## The BVA Beacon

### The New York Regional Group Newsletter

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DID YOU KNOW?

Certain veterans with service-connected disabilities that result in the veteran being Total & Permanent Disabled may be entitled to a complete discharge of all student loans.

A total and permanent disability (TPD) discharge relieves you from having to repay a William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan (Direct Loan) Program loan, Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) Program loan, and/or Federal Perkins Loan (Perkins Loan) Program loan or complete a TEACH Grant service obligation on the basis of your total and permanent disability. Before your federal student loans or TEACH Grant service obligation can be discharged, you must provide information to the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to show that you are totally and permanently disabled. ED will evaluate the information and determine if you qualify for a TPD discharge.

NEED APPS?

How does a Veteran go about getting the apps that he or she may need for their respective mobile equipment such as the IPhone, IPad, etc.? If it is to be obtained through the VIST Coordinator, where does it go from there?

Response: Any applications or “apps” purchased by VA for a Veteran must be recommended via a Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service (PSAS) consult by the clinical provider with relevant subject matter expertise, and the recommended app must be indicated for the identified impairment. Once purchased by PSAS, a redeem code for that app is given to the requesting clinician. The clinician will work with the patient to upload the app to the patient's device. Clinical providers may recommend applications or “apps” for Apple products such as an iTouch, iPad or iPhone. Such apps are recommended to support the Veteran who has identified impairment (s) including but not limited to vision, cognition, communication and/or physical function.

IDENTITY THEFT

 The Department of Veterans Affairs has developed a new program to assist those veterans who think they may have been a victim of identity theft. Below are the resources the VA has put in place.

VA Identity Theft Help Hot Line: 1-855-578-5492 toll free. 8:00AM to 8:00PM (Eastern Time) Monday thru Friday

Or go to:

http://www.va.gov/identitytheft

VETERAN COMPENSATION PROGRAMS

Can be found at the following web site:

http://www.veteranprograms.com/id1976.html

VA IMPLEMENTS SECOND PHASE of CHOICE CARD PROGRAM

Cards sent to Veterans waiting more than 30 days for care

Washington, DC – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced that it began mailing Veterans Choice Cards on November 17 to Veterans currently waiting more than 30-days from their preferred date or the date that is medically determined by their physician for an appointment at a VA facility.

 “VA continues to focus on implementation of this new temporary benefit so that Veterans receive the timely quality care they need in a way that reduces confusion and inefficiencies,” said Secretary Robert A. McDonald, who penned an open letter to Veterans announcing the implementation of the Choice Card program.

The Choice Program is a new, temporary benefit that allows some Veterans to receive health care in their communities rather than waiting for a VA appointment or traveling to a VA facility. The first round of cards along with a letter explaining the program was issued on November 5 to Veterans who are eligible based on their place of residence. VA is now engaging in the next phase of its rollout –eligibility explanation letters are being sent to Veterans waiting more than 30 days from their preferred date to be seen or considered medically necessary by their physician.

To improve service delivery, VA has prioritized efforts to accelerate Veterans off of wait lists and into clinics through the Accelerated Care Initiative begun over the Summer. Through this initiative, VA medical centers have increased access to care inside and outside of VA, added more clinic hours and work days, deployed mobile medical units and shared their best practices from VA’s high-performing facilities throughout the organization.

 Significant improvements have resulted nationally:

• Scheduling more than 1.2 million more appointments in the past four months than in the same period last year. In total, VA medical centers have scheduled over 19 million Veteran appointments from June to October 1, 2014;

• Reducing the national new patient Primary Care wait time by 18 percent;

• Completing 98 percent of appointments within 30 days of the Veterans’ preferred date, or the date determined to be medically necessary by a physician;

• Authorizing 1.1 million non-VA care authorizations, a 47-percent increase over the same period last year; and

• Increasing the amount of time providers could deliver care to Veterans by increasing the amount of clinic hours in primary and specialty care and through adding weekend and evening clinics at our medical centers.

 VA is America’s largest integrated health care system with over 1,700 sites of care, serving approximately 9 million Veterans enrolled in health care services. The Choice Program is part of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (VACAA), enacted nearly three months ago, to enable VA to meet the demand for Veterans’ health care in the short-term.

 For more information about the Choice Program, call 1-866- 606-8198 or visit http://www.va.gov/opa/choiceact/.

GLAUCOMA

It’s a disease that affects more than 2 million Americans with no known cure, but only half of them actually know they have it. During January’s National Glaucoma Awareness Month, military health officials say while there might not be a cure, there are ways to prevent further or permanent loss of vision with medication and/or surgery.

Though there is no cure for glaucoma, there are some treatments which can delay the loss of vision,” says Dr. Mary Lawrence, deputy director for the Vision Center of Excellence at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, MD. “Medicines in the form of eye drops or pills are the most common treatments, however, they do not restore sight already lost from glaucoma.”

Lawrence adds that the disease can affect anyone at any age. “Everyone is at risk for glaucoma, from infants to seniors,” says Lawrence, “Older people are at a higher risk for glaucoma, but babies can be born with the disease. African Americans in particular are susceptible at a younger age.”

Lawrence goes on to say that service members who have family members who have or have had glaucoma should be checked on a regular basis because they are 30 percent more likely to develop the disease. Other high risk groups for glaucoma include people over the age of 60 and Mexican Americans. The reason why the prevalence of glaucoma in Mexican and African-Americans compared to other ethnic groups is unknown, however knowledge of this is helpful with detecting the disease and getting treatment. Lawrence states people under the age of 40 should get tested every two to four years. People who have high-risk factors should be tested every one to two years after the age of 35.

Lawrence says that blunt eye trauma and blast trauma from combat can also increase a service member’s chances of contracting glaucoma. “There are 1.2 million neurons in each eye, and with the trauma that a blast can cause, these vision receptors to the brain can be permanently damaged,” she said.

While there are several types of glaucoma, open-angle glaucoma is the most common form of the disease. Fluid build-up on the optic nerve leaves the chamber at the open angle where the cornea and iris meet. Other forms of glaucoma include normal or low-tension glaucoma, congenital glaucoma, and angle-closure glaucoma, which can cause severe pain, nausea, redness of the eye and blurred vision. Persons suffering from angle-closure glaucoma need to seek treatment immediately.

Lawrence feels good eye health is essential to having a better, more efficient military. “The wellness of our service members is vital to us maintaining an elite global fighting force,” said Lawrence. “So it is very important that during National Glaucoma Awareness Month, service members make sure to get tested.”

***GOD BLESS AMERICA***!