

VETERAN AID &  
ATTENDANCE AND  
HOUSEBOUND  
BENEFITS



Scott's Auto Body

*Proudly Supports Tucson Area Veterans*



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Veterans and survivors who are eligible for a VA Pension and require the aid and attendance of another person, or are housebound, may be eligible for a higher maximum pension rate. These benefits are paid to the Veteran or family in addition to monthly pension, and they are not paid without eligibility to pension. Since aid and attendance and housebound allowances increase the pension amount, people who are not eligible for a basic pension due to excessive income may be eligible for pension at these increased rates. A Veteran or surviving spouse may not receive aid and attendance benefits and housebound benefits at the same time. A Veteran who is determined by VA to be in need of the regular aid and attendance of another person, or a Veteran who is permanently housebound, may be entitled to additional disability compensation or pension payments. A Veteran evaluated at 30 percent or more disabled is entitled to receive an additional payment for a spouse who is in need of the aid and attendance of another person.

# I. Overview and Rate Chart (2017)

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Veterans and surviving spouses who are eligible for VA pensions are eligible for higher maximum pension rates if they qualify for aid and attendance or housebound benefits. An eligible individual may qualify if he or she requires the regular aid of another person in order to perform personal functions required in everyday living, or is bedridden, a patient in a nursing home due to mental or physical incapacity, blind, or permanently and substantially confined to his/her immediate premises because of a disability.

Veterans and surviving spouses who are ineligible for basic pension based on excessive annual income may still be eligible for special monthly pension (SMP) if they require the aid and attendance of another in performing their daily functions, or if they are housebound due to a nonservice-connected condition as a higher income limit applies to SMP entitlement. In addition, unreimbursed medical expenses for nursing home or home-health care may be used to reduce countable annual income.

Claimants may apply for aid and attendance or housebound benefits by completing **VA Form 21-2680** (available through [www.va.gov/vaforms/](http://www.va.gov/vaforms/)). Claimants may also write to the nearest VA regional office and include copies of any evidence, preferably a report from an attending physician or a nursing home, validating the need for aid and attendance or housebound care. The report should be in sufficient detail to determine whether there is disease or injury producing physical or mental impairment, loss of coordination, or conditions affecting the ability to dress and undress, to feed oneself, to attend to sanitary needs, and to keep oneself ordinarily clean and presentable. In addition, VA may need to determine whether the claimant is confined to the home or immediate premises.

VA also pays a special \$90 monthly rate to pension-eligible Veterans or surviving spouses with no dependents who receive Medicaid-covered nursing home care. These funds are available for the beneficiary's personal use and may not be used to offset the cost of his or her care.

**Business Provider Note:** In some instances, the VA requires that the individual applying for the supplemental benefit be already receiving the services. To some, this can be seen as an obstacle. However, to a clever business person this can be an opportunity to not only to begin providing the necessary service on credit or at a reduced rate, while simultaneously offering the Veteran or his Family assistance in navigating the application process. This top-rate service generally results in satisfied lifelong customers and future referrals.

## 2017 VA Improved Pension - Veterans Rates

VETERAN	MONTHLY BENEFIT
Aid & Attendance (no dependents)	\$1,794
Aid & Attendance (one dependent)	\$2,127
SURVIVING SPOUSE	MONTHLY BENEFIT
Aid & Attendance (no dependents)	\$1,153
VETERAN MARRIED TO VETERAN	MONTHLY BENEFIT
Aid & Attendance (no dependents)	\$2,846

## II. Pensions

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### a) Aid & Attendance and Housebound

Veterans and survivors **who are eligible for a VA pension<sup>1</sup>** and require the **aid and attendance** of another person, or are **housebound**, may be eligible for additional monetary payment. These benefits are paid in **addition** to monthly pension, and they are not paid without eligibility to Pension.

Since Aid and Attendance and Housebound allowances increase the pension amount, people who are not eligible for a basic pension due to excessive income may be eligible for pension at these increased rates. A Veteran or surviving spouse may not receive Aid and Attendance benefits and Housebound benefits at the same time.

The Veterans Administration's Aid & Attendance Program offers assistance to eligible veterans and their spouses, or surviving spouses. The Aid and Attendance Pension can provide up to \$1,153 per month to a surviving spouse, or \$2,127 per month to a couple. A veteran filing for a sick spouse is eligible for up to \$1,406 per month. This benefit is paid directly to you, on a monthly basis, tax free for the rest of your life! For a couple (married veteran and spouse), the benefit is \$2,846. The program has financial eligibility rules for income and assets.

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<sup>1</sup> Pension eligibility requires that the Veteran be at least 65 year old (unless totally disabled), have minimal or no income, served in active duty at least 90 days with an honorable discharge, and at least one day during a wartime period.

## b) Aid & Attendance Eligibility

The Aid & Attendance (A&A) increased monthly pension amount may be added to your monthly pension amount if you meet one of the following conditions:

- You require the aid of another person in order to perform personal functions required in everyday living, such as bathing, feeding, dressing, attending to the wants of nature, adjusting prosthetic devices, or protecting yourself from the hazards of your daily environment
- You are bedridden, in that your disability or disabilities requires that you remain in bed apart from any prescribed course of convalescence or treatment
- You are a patient in a nursing home due to mental or physical incapacity
- Your eyesight is limited to a corrected 5/200 visual acuity or less in both eyes; or concentric contraction of the visual field to 5 degrees or less

## c) Housebound Eligibility

This increased monthly pension amount may be added to your monthly pension amount when you are substantially confined to your immediate premises because of permanent disability.

## d) How to Apply

You may apply for Aid and Attendance or Housebound benefits by writing to the [Pension Management Center \(PMC\) that serves your state](#). You may also visit your local regional benefit office to file your request. You can locate your local regional benefit office using the [VA Facility Locator](#).

You should **include copies of any evidence**, preferably a report from an attending physician validating the need for Aid and Attendance **or** Housebound type care.

- The report should be in sufficient detail to determine whether there is disease or injury producing physical or mental impairment, loss of coordination, or conditions affecting the ability to dress and undress, to feed oneself, to attend to sanitary needs, and to keep oneself ordinarily clean and presentable.
- Whether the claim is for Aid and Attendance or Housebound, the **report should indicate how well the applicant gets around**, where the applicant goes, and what he or she is able to do during a typical day. In addition, it is necessary to determine whether the claimant is confined to the home or immediate premises.

## **III. Survivors Aid & Attendance and Housebound Benefits**

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### **a) Payments for Deaths after Jan. 1, 1993**

Surviving spouses of Veterans who died on or after Jan. 1, 1993, receive a basic rate, plus additional payments for dependent children, for the aid and attendance of another person if they are patients in a nursing home or require the regular assistance of another person, or if they are permanently housebound.

### **b) Survivors Benefits**

Surviving spouses who are eligible for DIC or survivors pension may also be eligible for Aid and Attendance or Housebound benefits. They may apply for these benefits by writing to their VA regional office. They should include copies of any evidence, preferably a report from an attending physician or a nursing home, validating the need for aid and attendance or housebound care. The report should contain sufficient detail to determine whether there is disease or injury producing physical or mental impairment, loss of coordination, or conditions affecting the ability to dress and undress, to feed oneself, to attend to sanitary needs, and to keep oneself ordinarily clean and presentable. In addition, it is necessary to determine whether the surviving spouse is confined to the home or immediate premises.

## **IV. Becoming a Non VA Provider (VCP)**

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### **a) Overview**

As directed by the Choice Act, VA will administer the “Veterans Choice Fund” to implement the Veterans Choice Program (“the Program”). The Program will operate for 3 years or until the Fund is exhausted. President Trump signed an extension to the program in 2017. The Program will provide Veterans who were enrolled as of August 1, 2014 or eligible to enroll as a recently discharged combat Veteran with a Veterans Choice Card, and allow those Veterans who are unable to schedule an appointment within 30 days of their preferred date or the clinically appropriate date, or on the basis of their place of residence to elect to receive care from eligible non-VA health care entities or providers. This is separate from VA’s existing program providing Veterans care outside of the VA system.

### **b) Applying to Become a VCP**

Eligible non-VA entities or providers must enter into agreements with VA to furnish care, must maintain the same or similar credentials and licenses as VA providers, and must

submit to VA a copy of any medical records related to care and services provided under the Program for inclusion in the Veteran's VA electronic medical record.

It's important that all who care for Veterans have a basic understanding of military culture. With the Veterans Choice Program (VCP), the signature initiative of the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014, eligible Veterans have increased access to health care from community-based medical care providers. Many community providers are not trained or experienced in treating this unique Veteran patient community, according to a [2014 RAND report<sup>2</sup>](#). In early 2015, the American Medical Association issued guidelines for assessing a patient's military experience and duty assignments. In the interest of the highest quality, most compassionate health care for our Nation's Veterans, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is providing a number of accredited training resources at no cost to *all* Veteran care providers. **Click the "[Military Cultural Awareness](#)" and "[VHA TRAIN](#)" links to sign up for training courses:**

- [Military Cultural Awareness<sup>3</sup>](#)

*Note:* Click "OK" to move past any pop-up notice

- **Military Culture: Core Competencies for Healthcare Professionals**

**Module 1:** Self-Assessment/Intro to Military Ethos

**Module 2:** Military Organization and Roles

**Module 3:** Stressors and Resources

**Module 4:** Treatment, Resources, and Tools

**Note:** The four modules listed above are available via [VHA TRAIN](#), (<https://vha.train.org>) a new service to share valuable Veteran-focused continuing medical education at no cost to community health care and public health providers. Dozens of additional Veteran-care training courses will be added to VHA TRAIN throughout 2015.

To learn more about opportunities to care for our Nation's Veterans, please visit the [Veterans Choice Program<sup>4</sup>](#) and the [Community Care<sup>5</sup>](#) websites. If you are interested

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<sup>2</sup> [www.rand.org/news/press/2014/11/12/index1.html](http://www.rand.org/news/press/2014/11/12/index1.html)

<sup>3</sup> [http://learning.mycareeratva.va.gov/courses/military-cultural-awareness-cours/m/wrap\\_menu.htm](http://learning.mycareeratva.va.gov/courses/military-cultural-awareness-cours/m/wrap_menu.htm)

<sup>4</sup> [www.va.gov/opa/choiceact/](http://www.va.gov/opa/choiceact/)

<sup>5</sup> [www.va.gov/communitycare/](http://www.va.gov/communitycare/)

in becoming a Patient-Centered Community Care and/or Choice Program provider, please contact one or both of the Third Party Administrators below:

**Health Net**, ([www.hnfs.com/](http://www.hnfs.com/))

Provider Customer Service: [HNFSProviderRelations@Healthnet.com](mailto:HNFSProviderRelations@Healthnet.com), 1 (800) 979-9620

**TriWest**, (<https://joinournetwork.triwest.com/>)

Provider Services Contracting: [TriWestDirectContracting@triwest.com](mailto:TriWestDirectContracting@triwest.com) 1 (866) 284-3742

## **c) Claims Processing**

VA will establish and implement a system to process and pay claims for care delivered to Veterans by non-VA providers under the Program and other non-VA care authorities.

### **i. Helpful Web Resources**

- **Form CMS 1500 processing manual**

<http://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Guidance/Manuals/Downloads/clm104c26.pdf>

- **Form CMS 1450 processing manual**

<http://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Guidance/Manuals/Downloads/clm104c25.pdf>

- **Medicare Claims Processing Manual**

<http://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Guidance/Manuals/Downloads/clm104c12.pdf>

- **Utilize Medicare's Claims Processing Manual CMS 100-04 at:**

<http://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Guidance/Manuals/Internet-Only-Manuals-IOMs-Items/CMS018912.html?DLPage=1&DLSort=0&DLSortDir=ascending>

Veterans Affairs manages several health care programs that reimburse private health care providers for caring for our Veterans and their eligible family members. Unfortunately, these health care programs have a different statutory and regulatory authority, which creates diverse payment methodologies. The majority of VA health care programs utilize Medicare's payment methodologies or something very similar.

Therefore, providers and facilities that utilize Medicare's billing and coding guidelines will greatly minimize claim delays or rejections as a result of the Program Integrity Tools Improper Payment Review.



## **ii. Medicare Claim Processing Guide**

The following Medicare link is an excellent source of billing and coding guidance for all providers and facilities:

<http://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Guidance/Manuals/Downloads/clm104c01.pdf>

## **iii. Additional TriWest Information**

The TriWest Provider Portal is your one-stop shop for information on filing claims and navigating the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) programs outlined in this training

[www.triwest.com/provider](http://www.triwest.com/provider)

## **iv. Additional Health Net Information**

Health Net Federal Services' process for receiving and paying providers is designed to ensure the medical claims received by VA are complete and accurate.

A clean claim is a claim that complies with billing guidelines and requirements, has no defects or improprieties, and does not require special processing that would prevent timely payment. Clean claims will be processed within 30 days.

Claims must be submitted directly to HNFS within 120 days of the date of service or upon the conclusion of a series of authorized visits. Electronic data interchange claim submissions through Change Healthcare are accepted and encouraged.

To register, visit <http://www.changehealthcare.com/legacy/resources/enrollment-services/medical-hospital-enrollment>.

Health Net Federal Services offers tips to reduce common claim submittal errors (paper and electronic) and common denial code explanations.

Visit [www.hnfs.com/go/VA](http://www.hnfs.com/go/VA) > Claims > Claims Tips.