



IOWA COUNTY VETERANS NEWSLETTER

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VETERANS CHOICE QUESTIONS

Due to changes during the life of the program and recent legislative actions, Veteran's Choice continues to be a source of confusion for many veterans. I have compiled ten common questions and answers below regarding the choice program.

1. Am I eligible for the Veterans Choice Program?

To be eligible for the program, you must be enrolled in VA healthcare and must also meet at least one of the following eligibility criteria.

- You are told by your local VA medical facility that you have to wait more than 30 days for an appointment.
- Your residence is more than a 40-mile drive to the closest VA medical facility with a full time primary care physician.
- You need to travel by air, boat or ferry to you the VA medical facility closest to your home.
- You face an unusual or excessive burden in traveling to the closest VA medical facility based on a geographic challenge, environmental factor, medical condition or other clinical decision. You reside in a State or Territory without a full-service VA medical facility.

2. What if I think I am eligible?

Call the Veterans Choice Program call center at (866)606-8198 or visit the VCP website.

3. Can I call my non-VA doctor to make an appointment?

No, you should call the VCP call center at (866)606-8198 to verify eligibility and to set up an appointment.

4. How is the 40 mile calculation determined?

The distance calculation is based on driving distance from your permanent residence (or active temporary address) to the closest VA facility, including outpatient clinics and VA Medical Centers.

5. Can I receive Beneficiary Travel pay for appointments with a VCP provider?

Yes, the Choice Act does provide funding to pay for travel to VCP provider appointment for those veterans who are eligible for travel pay, the choice program does not provide any new travel pay eligibility.

6. I didn't receive, or I lost my Choice Card, what do I do?

The Choice Card is not needed for VCP access, the card just provides the VCP call center number, which is listed in a couple locations above.

7. How do I get prescriptions filled if a I use the Veterans Choice Program?

The community-based provider can issue a prescription for up to a 14-day supply of a national formulary medication. This prescription may be filled at any non-VA pharmacy. The cost of the prescription can be reimbursed at the Business Office/Non-VA Care Coordination Office at VA facilities. The reimbursement may take 30-45 days to process, and requires a copy of the prescription and the original receipt. Reimbursement is not available at the VA Pharmacy.

8. If I use Veterans Choice, does that affect my VA healthcare?

No, it does not. Veterans Choice is your choice to use or not. The program is designed to provide veterans with more options to access the care they need.

9. What is my responsibility for co-payments to the provider or other insurance?

Nothing. VA is now the primary coordinator of benefits for VCP, so you are only responsible for your VA copayment. That copayment, if any, will be determined and billed by the VA after the care is provided.

10. How does the new VCP extension law effect me?

Public Law 115-26, enacted April 19, 2017, made three key changes to improve the VCP. The law removed the expiration date for the program, made the VA the primary coordinator of benefits and if removed barriers with sharing necessary health information with community providers.

DONATION OF ABANDONED VEHICLES

Under a state law (Wisconsin Statutes Ch. 45.095) enacted in 2015, non-profit organizations that provide financial or other assistance to veterans and their families can claim abandoned vehicles from impound lots or receive donated vehicles as a fundraising mechanism. Donated/ claimed cars are inspected for quality and to determine if they are road worthy. If they are road worthy, a cooperating salvage yard can sell the vehicle, and a percentage of the money goes back to the Veterans Service Organization. If not “road worthy” the Veterans Service Organization can sell the vehicle for scrap

value. Fifty percent of the monies received through this program are to be utilized to assist active duty service members, veterans or the families of veterans. New Richmond VFW Post 10818 has been doing this and was able to donate \$26,000 to St. Croix County veterans and their families. The New Richmond VFW has also assisted in purchasing “road worthy” vehicles for veterans in need of a car so they can drive to work or medical appointments.

VIETNAM LIVER FLUKE WORM LINK

Veteran advocates are demanding that a form a cancer of the bile duct associated with this parasitic worm be included among diseases presumed by the Department of Veterans affairs to be connected to service in Vietnam. Liver flukes are found mainly in parts of Southeast Asia, China and South Korea, where residents and tourists alike risk infection from certain types of freshwater fish such as tilapia and carp sometimes in sour fish dish called pla som. In the US, cholangiocarcinoma is exceptionally rare with about 5000 diagnosed cases each year. In one location in Laos, researchers found liver flukes, which can survive pickling and fermentation, in about 60 percent of the villagers, and in some parts of Vietnam up to 40 percent were infected. According to Jeff Bethony, a liver fluke expert at George Washington University, “If American doctors better understood cholangiocarcinoma and the potential risks to those who served in Vietnam, they could use ultrasound to check for inflammation, and then surgery might be possible for some of them. Early is key, the VA should be testing for this.”

PROPOSED CHANGES TO VA FUNERAL BENEFITS

U.S. Senators Gary Peters (D-MI) and Marco Rubio (R-FL), announced they are introducing legislation to improve burial services for veterans by increasing funeral benefits for eligible veterans. The **Burial Rights for America’s Veterans Efforts (BRAVE)** Act would update the current funeral and burial benefit system to ensure that all non-service connected deaths are treated equally, regardless of where the veteran passes away. Currently veterans with no next of kin that pass away in a VA facility are afforded greater funds to cover funeral and burial costs than veterans that pass away in a private home or other facility. The American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Vietnam Veterans of America and

National Funeral Directors Association have all spoken out in support of this proposed legislation. The BRAVE Act will increase the \$300 for non-service connected deaths to \$749 to equal the benefit received if a veteran passes away in a VA facility. The legislation additionally indexes for inflation both the non-service and service-related passing funeral benefits. According to the National Funeral Directors Association, national median cost of a funeral in 2015 was \$7,181, which does not include a vault, which is typically required in most cemeteries. Over the past decade the median cost of an adult funeral has increased 28.6 percent, the VA benefit available has not kept pace with inflation. In 1973, the benefit for a veteran with no next of kin and a non-service connected death would have been 22 percent of the national average; the benefit represents 2 percent of today's national average.

The ADRC is looking for drivers for the Driver Escort Program. You can receive reimbursement for your mileage transporting veterans, elderly and disabled people to medical appointments. Contact the ADRC at (608)930-9835 for more information.

VETERANS CAN REGISTER NOW FOR CHANCE AT EARLY ACCESS TO ONLINE MILITARY EXCHANGE SHOPPING

All honorably discharged veterans interested in shopping online at the military exchanges can begin their verification process immediately at VetVerify.org. Some veterans that register early may be chosen as beta testers, allowing them to shop prior to the program's full launch. This new benefit, allowing honorably discharged veterans to shop at online military exchanges is set to begin on November 11, 2017. The benefit only applies to online shopping, it does not allow in person shopping at brick and mortar exchange locations.

GULF WAR ILLNESS - COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY FOR INSOMNIA

If you have Gulf War Illness symptoms, and have trouble falling to sleep or staying asleep, you may be eligible for a non-medication insomnia treatment study for improving sleep and managing Gulf War Illness symptoms.

The study involves a clinical screening interview to determine eligibility, self-report questionnaires, 8 weekly CBTi sessions by phone, keeping track of your sleep/wake routine and habits in a sleep diary. Clinical research suggests that sleep quality affects pain, fatigue, mood, cognition, and daily functioning. The study is hoping to determine if helping veterans with GWI sleep better will also alleviate other GWI symptoms. Contact Nina Alpert at (415)221-4810 extension 24602 or email at nina.alpert@va.gov for more information.

2017 HEALTH and WELLNESS EXPO

On September 29, 2017, the Aging and Disability Resource Center of Iowa County and Upland Hills Health are sponsoring the 6th annual Health and Wellness Expo. The event runs from 9:00 a.m. until 12:00 p.m. at Hidden Valley Church in Dodgeville, WI. There will be numerous informational displays, a secure prescription medication drop-off, and the event is free to attend. Attendees can receive free health screenings and a chance at some door prizes as well.

DODGEVILLE CHRONICLE REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

The Dodgeville Chronicle is looking for veterans that would like to share their stories for a special segment that will run in the paper near Veteran's Day. They are specifically looking for those who have wartime service of any era. If you are interested in being interviewed, please contact the Dodgeville Chronicle at (608)935-2331, or e-mail them at news@thedodgevillechronicle.com.

EAGLE AND FRIENDS AT THE WISCONSIN VETERANS MUSEUM

This program features our national symbol, the bald eagle, with a discussion about the importance of the bald eagle and its relationship to veterans of the United States Armed Forces and Wisconsin. In addition to meeting the bald eagles, Glory (adult male) and Valkyrie (young female), a falcon and owl will be present as well. The 60-minute program begins at 2:30 p.m. on September 16, 2017 followed by a 30 minute meet and greet with the birds. Contact Erin Hoag at (608)264-7663 with any questions.

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**Veterans
Newsletter**

IMPORTANT DATES

September 4th – Labor Day
November 5th – Daylight Saving Time ends
November 23rd – Thanksgiving Day

September 22nd – Autumn Begins
November 11th – Veterans Day

VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE CLOSINGS IN 2015

Labor Day
Veterans Officer Training Conference
Thanksgiving Holiday
Christmas Holiday

Monday, September 4th
September 18-22, 2017
Thursday/Friday, November 23rd & 24th
Friday/Monday, December 22nd & 25th