

# July 2009 Department News Bulletin

## VA HEALTH CARE FUNDING Update 21:

Congressional efforts to provide advanced funding for veterans' health programs made significant progress 23 JUN. The House Appropriations Committee approved by voice vote the first advance budget for the Veterans Affairs Department. The 2010 spending bill for the VA and military construction includes fiscal 2011 health care funding. Veterans' organizations have pushed for advance appropriations to keep VA hospitals running smoothly in case Congress does not pass the annual VA appropriation bill by the end of the fiscal year 30 SEP. In 19 of the past 22 years, Congress has failed to pass the VA funding bill by the start of the fiscal year. The House also voted 409-1 to approve H.R.1016, which would change budgeting rules to allow VA medical funding to be approved a year in advance.

The Military Construction - VA appropriations bill contains \$133.7 billion in spending, \$77.9 billion of which is discretionary. The discretionary spending is \$239 million more than the president's request and about 7% more than what the department received for the current fiscal year. The bill includes \$108.9 billion for the VA, the same as the president's request and \$14.9 billion more than 2009. It includes \$48.2 billion for advance appropriations for fiscal 2011 for three medical departments: services; support and compliance; and facilities. The Military Construction-VA bill also contains:

- A. \$45.1 billion for the Veterans Health Administration, the same as the president's request and \$4.4 billion more than 2009. The VHA estimates it will treat more than 6.1 million patients in 2010.
- B. \$3.3 billion for information technology, the same as the president's request and \$559 million more than 2009. These funds will support new programs, including transitioning to paperless benefits processing and improving the electronic health records system.
- C. \$2.1 billion for general operating expenses, \$135 million less than the president's request and \$287 million above 2009. The increase will allow the VA to hire about 1,200 more claims processors to tackle the backlog of benefits claims, which is approaching one million.

[Source: FederalTimes.com Rebecca Neal 24 Jun 09 ++]

## GI Bill Update 51:

The Pentagon announced 19 JUN that service members can register to transfer their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to family members beginning 29 JUN. The full Pentagon policy memorandum is online at [www.defenselink.mil/news/DTM%2009-003%20Post%2009-11%20GI%20Bill.pdf](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/DTM%2009-003%20Post%2009-11%20GI%20Bill.pdf) . According to Bob Clark, the Defense Department's assistant accession policy director and the top official working on the new benefits plan, on that date a special Pentagon Web site will go live allowing service members to securely apply to allow their immediate family members to share in their education benefits beginning 1 AUG. Service members who plan to use at least part of their benefit in the near future should first register through the Department of Veterans Affairs GI Bill Web site [www.gibill.va.gov](http://www.gibill.va.gov), Clark said. Those who do not plan to use their benefits anytime soon or not at all, do not have to register with VA to apply for the family member benefit. They can simply register through the Pentagon site that will become active 29 JUN.

Service members have up to 15 years from the time they leave the service to apply through VA for a Certificate of Eligibility, Clark said. He emphasized that service members must be on active duty or in the Selected Reserve on 1 AUG to be eligible for family transfer rights. "Those who have retired, even if their last

day on active duty was July 31st or any time before that, or have separated or are in the IRR (Individual Ready Reserve) are not eligible for the transferability,” he said. Service members will apply beginning 29 JUN through the Transferability of Educational Benefits (TEB) website <https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/TEB/>. Service members will be able to securely access this site with their Common Access Card, a Defense Department Self Service User ID or a Defense Finance and Accounting Service PIN number, the Pentagon said. Clark asked that service members whose family members do not plan to take classes this fall to delay their registration by a couple of weeks (until at least 15 JUL) to allow those who do plan to do so to get through the registration process. The effective date will be 1 AUG for all applicants, regardless of their application date, he said, and the services will have their hands full as they must each verify the information and, in many cases, process re-enlistments and service extensions.

“We want the services to be able to prioritize their applications,” Clark said. Once that is done, the services will pass the application to the Department of Veterans Affairs, Clark said. “At that point... the family member will be treated by VA just as if they were a service member or veteran,” he said. Clark denied that a request for delayed applications is related to a fear of crashing computer servers; the Web site is being administered by the Defense Manpower Data Center, whose servers have “substantial” capability, he said. No changes have been made to the final rules previously announced; their implementation was delayed over a procedural matter that has been resolved, Clark said. The final rules, according to the Pentagon, allow transferability of a portion or all of Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits for any member of the armed forces (active duty or Selected Reserve, officer or enlisted) on or after 1 AUG 09, who is eligible for the benefit, and:

- Has at least six years of service in the armed forces on the date of election and agrees to serve four additional years in the armed forces from the date of election.
- Has at least 10 years of service in the armed forces (active duty and/or Selected Reserve) on the date of election, is precluded by either standard policy or statute from committing to four additional years, and agrees to serve for the maximum amount of time allowed by such policy or statute, or is or becomes retirement-eligible during the period from 1 AUG 09, through 1 AUG 13.

#### **Regarding additional service requirements:**

- For those eligible for retirement on 1 AUG 09 or have an approved retirement date after 1 AUG 09 and before 1 AUG 10, no additional service is required.
- One year for those eligible for retirement after 1 AUG 09 and before 1 AUG 10.
- Two years after approval of transfer for those eligible for retirement on or after 1 AUG 10 and before 1 AUG 11.
- Three years after approval of transfer for those eligible for retirement on or after 1 AUG 11 and before 1 AUG 12.

An individual approved to transfer an entitlement to educational assistance under this section may transfer the individual’s entitlement to the individual’s spouse, one or more of the individual’s children, or any combination of spouse and child. Regarding transfer rules:

### **ALZHEIMER'S Update 06:**

The Alzheimer’s Association estimates that 4.5 million Americans now have Alzheimer’s, and this number is expected to reach 16 million by 2050. Ten people over 65 have the disease and the rate is closer to 50% for people over 85. The Alzheimer’s Association and the National Institute on Aging estimate that the cost of current Alzheimer’s care is more than \$100 billion annually. More than a third of U.S. adults have a family member or friend who has Alzheimer’s. Three out of five people surveyed were concerned that they may someday have to be a caretaker for someone with Alzheimer’s. Advancing age is the number one risk factor

for developing Alzheimer's disease. Have you noticed any of these warning signs? If so, list any concerns you have and take this with you to the doctor:

1. Memory changes that disrupt daily life. One of the most common signs of Alzheimer's, especially in the early stages, is forgetting recently learned information. Others include forgetting important dates or events; asking for the same information over and over; relying on memory aides (e.g., reminder notes or electronic devices) or family members for things they used to handle on their own. **What's typical? Sometimes forgetting names or appointments, but remembering them later.**
2. Challenges in planning or solving problems. Some people may experience changes in their ability to develop and follow a plan or work with numbers. They may have trouble following a familiar recipe or keeping track of monthly bills. They may have difficulty concentrating and take much longer to do things than they did before. **What's typical? Making occasional errors when balancing a checkbook.**
3. Difficulty completing familiar tasks at home, at work or at leisure. People with Alzheimer's often find it hard to complete daily tasks. Sometimes, people may have trouble driving to a familiar location, managing a budget at work or remembering the rules of a favorite game. **What's typical? Occasionally needing help to use the settings on a microwave or to record a television show.**
4. Confusion with time or place. People with Alzheimer's can lose track of dates, seasons and the passage of time. They may have trouble understanding something if it is not happening immediately. Sometimes they may forget where they are or how they got there. **What's typical? Getting confused about the day of the week but figuring it out later.**
5. Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships. For some people, having vision problems is a sign of Alzheimer's. They may have difficulty reading, judging distance and determining color or contrast. In terms of perception, they may pass a mirror and think someone else is in the room. They may not recognize their own reflection. **What's typical? Vision changes related to cataracts.**
6. New problems with words in speaking or writing. People with Alzheimer's may have trouble following or joining a conversation. They may stop in the middle of a conversation and have no idea how to continue or they may repeat themselves. They may struggle with vocabulary, have problems finding the right word or call things by the wrong name (e.g., calling a "watch" a "hand-clock"). **What's typical? Sometimes having trouble finding the right word.**
7. Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps. A person with Alzheimer's disease may put things in unusual places. They may lose things and be unable to go back over their steps to find them again. Sometimes, they may accuse others of stealing. This may occur more frequently over time. **What's typical? Misplacing things from time to time, such as a pair of glasses or the remote control.**
8. Decreased or poor judgment. People with Alzheimer's may experience changes in judgment or decision-making. For example, they may use poor judgment when dealing with money, giving large amounts to telemarketers. They may pay less attention to grooming or keeping themselves clean. **What's typical? Making a bad decision once in a while.**
9. Withdrawal from work or social activities. A person with Alzheimer's may start to remove themselves from hobbies, social activities, work projects or sports. They may have trouble keeping up with a favorite sports team or remembering how to complete a favorite hobby. They may also avoid being social because of the changes they have experienced. **What's typical? Sometimes feeling weary of work, with family and at social obligations.**
10. Changes in mood and personality. The mood and personalities of people with Alzheimer's can change. They can become confused, suspicious, depressed, fearful or anxious. They may be easily upset at home, at

work, with friends or in places where they are out of their comfort zone. **What's typical? Developing very specific ways of doing things and becoming irritable when a routine is disrupted.**

If you have questions about any of these warning signs, the Alzheimer's Association recommends consulting a physician. Early diagnosis provides the best opportunities for treatment, support and future planning. For more information, refer to [www.alz.org/10signs](http://www.alz.org/10signs) or call (877) 474-8259.

[Source: About.com: Senior Living 2 Jun 09 ++]