

Veterans Corner
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VA Reaches out to Veterans and Spouses

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is reaching out to inform wartime veterans and surviving spouses of deceased wartime veterans about an under-used, special monthly pension benefit called Aid and Attendance.

Although this is not a new program, not everyone is aware of his or her potential eligibility. The Aid and Attendance pension benefit may be available to wartime veterans and surviving spouses who have in-home care or who live in nursing-homes or assisted-living facilities.

Many elderly veterans and surviving spouses whose incomes are above the congressionally mandated legal limit for a VA pension may still be eligible for the special monthly Aid and Attendance benefit if they have large medical expenses, including nursing home expenses, for which they do not receive reimbursement.

To qualify, claimants must be incapable of self support and in need of regular personal assistance.

The basic criteria for the Aid and Attendance benefit include the inability to feed oneself, to dress and undress without assistance, or to take care of one's own bodily needs. People who are bedridden or need help to adjust special prosthetic or orthopedic devices may also be eligible, as well as those who have a physical or mental injury or illness that requires regular assistance to protect them from hazards or dangers in their daily environment.

For a wartime veterans or surviving spouse to qualify for this special monthly pension, the veteran must have served at least 90 days of active military service, one day of which was during a period of war, and be discharged under conditions other than dishonorable.

Wartime veterans who entered active duty on or after September 8, 1980, (October 16, 1981, for officers) must have completed at least 24 continuous months of military service for the period for which they were ordered to active duty.

If all requirements are met, VA determined eligibility for the Aid and Attendance benefit by adjusting for un-reimbursed medical expenses from the veteran's or surviving spouse's total household income. If the remaining income amount falls below the annual income threshold for the Aid and Attendance benefit, VA pays the difference between the claimant's household income and the Aid and Attendance threshold.

The Aid and Attendance income threshold for a veteran without dependents is \$18,234 annually. The threshold increases to \$21,615 if a veteran has one dependent, and by \$1,866 for each additional dependent. The annual Aid and Attendance threshold for a surviving spouse alone is \$11,715. This threshold increases to \$13,976 if there is one dependent child and by \$1,866 for each additional child.

Additional information and assistance in applying for the Aid and Attendance benefit may be obtained by calling Robert Mitchell at the Saratoga County Veterans Service Agency at 884-4115.

Unauthorized Unlawful Solicitation of Fees

There have been reports about individuals employed by private companies who claim to help veterans and their dependents apply for VA benefits. Some of these individuals have targeted elderly claimants at assisted living facilities. They give claimants the impression that they are employed by VA and are charging \$600 to \$900 to process a pension claim.

Some organizations that do not qualify for VA recognition structure their business to receive payment for their services from claimants' private care providers in an effort to avoid criminal penalties. The care providers typically do not know that these organizations are prohibited by law from preparing claims and charging fees, and are generally unaware of the services provided freely by Saratoga County VSA and the New York State Division of Veterans Affairs. For more information call your nearest Veteran's Service Agency.