

Veteran Updates

News and updates on Veterans issues from the San Francisco VA Health Care System • April 2015

VA Eliminates Net Worth for VA Health Care Eligibility

The Department of Veterans Affairs is updating the way it determines eligibility for VA health care, a change that will result in more Veterans having access to the health care benefits they've earned and deserve.

Effective 2015, VA eliminated the use of net worth as a determining factor for both health care programs and co-payment responsibilities. This change makes VA health care benefits more accessible to lower-income Veterans and brings VA policies in line with Secretary Bob McDonald's MyVA initiative, which reorients VA around Veterans' needs.

"Everything that we do and every decision we make has to be focused on the Veterans we serve," said Secretary Bob McDonald.

"We are working every day to earn their trust. Changing the way we determine eligibility to make the process easier for Veterans is part of our promise to our Veterans."

Instead of combining the sum of Veterans' income with their assets to determine eligibility for medical care and co-payment obligations, VA will now only consider a Veteran's gross household income

and deductible expenses from the previous year. Elimination of the consideration of net worth for VA health care enrollment means that certain lower-income, non-service-connected Veterans will have less out-of-pocket costs. Over a 5-year period, it is estimated that 190,000 Veterans will become eligible for reduced costs of their health care services.

In March 2014, VA eliminated the annual requirement for updated financial information. VA now uses information from the Internal Revenue Service and Social Security Administration to automatically match individual Veterans' income information, which reduces the burden on Veterans to keep their healthcare eligibility up to date. That change better aligned VA's health care financial assessment program with other federal health care organizations.

Veterans may submit updated income information at www.1010ez.med.va.gov/, or by visiting their nearby VA health care facility.

For more information, visit www.va.gov/healthbenefits or call VA toll-free at 1-877-222-VETS (8387).

42,000 Enrolled Veterans Selected for VA Survey

During the next few months (April – July 2015), the VA is conducting a survey of enrolled Veterans.

Veterans who have been asked to participate in the survey will be sent a letter that provides information about the survey and the contractor conducting the survey on behalf of VA.

Veterans are asked to complete the survey by answering questions online, by telephone (a 15-30 minute call), or through the mail.

In case you are one of the 42,000 Veterans selected, why should you participate?

Your support in this survey will help ensure that the VA provides the best care possible for our enrollees, where it is needed, and when it is needed.

Reports of results from previous surveys may be found on the VA's Office of the Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Policy & Planning website, www.va.gov/healthpolicyplanning/analysis.asp.

Veteran Kudos

"I LOVE the most marvelous, carrying, compassionate people of the SFVAMC Social Work department.

"There is NOT another service in the Bay Area with a more caring and professional team of people ready to 'hear' you and to open their network of resources to find the best solutions which work best for you.

"I know this to be a fact because I received the assistance I desperately needed after exhausting all City and County resources first. The only reason I did not start with this department is because I didn't know it was available.

*"Now, I highly recommend you give it a chance and give the Social Worker the respect they deserve because they WANT to help. They WANT to make certain that YOU are alright. They care. They really care."
- S.U.*



*"Michelle Funzes Arteaga is my social worker with the VA. She is the best! She really cares about us Veterans."
- M.J.*



*"Anne Kelly with the Hospice Team was the best."
- J.S.*

VA Expands Eligibility for Veterans Choice Program

To expand eligibility for the Veterans Choice Program, VA will soon change the calculation used to determine the distance between a Veteran's residence and the nearest VA medical facility from a straight line distance "as the crow flies," to a driving distance of 40 or more miles.

"VA has worked very quickly to implement the Veterans Choice Program, and we appreciate the constructive feedback shared by Veterans and our partners to help us improve service to Veterans," said Secretary Bob McDonald.

"We've determined that changing the distance calculation will help ensure more Veterans have access to care when and where they

want it," said Secretary McDonald. The change is expected to roughly double the number of Veterans eligible for this program.

The Veterans Choice Program is a new, temporary benefit that allows eligible Veterans to receive health care in their communities rather than waiting for a VA appointment or traveling to a VA facility.

Veterans interested in the Veterans Choice Program should call 1-866-606-8198 to confirm their eligibility and to schedule an appointment.

Since the Choice Program went into effect on November 5, 2014, more than 45,000 medical appointments have been scheduled.

Alcohol Awareness Month

For some adults, drinking small amounts of alcohol does not cause health problems. For many adults, one drink can lead to binge drinking and can put them at a higher risk for health problems, such as liver damage, cancer, psychological disorders, high blood pressure, stroke, and more.

If you choose to drink, the recommended limit is one drink per day for women and two drinks per day for men. One drink means one 12 oz. beer, a 5 oz. glass of wine, or 1.5 oz. of hard liquor.

Binge drinking involves drinking more than 3 drinks on one occasion

if female or over age 65, and 4 drinks if male and under age 65.

People who should not drink alcohol include those recovering from alcohol dependence (alcoholics), children and teenagers, people who are planning to drive or operate machinery, people who cannot limit their drinking to the recommended levels, women who are pregnant or plan to become pregnant, and people who take certain medications that interact with alcohol.

Remember, you can always talk with your VA health care team about resources VA has to help you.

