrypted ability to electronically communicate with VA providers 24/7. With Secure Messaging veterans and caregivers can:

- Ask non-urgent, non-emergency health-related questions
- Provide updates on a condition
- Request VA referrals, test results, and prescription renewals.
- Manage VA health appointments.
- Receive health education information from the Veterans Health Library.

**Eligibility:** Secure Messaging is available to all Veterans with a My HealtheVet Premium Account.

**Managed By:** VHA (Chief of Staff; My HealtheVet Coordinator)

**Application Procedure:** Veterans/Caregivers can sign up online at <https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/user-registration/> or they can request assistance from staff at the local VA facility.

### VIST Tips:

- Many blind and visually impaired Veterans have been issued computer and/or smart phone technology through VA that can easily be used to send a secure message to VIST. VIST should encourage Veterans to sign up for and use Secure Messaging to improve communication with VA providers, including VIST/BROS.
- VIST should coordinate with local My HealtheVet Coordinator to establish a VIST group within Secure Messaging which will enable VIST to send secure group messages, including attachments to VIST patients. This is called a Personal Distribution Group.
- BRS instructional staff at BRCs, VISORs and Low Vision Clinics can assist with training on how to maximize Secure Messaging through computer and assistive technology.

**More Information:** [Secure Messaging General Frequently Asked Questions - My HealtheVet \(va.gov\)](#)

**Additional Info:** [About MHV - My HealtheVet \(va.gov\)](#)

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## MEDICAL: TeleHealth/VA Video Connect (VVC)

**Type of Benefit:** Medical – Using technology to provide mobility and enhanced access to care at VA facilities.

VA's innovative telehealth technologies provide mobility and enhanced access to care. Telehealth connects Veterans with VA care teams and specialists, without regard to distance. There are 3 types of VA TeleHealth: Home, Clinic and Hospital.

**Benefit:** VA TeleHealth Services reduces travel and brings care closer to the Veteran through:

- Real-time, interactive video visits
  - VA Video Connect (VVC) allows Veterans and caregivers to easily meet with VA healthcare providers through live video on any computer, tablet, or mobile device with an internet connection.
  - VA will provide a VVC tablet for those without personal devices or internet
- In-home and mobile health remote monitoring (i.e. blood pressure, mental health, etc.)
- Devices that gather and store health data

**Eligibility:** TeleHealth is available to all Veterans.

**Managed By:** VHA (Chief of Staff; TeleHealth Coordinator)

**Application Procedure:** Veterans/Caregivers can get started with VA TeleHealth by applying online, by phone, or by mail at: [Help Center | Telehealth VA](#)

### VIST Tips:

- VIST should assist in getting all interested blind and visually impaired veterans set-up and trained to use TeleHealth. Healthcare in the future will be relying more and more on TeleHealth services and tools, therefore establishing TeleHealth capability in the visually impaired population is a priority for BRS programs.
- Even if a Veteran is unable to independently use TeleHealth services, family members and caregivers that have the capability can be set-up to assist the veteran utilize VVC or TeleHealth services.
- BRS instructional staff at BRCs, VISORs and Low Vision Clinics can assist with training on how to access and maximize TeleHealth and particularly VA Video Connect (VVC) through computer and assistive technology. In addition, BRS programs now offer comprehensive training via VVC technology.

**More Information:** [Telehealth VA |](#)

**Additional Info:** [At Home | Telehealth VA](#)

- [Connected Care Academy](#) (for VA staff only)

**Troubleshoot Technical Problems with VVC:** (866) 651-3180

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## MEDICAL: VA Healthcare Enrollment Priority Groups

**Type of Benefit:** Medical – Eligibility for VA Healthcare.

Eight priority groups have been established to help ensure that VA resources are allocated to veterans with the highest priority for VA care. Priority Group 1 is the highest priority and Priority Group 8 is the lowest. Priority level funding may change from year to year, depending on congressional funding. If VA cannot renew a veteran's enrollment for the following year, the veteran will be notified 60 days before their current enrollment period expires. At time of enrollment for VA healthcare the veteran's eligibility will be reviewed and based on the findings will be assigned to one of the following VA Healthcare Priority Groups:

### Priority Group 1

- ◆ Veterans with service-connected (SC) conditions who are rated 50% or more disabling
- ◆ Veterans determined by VA to be unemployable due to service-connected conditions
- ◆ Veterans that have received the Medal of Honor (MOH)

### Priority Group 2

Veterans with VA rated service-connected (SC) conditions who are rated 30% or 40% disabling

### Priority Group 3

- ◆ Veterans who are Former Prisoners of War (POWs)
- ◆ Veterans who have received the Purple Heart medal
- ◆ Veterans with service-connected (SC) disabilities rated 10% or 20% disabling
- ◆ Veterans discharged from active duty for a disability that was incurred or aggravated in the line of duty
- ◆ Veterans awarded special eligibility classification under Title 38, U.S.C., Section 1151, "benefits for individuals disabled by treatment or vocational rehabilitation"

### Priority Group 4

- ◆ Veterans who are receiving aid and attendance or housebound benefits from VA
- ◆ Veterans who have been determined by VA to be catastrophically disabled

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**Priority Group 5**

- ◆ Nonservice-connected (NSC) Veterans and non-compensable service-connected (SC) veterans rated 0% disabled by VA with annual income below the VA's and geographically (based on resident zip code) adjusted income limits
- ◆ Veterans receiving VA pension benefits (basic rate only)
- ◆ Veterans eligible for Medicaid programs

**Priority Group 6**

- ◆ Compensable 0% percent service-connected (SC) veterans
- ◆ Veterans exposed to Ionizing Radiation during atmospheric testing or during the occupation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki
- ◆ Project 112/SHAD participants
- ◆ Veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam between January 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975
- ◆ Veterans of the Persian Gulf War who served between August 2, 1990 and November 11, 1998
- ◆ Veterans who served on active duty at Camp Lejeune for at least 30 days between August 1, 1953 and December 31, 1987
- ◆ Currently enrolled Veterans and new enrollees who serve in a theater of combat operations after November 11, 1998 and those who were discharged from active duty on or after January 28, 2003, are eligible for the enhanced benefits, for 5 years post discharge.

**Priority Group 7**

Veterans with gross household income below the geographically-adjusted income limits (GMT) for their resident location and who agree to pay copays

**Priority Group 8**

Veterans with gross household income above the VA and the geographically-adjusted income limits for their resident location and who agrees to pay copays

**Veteran's ELIGIBLE for enrollment****Non-compensable 0% service-connected:**

- ◆ **Subpriority a:** Enrolled as of January 16, 2003 and who have remained enrolled since that date and/or placed in this sub priority due to changed eligibility status
- ◆ **Subpriority b:** Enrolled on or after June 15, 2009 whose income exceeds the current VA or geographic income limits by 10% or less

**Nonservice-Connected and:**

- ◆ **Subpriority c:** Enrolled as of January 16, 2003 and who have remained enrolled since that date and/or placed in this sub priority due to changed eligibility status
- ◆ **Subpriority d:** Enrolled on or after June 15, 2009, whose income exceeds the current VA or geographic income limits by 10% or less

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**Veteran's NOT eligible for enrollment**

Veterans not meeting the criteria above:

- ◆ **Subpriority e:** Non-compensable 0% service-connected (eligible for care of their SC condition only)
- ◆ **Subpriority g:** Nonservice-connected

**NOTE-1** Veterans assigned to Priority Groups 8e or 8g are not eligible for enrollment as a result of the enrollment restriction which suspended enrolling new high-income veterans who apply for care after January 16, 2003.

**NOTE-2** VHA Directive 2000-001 dated January 4, 2000 found that ALL legally blinded veterans will automatically be placed in priority category 4 or higher, if their VA rating qualifies for a higher Priority Group assignment.

**Managed By:** VHA (Health Administration Service)

**Application Procedure:** Priority group assignment is automatic at enrollment with VHA.

**VIST Tips:**

- Verify that all legally blind veterans are identified as Catastrophically Disabled (CD) or assigned to Priority Group-1.

**More Information:** [VA Priority Groups](#)

**Additional Info:**

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## MEDICAL: VEText

**Type of Benefit:** Medical – Appointment Reminders

To increase access to health care for all Veterans, VHA has developed VEText, an interactive mobile solution to remind Veterans of upcoming appointments via text messaging. This is a quick and easy way to confirm and/or cancel appointments.

**BENEFIT:** VEText has the following features:

- First text message reminder will be sent seven (7) days before the appointment.
- Second text message reminder will be sent two (2) days before the appointment.
- Veterans can confirm or cancel the appointment based on prompts in the reminder message.
- Offers a feature called Open Slot Management (OSM) that enables earlier appointment slots for Veterans meeting certain criteria (wait time, service-connected, etc.). Review the FAQs below for additional details on the OSM feature.
- Includes an Opt-Out feature to stop reminders.
- Veterans still will receive appointment letters, postcards, or automated phone call reminders. VEText is just an additional appointment reminder.

**Eligibility:** Every enrolled Veteran with a cell phone number listed in their health record is automatically enrolled in the VEText program.

**Managed By:** VHA (Health Administration Service)

**Application Procedure:** None. Enrollment is automatic if a cell number is provided. Veteran's can Opt-Out of receiving text reminders.

**VIST Tips:**

- VIST should help veterans understand the importance of including their cell phone number, if available, up-to-date in the electronic patient record.
- BRS training programs can assist blind and visually impaired veterans learn to .

**More Information:** [VA.gov: VEText](https://www.va.gov/vetext)

**Additional Information:** [VEText FAQs](#)

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## PENSION: No Reduction While Hospitalized for Rehabilitation

**Type of Benefit:** Disability Pension – Extension of time period before reduction

VA Pension benefits are subject to reduction when a veteran with no dependents is hospitalized in a VA facility or at VA expense. However, when the hospitalization is for providing a prescribed program of rehabilitation then a reduction will not be made.

**SOURCE:** 38 CFR 3.551(h)

**BENEFIT:** VA pension benefits are **not** reduced during periods of hospitalization to participate in a prescribed rehabilitation program.

**Eligibility:** Veterans in receipt of VA NSC Pension benefits that are hospitalized must meet the following criteria:

- The primary purpose for furnishing hospital or nursing home care is to provide the veteran with a prescribed program of rehabilitation under Chapter 17 of title 38, United States Code, **and**
- Veteran is admitted to a VA hospital or nursing home after October 16, 1981.

**Managed By:** VBA (local VA Regional Office)

**Application Procedure:** None. VHA contacts VBA regarding hospitalization status.

### VIST Tips:

- Admission to a Blind Rehabilitation Center (BRC) program would qualify as a prescribed program of rehabilitation.
- The regulation is written in a manner that essentially gives a time period extension of 3 months while participating in a rehabilitation program. But the regulation also extends the time period beyond 3 months if the continued hospitalization or nursing home care is for a prescribed program of rehabilitation. It is possible that VBA may request clarification from a BRC to indicate that additional admission time was needed.

**More Information:** <https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/38/3.551>

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## PROSTHETICS & SENSORY AIDS SERVICE (PSAS)

**Type of Benefit:** Medical – Prosthetic, Sensory Aids and Rehabilitative Items.

VA is the largest and most comprehensive provider of prosthetic devices and sensory aids in the United States. A “prosthetic device” includes artificial limbs and any devices that support or replace a body part or function, including artificial eyes. Prosthetics & Sensory Aids Service (PSAS) provides a full range of equipment and services to eligible veterans. VA also provides repairs and if needed replacement of these devices.

**Benefits:** VA PSAS provides a wide range of comprehensive services and items including, but not limited to:

- [Adaptive recreational equipment](#)
- Adaptive household items
- [Aids for the blindness and visual impairment](#)
- Cognitive devices
- Communication and assistive devices
- Durable medical equipment
- [Home exercise equipment](#)
- [Home medical equipment](#) (see separate section in Volume 1)
- Home respiratory equipment
- Implants
- Mobility aids, such as walkers and wheelchairs
- Prosthetic limbs
- Orthotic and prosthetic custom-fabricated and fitted devices (e.g. shoe inserts, braces, artificial limbs)
- Sensory Aids including hearing aids and eyeglasses
- Prosthetic Benefit Programs, including:
  - [Clothing Allowance](#)
  - [HISA](#) (Home Improvement Structural Alterations)
  - [Automobile Adaptive Equipment](#)
  - [Vehicle modifications](#) (for NSC veterans)
  - [Service Dog Veterinary Health Insurance](#)
- Prosthetic item repairs and replacement when necessary
- No co-pays for any Prosthetics devices issued to veterans
- **NOTE:** VA published new regulations to improve delivery of prosthetic and sensory aids in January 2021. The new regulation established nationwide categories of prosthetic and orthotic services, sensory aids and medical devices VA is authorized to provide Veterans as part of their active treatment and ongoing rehabilitation. The regulation update establishes uniform categories and definitions of prosthetic and rehabilitation items and services.

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**Eligibility:** Enrolled for VA care and have a medical need for a prosthetic service/item. Additional eligibility criteria may apply for certain programs.

**Managed By:** VHA (Prosthetics & Sensory Aids Service)

**Source:**

- 38 CFR 17.3200 through 17.3250
- VHA Handbooks 1173.1 through 1173.17

**Application Procedure:** Consult to Prosthetics & Sensory Aids Service for requested item(s) or service by an authorized VA medical provider. For example, an Eye Doctor would need to request eyeglasses.

**VIST Tips:**

- Local Prosthetics & Sensory Aids management should be a key member of the local VIS Team and work closely with BRS programs and staff to meet the Prosthetics needs of blind and visually impaired veterans served by VA.
- Equipment for blind veterans and service and guide dog benefits have separate authorities in the U.S. code and federal regulation. See separate sections in Volume 1 for more detailed discussion.
- Artificial eyes are also handled by PSAS. A VA Eye Care Provider should evaluate the need for an artificial eye and then consult Prosthetics for initial issuance or replacement.
- Equipment is the property of the veteran once the veteran takes possession of the item. The exception to this is when an item is specifically loaned to a veteran.
- VA will generally provide only one (1) item, not duplicates, although spare items may be authorized if certain criteria is met.
- While Prosthetics will provide Adaptive Household items, they will **not** provide household furniture or furnishings, improvements or structural alterations, or household appliances, unless a household appliance is necessary to complete an ADL in the home or other residential setting.
  - A *household appliance* means an item used in the home for performance of domestic chores or other domestic tasks, including but not limited to a refrigerator, stove, washing machine, and vacuum cleaner.
  - *Household furniture or furnishing* means an item commonly used to make a home habitable or otherwise used to ornament a home, including but not limited to tables, chairs, desks, lamps, cabinets, non-hospital beds, and carpet(s).
- Veterans may appeal a local or VISN decision that denies a prosthetic request to VACO-Prosthetics for review.

**More Information:**

- [New Rule/Regulation \(12/28/2020\) for PSAS](#)
- [Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services Home \(va.gov\)](#)

**Additional Info:** [VA Handbooks - Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services](#)

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## PROSTHETICS: Aids and Devices for the Visually Impaired

**Type of Benefit:** Medical – Prosthetic and adaptive devices for the visually impaired.

VA provides a full range of low vision devices and aids for the blind designed to improve independence and safety for blind and visually impaired veterans. VA also provides repairs and if needed replacement of these devices.

**NOTE:** VA Central Office updated the guidance on Aids for the Blind in April 2021 with the publication of **VHA Directive 1174** (see below). This new Directive **rescinded VHA Handbook 1173.5 (Aids for the Blind)** and provided new guidance to VHA programs regarding issuance of Prosthetic equipment to visually impaired veterans.

VHA also **rescinded VHA Handbook 1173.12 (Prescription Optics and Low Vision Devices)** on October 24, 2019 and replaced it with **VHA Directive 1034 (Prescribing and Providing Eyeglasses, Contact Lenses, and Hearing Aids)**.

**Benefits:** In addition to the full range of prosthetic devices available to all Veterans (walkers, wheelchairs, power chairs, hearing aids, hospital beds, etc.) eligible blind and visually impaired Veterans may be issued devices that minimize the disability of blindness:

- Common devices for blind and visually impaired Veterans include the following:
  - Orientation & Mobility (O&M) devices to promote safe and independent travel
  - Low vision aids and eyeglasses
  - ADL devices (communication, organization, kitchen, telling time, personal care, etc.)
  - Adaptive Medical Devices (glucometers, medication organizers, blood pressure monitors, etc.)
  - Computer Systems (desk model, laptops and tablet systems) and Assistive Technology (smart phones and smart home devices)
  - Adaptive recreation and leisure devices
- [Pet Insurance for approved Dog Guides](#) (see separate section for more information)
- Device delivery and home set-up can be arranged and paid for by Prosthetics
- Duplicate devices can be authorized when the device contributes to the Veteran's individualized treatment plan (i.e. it is required for vocational or avocational activities) as determined by the BRS clinician.
- No co-pays for any Prosthetics devices issued to veterans

**Eligibility:** Enrolled for VA care and have an identified need for blind rehabilitation or low vision services.

**Managed By:** VHA (Prosthetics & Sensory Aids Service)

**Source:** 38 U.S.C. 1714(b) and 38 CFR 17.154  
VHA Directive 1174 (Blind and Visual Impairment Rehabilitation Continuum of Care)

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**Application Procedure:** Needs assessment completed by BRS staff with consult to Prosthetics & Sensory Aids Service for requested item(s). Some requests for new or unusual devices may require the submission of VA Form 10-2641 (Authority for Issuance of Special and/or Experimental Appliance) to the VISN Prosthetic Representative and if needed to VA Central Office for further review.

**VIST Tips:**

- Local Prosthetics & Sensory Aids management should be a key member of the local VIS Team and work closely with BRS programs and staff to meet the Prosthetics needs of blind and visually impaired veterans served by VA.
- All BRS programs should maintain a stock of common Prosthetics Aids/Devices for the visually impaired on hand to meet the immediate safety and independence needs of Veterans served by BRS. Devices maintained as stock items are handled by local Logistics and Management Service staff.
- Veteran's have the right to appeal local and VISN level decision to VA Central Office (VACO) for a higher level review.

**More Information:**

[VHA Directive 1174, Blind and Visual Impairment Rehabilitation Continuum of Care](#)

**Additional Info:**

- [Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services Home \(va.gov\)](#)
- VHA Directive 1034: [Prescribing and Providing Eyeglasses, Contact Lenses, and Hearing Aids](#)

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## PROSTHETICS: Dog Guides for the Blind

**Type of Benefit:** Medical – Prosthetic and adaptive devices for the blind.

VA provides to veterans with visual, hearing, or mobility benefits to support the use of a service dog as part of the management of these impairments. VA also provides repairs and if needed replacement of these devices.

**Benefit:** VA provides the following benefits related to service dogs, including Dog Guides for the Blind:

- Assistance with veterinary care (through Pet Insurance – see More Information link below)
- Travel benefits associated with obtaining and training a service dog
- Provision, maintenance, and replacement of hardware required for the service dog to perform the tasks necessary to assist the Veteran

**Eligibility:** Enrolled for VA care and have an identified need for a Service Dog.

- Service dogs must be trained and from an Assistance Dogs International (ADI) or International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF) accredited service dog organization.

**Managed By:** VHA (Prosthetics & Sensory Aids Service)

**Source:** 38 U.S.C. 1714

**Application Procedure:** Needs assessment completed by BRS staff with consult to Prosthetics & Sensory Aids Service for requested item(s). Must include an O&M assessment indicating need for a Dog Guide and a VA-Form 10-2641 (Authority for Issuance of Special and/or Experimental Appliances) to VACO-Prosthetics.

### VIST Tips:

- VA does NOT provide the dog, but instead provides Pet Insurance to cover veterinary costs, related travel benefits and replacement hardware when needed.
- Requests for Guide Dogs (GD) must include VA or VA authorized O&M (COMS) assessment and recommendation for issuance of a Guide Dog.

### More Information:

- [Clinical Practice Recommendations \(CPR\) - Guide Dog/Service Dog](#)
- [SERVICE DOG VETERINARY HEALTH INSURANCE BENEFIT \(VHIB\) RULES \(va.gov\)](#)
- [Service Dog Veterinary Health Benefit - Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services \(va.gov\)](#)
- [Guide and Service Dogs Frequently Asked Questions - Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services \(va.gov\)](#)



2641-Dog  
Guide.pdf

### Additional Info:

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## PROSTHETICS: Home Exercise Equipment

**Type of Benefit:** Medical – Prosthetic and Sensory Aids.

VA Prosthetic & Sensory Aids Service (PSAS) is now authorized to provide Home Exercise Equipment to eligible veterans.

**Definition:** **Home Exercise Equipment** is defined as an item used in a home or residential setting that compensates for a loss of physical, sensory, or cognitive function and that is necessary for the veteran to actively and regularly participate in aerobic, fitness, strength, or flexibility activities to achieve the veteran's rehabilitation goals as documented in the veteran's medical record, when there is no other means for the veteran to exercise to achieve the veteran's rehabilitation goals.

**Benefit:** PSAS is authorized to issue Home Exercise Equipment:

- Where such equipment will only be provided for one location, the veteran's primary residence, unless it is clinically determined that the equipment should be provided at the veteran's non-primary residence instead of the veteran's primary residence.
- Prior to any installation of home exercise equipment, the owner of the residence must agree to the installation.
- Such equipment will only be provided to achieve the veteran's rehabilitation goals as documented in the veteran's medical record.
- No co-pays for any Prosthetics devices issued to veterans

**Eligibility:** Enrolled for VA care and have an identified need for blind rehabilitation or low vision services.

**Managed By:** VHA (Prosthetics & Sensory Aids Service)

**Source:** 38 CFR 17.3230

**Application Procedure:** Needs assessment completed by BRS staff with consult to Prosthetics & Sensory Aids Service for requested item(s).

**VIST Tips:**

- This benefit will be of interest to many blind and visually impaired veterans as it can be quite difficult to properly exercise without sighted assistance and/or transportation to a local gym.
- Veterans will need to work with local rehabilitation staff to verify there is a medical need as well as medical clearance.

**More Information:** [38 CFR 17.3230](#)

**Additional Info:**

- [Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services Home \(va.gov\)](#)
- [Federal Register :: Prosthetic and Rehabilitative Items and Services](#)

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## PROSTHETICS: Home Medical Equipment

**Type of Benefit:** Medical – Prosthetic and Sensory Aids.

VA Prosthetic & Sensory Aids Service (PSAS) is authorized to provide Home Medical Equipment to eligible veterans. What is important to note is what is allowed and not allowed by VA regulation.

**Definitions:**

**Home Medical Equipment** means an item that is a movable and durable medical device that is used in a home or residential setting to treat or support treatment of specific medical conditions. Such equipment includes but is not limited to hospital beds, portable patient lifts, portable ramps, ventilators, home dialysis equipment, and infusion, feeding, or wound therapy pumps. This definition does **not** include household furniture or furnishings, improvements or structural alterations, or household appliances.

**Household Appliance** means an item used in the home for performance of domestic chores or other domestic tasks, including but not limited to a refrigerator, stove, washing machine, and vacuum cleaner.

**Household Furniture or Furnishing** means an item commonly used to make a home habitable or otherwise used to ornament a home, including but not limited to tables, chairs, lamps, cabinets, non-hospitable beds, curtains, and carpet(s).

**Benefit:** PSAS is authorized to issue Home Medical Equipment within the limits of the regulation (*Note the definitions above*).

**Eligibility:** Enrolled for VA care and have an identified need for prosthetics services.

**Managed By:** VHA (Prosthetics & Sensory Aids Service)

**Source:** 38 CFR 17.3210

**Application Procedure:** Needs assessment completed by BRS, rehabilitation or medical staff with consult to Prosthetics & Sensory Aids Service for requested item(s).

**VIST Tips:**

- As technology advances and becomes more accessible to blind and visually impaired it is possible that a household appliance or household furnishing might be approved through the *Aids for the Blind* authorization. A veteran can always appeal a local decision to VACO-Prosthetics and seek a higher level review. An example of this type of situation is a talking microwave.

**More Information:** [Federal Register: Prosthetic and Rehabilitative Items and Services](#)

**Additional Info:**

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## PROSTHETICS: Recreational and Sports Equipment

**Type of Benefit:** Medical – Prosthetic and Sensory Aids.

VA provides to eligible veterans approved recreational and sports equipment that will lead to constructive or productive uses of leisure time and contribute to a veteran's rehabilitation goals.

**Benefit:** VA may provide the following types of recreational and sports equipment:

- **Recreational Leisure Equipment (Non-Motorized/Power)**
  - To compensate for the loss or loss of use of a body part or function in the pursuit of a leisure activity
  - Examples include Braille or large print playing cards, adaptive board games for visually impaired, etc.
- **Recreational Sports Equipment (Motorized/Power)**
  - Restricted to those veterans with limited options for recreation and sports participation without a power device.
- **Recreational Sports Equipment (Non-Motorized/Power)**
  - Sports wheelchairs, sport devices, hand cycles and prosthetic devices

**Eligibility:** Enrolled for VA care and have an identified need for recreational and/or sports equipment.

- Certain equipment may require medical clearance with no contraindications identified.
- Onset of disability occurred at least 6 months before permanent equipment is issued.

**Managed By:** VHA (Prosthetics & Sensory Aids Service)

**Application Procedure:** Needs assessment completed by BRS staff with consult to Prosthetics & Sensory Aids Service for requested item(s). Certain equipment may require submission of VA-Form 10-2641 (Authority for Issuance of Special and/or Experimental Appliances) and Recreation and Sports Equipment Request Supplement to Form 10-2641 to VACO-Prosthetics for approval.

**VIST Tips:**

- Visually impaired veterans have been approved for tandem bicycles. Some BRC programs have established formal tandem bike and adaptive sports programs that provide comprehensive assessment/training on adaptive sports equipment.
- Prosthetics has approved issuance of multiple adaptive games for visually impaired.

**More Information:**

[https://www.prosthetics.va.gov/docs/Recreational\\_and\\_Sports\\_Equipment.pdf](https://www.prosthetics.va.gov/docs/Recreational_and_Sports_Equipment.pdf)

**Additional Info:**

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## SPORTS: VA Adaptive Sports & Therapeutic Arts

**Type of Benefit:** Health care – Adaptive Sports & Therapeutic Arts

VA sponsors several National Veterans Sports programs and Special Events during the year. These programs provide Veterans with opportunities for health and healing through adaptive sports and therapeutic arts. VA also sponsors an Athlete Stipend Program.

**Benefit:** Ability to participate in nationally sponsored Sports and Therapeutic Arts activities and/or receive a monthly allowance through the Athlete Stipend Program.

The current National Veteran events include:

- National Veterans Golden Age Games
- National Disabled Veterans TEE Tournament
- National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic
- National Veterans Creative Arts Competition & Festival
- National Veterans Wheelchair Games
- National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports clinic

**Eligibility:** Check the *More Information* link below for more detailed information on the Adaptive Sporting Events and Special Programs. To receive an Athlete Stipend a Veteran with a disability must be training must be in training for an Olympic and/or Paralympic sport.

**Managed By:** VHA (Office of National Veterans Sports Programs and Special Events)

**Application Procedure:** Contact each event coordinator or contact [sports4vets@va.gov](mailto:sports4vets@va.gov).

**VIST Tips:**

- These programs are great opportunities for blind and visually impaired veterans to participate in.

**More Information:** <https://www.blogs.va.gov/nvspse/>

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## TRANSPORTATION: Beneficiary Travel

**Type of Benefit:** Transportation – VA reimbursement for travel to and from approved health care appointments.

VA offers 2 types of beneficiary travel benefits for eligible Veterans:

- **Reimbursement for general health care travel:** Covers regular transportation, like car, plane, train, bus, taxi or light rail and reimbursement for eligible caregivers.
- **Special mode transportation:** Includes special types of transportation, such as an ambulance, ambulette, or wheelchair van.

**Benefit:**

- **Reimbursement** for travel to closest VA health facility to Veteran's home that can provide the care needed:
  - VA pays **41.5 cents per mile**, after a small deductible, for approved travel.
  - VA will reimburse for travel to non-VA care that has been approved in advance.
    - Emergency care at non-VA facilities does not require prior approval.
  - Expenses can include mileage driven, tolls, parking, taxi and plane fares and may include meals and lodging in some cases.
- **VA coordination/payment of transportation.**
  - For cases involving Special Mode.
  - Blind and visually impaired veterans are eligible for Special Mode (see next section for details) transportation for VA appointments, if they meet the eligibility criteria listed below.

**Eligibility:** Must meet 1 of the following criteria:

- Have a VA disability rating of 30% SC or higher, or
- Are traveling for treatment of an SC condition (even if less than 30% SC), or
- Receive a VA pension, or
- Have an income that's below the maximum annual VA pension rate<sup>+</sup>, or
- Travel is for a scheduled VA claim exam (C&P exam), or
- Travel is for receiving a service dog, or
- Can't afford to pay for travel, as defined by guidelines
- Travel is for VA-approved transplant care
- Travel is for treatment at special disability rehabilitation centers such as clinics providing care for spinal cord injuries, vision loss or blindness, or prosthetics rehabilitation; to qualify one of following criteria must be met:
  - Need in-patient care, or
  - Veteran is receiving temporary lodging approved by VA
- **\*NOTE:** The income allowed for Catastrophic Disability (CD) veterans is higher (A&A Pension rate) than for non-CD veterans (Basic Pension rate). The source for this is found in the BT Calculator used to determine if a veteran qualifies for beneficiary travel.

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**Managed By:** VHA (Beneficiary Travel Office)

**Application Procedure:** File a claim within 30 days of the appointment at Access VA at <https://eauth.va.gov/accessva/#forVeterans> 24/7, 365 days per year or with BT Office.

**VIST Tips:**

- Veterans who use VA Hoptel services to attend a BRS program outpatient appointment will qualify for travel reimbursement.
- Blind and visually impaired veterans who are eligible for Beneficiary Travel are also eligible for Special Mode, even if they don't need a wheelchair van or special vehicle for safe travel. They can be authorized a "hired car" for transportation. Please see separate section on next page for detailed discussion of Special Mode transportation benefits.

**More Information:** [VA Travel Pay Reimbursement | Veterans Affairs](#)

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## TRANSPORTATION: Beneficiary Travel – Special Mode

**Type of Benefit:** Transportation – VA pays for Special Mode Transportation

VA can provide direct transportation to and from VA arranged medical care for eligible veterans traveling for care at a VA health facility or for VA-approved care at a facility in the community.

**Benefit:** VA can coordinate and pay for special types of transportation, like an ambulance, ambulette, or wheelchair van for eligible veterans.

**Eligibility:** Must meet all of the following criteria:

- Veteran is eligible for general health care travel reimbursement (see previous section), **AND**
- A VA health care provider determines that the medical condition requires an ambulance or specially equipped van for travel, **AND**
- VA has approved the travel in advance, unless the travel is for an emergency situation where a delay would threaten the life or health of the Veteran.

**Managed By:** VHA (Beneficiary Travel Office)

**Application Procedure:** VIST and/or Primary Care Provider submit Beneficiary Travel Consult request for Special Mode.

**VIST Tips:**

- Visually impaired veterans who are eligible for Beneficiary Travel can be authorized Special Mode transportation. The clinician must enter the following statement on the Consult: *“Vision impairment or Blind as the diagnosis and cannot safely ambulate, No safe access to other types of transportation.”* **Source:** E-mail from Veterans Transportation Program (10NF4) to field facilities dated 10/18/2018 (see next page).
- Unless a wheelchair accessible van or ambulance is indicated eligible blind and visually impaired veterans may be transported on common carrier (taxi, van, or uber/lyft).

**More Information:** [VA Travel Pay Reimbursement | Veterans Affairs](#)

**Additional Info:** See next page for VACO authorization for blind and visually impaired to use Special Mode Transportation.

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**VHA Veterans Transportation Program Announcement**

**TOPIC: Beneficiary Travel: Special Mode Transportation for Veterans with Visual Impairments**

**SOURCE:** Outlook E-mail from Veteran Transportation Program (10NF4) to field facilities

**DATE:** October 18, 2018

**VHA Veterans Transportation Program Announcement  
Beneficiary Travel**

**Special Mode Transportation for Veterans with Visual Impairments**

The following provides guidance regarding the use of special mode transport for BT eligible Veterans with visual impairments.

The Blind Veterans of America expressed concerns that BT eligible Veterans were being denied special mode transport because they can ambulate. This has placed a barrier to accessing needed care. The program office agrees that there may be circumstances when regardless of the Veterans ability to ambulate it may be unsafe for them to do so to access other forms of transportation. Especially in areas where a bus station may be a significant distance from the Veterans residence and require the ability to be able to safely navigate over uneven terrain or through areas of congestion. Additionally, taxi's and hired cars may not be available to the Veteran in rural areas.

The program office for BT has never provided specific medical criteria for determining who could or could not use Special Mode (SM) transportation. This has always been a medical decision requiring that clinical reason including the diagnosis and physical or mental limitation be documented by a qualified clinician within the Veteran's medical record for the event or series of events that the use of SM is needed. Although common examples for medical criteria have been provided to assist in consideration of ordering SM transport, we have always stated ultimately it is a clinical and not an administrative decision. In fact, medical criteria for SM can broadly be defined as the clinical reason why a claimant can only be safely transported using SM. Safety is the number one concern. If an authorized clinician orders SM transport for a vision impaired veteran who is BT eligible entering "Vision Impairment or Blind as the diagnosis and cannot safely ambulate" with further explanation of "No safe access to other types of transportation," medical justification has been satisfied and transport should be provided by VTS if available or SM at VA expense for the period specified to all VA or authorized non-VA appointments.

POC: VHA Veteran Transportation Program group at,  
[VHABeneficiaryTravelQuestions@va.gov](mailto:VHABeneficiaryTravelQuestions@va.gov)

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## TRANSPORTATION: DAV Transportation

**Type of Benefit:** Transportation – Free Transportation to VA appointments

The Disabled American Veterans (DAV) service organization operates a fleet of vehicles around the country that provides free transportation to VA facilities for injured and ill veterans. Vans are driven by volunteer drivers.

**Benefit:** Alternative options for veterans needing assistance with transportation.

**Eligibility:** Must meet all of the following criteria:

- Eligible for VA health care benefits, **AND**
- Have a VA-authorized appointment

**Managed By:** DAV (DAV Transportation Coordinators)

**Application Procedure:** Veteran/caregiver contacts the local DAV Transportation Coordinator.

**VIST Tips:**

- Does not operate in all areas or VA facilities and may have day/time limits.

**More Information:** [The DAV provides FREE Rides for Veterans - Disabled American Veterans](#)

**Additional Info:** <https://www.dav.org/wp-content/uploads/HSCDirectory.pdf>

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**TRANSPORTATION: Veterans Transportation Service (VTS)**

**Type of Benefit:** Transportation – VA staffed vehicles

The Veterans Transportation Service (VTS) is an established network of transportation options for Veterans through joint effort between VA, Veterans Service Organizations, community transportation providers; federal, state, and local government transportation agencies; non-profits and Veterans Transportation Community Living Initiative (VTCLI) grantees.

**Benefit:** Alternative options for veterans needing assistance with transportation.

**Eligibility:** Must meet all of the following criteria:

- Eligible for VA health care benefits, **AND**
- Have a VA-authorized appointment

**Managed By:** VHA (Beneficiary Travel Office)

**Application Procedure:** Veteran/caregiver contacts the local VA healthcare facility transportation service staff to request pickup.

**VIST Tips:**

- Visually impaired veterans that are eligible for Special Mode transportation may be placed on a VTS vehicle, if available and appropriate.
- VTS is not available at all VA facilities.

**More Information:** [Veterans Transportation Service \(VTS\) - Health Benefits \(va.gov\)](#)

**Additional Info:** [Resources - Health Benefits \(va.gov\)](#)

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## VOCATIONAL REHAB: Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E)

**Type of Benefit:** Employment Assistance – Vocational Rehab

VA offers a comprehensive Vocational Rehab program that offers career and employment assistance to eligible Veterans.

**Benefit:** Various programs designed to assist Veterans and eligible Service-Members learn new skills, find a new job, start a business, obtain education counseling, or return to a former job.

**Eligibility:** Must meet all of the following criteria:

- Other than dishonorable discharge, **AND**
- Have a service-connected disability rating of at least 10% SC from VA, **AND**
- Apply for VR&E services

**NOTE:** Active Duty Service Members may also be eligible for VR&E benefits prior to separation from active duty service. See More Information below for details.

**Basic Period of Eligibility:** Ends 12 years from the date Veteran received notice of:

- Separation from active military service, **or**
- First VA service-connected disability rating

**NOTE:** The basic period of eligibility may be extended if a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) finds that a veteran has a serious employment handicap (SEH). VA defines serious employment handicap when the SC disability limits the ability to prepare for, obtain, and maintain suitable employment.

**Managed By:** VBA (Veteran Readiness & Employment – VR&E)

**Application Procedure:** Veteran/caregiver applies through eBenefits and selects Education and Career Counseling.

**VIST Tips:**

- Blindness and severe vision loss would be considered a serious employment handicap (SEH).
- Disabled veterans may be eligible for state vocational rehabilitation benefits. Please see Volume-3 (Non-VA Benefits and Services) for additional resources.

**More Information:** [Veteran Readiness and Employment \(VR&E\) | Veterans Affairs \(va.gov\)](#)

**Additional Info:**

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