



IOWA COUNTY VETERANS NEWSLETTER

Compiled by the Iowa County Veterans Service Office: 303 W. Chapel Street, Suite 1300, Dodgeville, WI 53533
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Jeffrey T. Lindeman, County Veterans Service Officer

FALL, 2023

HIGHGROUND MEMORIAL TRIP

Lafayette County Veterans Services is offering a free trip to the Highground Veterans Memorial outside Neillsville, WI on 29 Sep 2023. The trip departs Lafayette County Veterans Office at 7:00 a.m. and will return at 6:00 p.m. The trip includes transportation on a motorcoach and lunch. If you are interested in attending, contact Sam Fuller at Lafayette County Veterans Office at (608)776-4886. Space is limited. If you are interested contact him as soon as possible.

VA DENTAL INSURANCE PROGRAM (VADIP)

The VA Dental Insurance Program (VADIP) offers discounted private dental insurance for Veterans and family members who meet certain requirements. Find out if you're eligible, and how to enroll in a plan that meets your needs and budget.

You may be eligible for VADIP if you meet one of these requirements.

One of these must be true:

- You're a Veteran who's enrolled in VA health care, **or**
- You're the current or surviving spouse or dependent child of a Veteran or service member, and you're enrolled in the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the VA (CHAMPVA)

Note: Insurance carriers may offer separate

coverage options for dependents who aren't CHAMPVA beneficiaries.

VADIP provides coverage throughout the United States and its territories, including Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

While some Veterans enrolled in VA health care are eligible for free dental care from our providers, many are not. Others may be eligible for free care for some, but not all, of their dental needs.

If you're not eligible for free VA dental care, VADIP can help you buy private dental insurance at a reduced cost.

If you're eligible for free VA care for some of your dental needs, you can buy a VADIP plan if you want added dental insurance. Signing up for VADIP won't affect your ability to get free VA dental care.

VADIP plans cover many common dental procedures. These may include:

- Diagnostic services
- Preventive dental care
- Root canals and other services to manage oral health problems and restore function (called endodontic or restorative services)
- Dental surgery
- Emergency dental care

The costs for your coverage will depend on the insurance company and plan you choose.

Based on your plan, you'll pay:

- The full insurance premium for each individual on your plan
- Any required copays when you get care.

Delta Dental and MetLife are the contracted providers for VADIP.

For questions about Delta Dental, call [855-370-3303](tel:855-370-3303), or MetLife, call [888-310-1681](tel:888-310-1681).

ONLINE VA TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT PROGRAM IS FAILING VETERANS, INSPECTOR GENERAL FINDS

A new system designed to ensure that the Department of Veterans Affairs reimburses veterans for appointment-related travel quickly and properly is not living up to expectations, frustrating veterans and causing headaches for travel staff.

The Veterans Health Administration rolled out its Beneficiary Travel Self Service System, a web-based travel reimbursement program, in November 2020 to replace a long-standing system accessible through stand-alone kiosks at VA medical facilities or by submitting paper claims.

Goals for the new program, known as BTSSS, were to make it easier for veterans to file travel claims and decrease the amount the VA improperly paid out for claims. Incorrect payments increased from \$70 million in fiscal 2013 to \$123 million in fiscal 2021. The Veterans Health Administration spent more than \$1.3 billion on patient travel in fiscal 2021, an increase from roughly \$1 billion in fiscal 2019 and \$890 million in fiscal 2020.

Shortly after the system was introduced and the VA began removing travel kiosks from hospitals and clinics, veterans began notifying Military.com of their concerns with the new system, which is primarily accessed via smartphone or computer.

The VA Office of Inspector General began receiving complaints that BTSSS actually slowed down processing and decreased production, prompting the office to investigate whether the new system met expectations.

The system, developed by Liberty IT Solutions, now part of Booz Allen Hamilton, was designed to solve claims automatically, without human involvement, at

least 90% of the time and was to be used by veterans without them requiring assistance at least 80% of the time.

But a VA OIG review published in May 2023, found that just 17% of claims filed from February 2021 through July 2022 were automatically adjudicated, "well short of ... the goal of 90 percent." It also calculated that veterans used the web-based portal for only about 49% of total claims.

The OIG found that travel staff implemented work-arounds to deal with the new program and frequently relied on the old system to fill claims.

It also determined that the VA failed to effectively communicate with veterans and veterans service organizations before changing over to the new system and, instead, solicited feedback only from veterans who worked at the VA program office responsible for implementation, not patients or VSOs.

"Further, the program office did not provide training to veterans on how to enter claims in BTSSS until almost five months after system launch. Consequently, during system rollout, the review team found that some veterans experienced difficulties creating user accounts and lacked needed training on how to use the new system to enter travel claims," according to the report, "Goals Not Met for Implementation of the Beneficiary Travel Self-Service System."

VA officials say they have implemented a new patient check-in process designed to simplify the steps taken before a veteran is seen for an appointment, and that is why the kiosks were removed.

A decision has been made, however, to integrate BTSSS with the new patient check-in process, "expected for completion later this summer," according to John Saulmon, chief of staff for member services at the VHA.

The VA also is developing a program that will allow it to handle paper claims more efficiently in the system. Travel claims will then be submittable online, via email, by fax or in person during patient check-in.

The VA estimates that 90% of veterans have access to a smartphone or other mobile device, and it encourages them to use the system. VA medical centers were urged to conduct outreach when the program was first introduced, and how-to videos are available online, according to Saulmon.

In the VA's response to the report, officials said they concurred with the OIGs recommendations to

improve the system and would work harder to effectively communicate with patients on how to access the system through their computer or smartphone.

"We will utilize the customer feedback [of the baseline BTSSS veteran survey] to perform targeted user testing by veterans to develop and prioritize future changes to [the system]," VA officials wrote in their response.

NEW ALZHEIMER'S DRUG MAY RAISE 2024 MEDICARE PART B RATES

Recent approval by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of a new treatment for early-stage Alzheimer's disease may increase Medicare Part B premiums in 2024.

Medicare announced plans to cover Leqembi following its July 6 FDA approval. The drug reportedly will cost \$26,500 a year, and with premiums set to cover about a quarter of program costs, it's likely Medicare users would see Part B costs for 2024 higher than the \$174.80 standard monthly premium predicted by Medicare's board of trustees in their March report.

A different Alzheimer's medication, Aduhelm, was part of the reason behind a 15% Part B premium jump from 2021 to 2022, according to the nonprofit health policy research organization KFF. Medicare later decided to limit coverage of that drug to patients in official clinical trials, significantly reducing the number of covered beneficiaries and leading to the first Part B year-over-year premium decrease in more than a decade.

KFF estimates annual Medicare spending on Leqembi would be \$2.7 billion based on drugmaker Eisai's estimates, which would rank the drug third on the covered-medication cost list.

Medicare beneficiaries with around \$100,000 or higher in a Medicare-specific form of Modified Adjusted Gross Income (married couples filing a joint tax return have a different income scale) pay an adjusted rate for Part B coverage by adding an Income Related Monthly Adjustment Amount (IRMAA) to the standard premium.

The five IRMAA brackets, which are adjusted annually for inflation, usually are announced in late September. Note: The income levels used by

Medicare to determine the 2024 rate will be from 2022 tax returns, unless a lower amount is requested in connection with a life-changing event.

DO YOU HAVE TROUBLE SLEEPING?

Looking for Desert Shield/Desert Storm; Gulf War veterans for a sleep research study.

Linda Chao, Ph.D., is a research career scientist at the San Francisco VA Health Care System. She is heading a DoD-funded clinical trial for Gulf War veterans with Gulf War Illness and insomnia. This study is trying to find out if helping Gulf War veterans sleep better will also relieve symptoms of Gulf War Illness. All study procedures are completely remote.

Why Participate?

- Opportunity to receive sleep intervention.
- Contribute valuable information that may help other Veterans.
- Receive up to \$255 for taking part in this research study.

Who can Participate?

- Operation Desert Storm/Desert Shield Veterans who were deployed to the Gulf War between 1990-1991
- Must have sleep problems/insomnia.
- Must have Gulf War Illness symptoms (e.g., fatigue, pain, memory and/or concentration difficulties, skin, respiratory, and/or GI problems)

If you are interested in participating, or would like additional information you can call (650)451-2747 or email - Morgan.Tade@va.gov

2023 HEALTH and WELLNESS EXPO

The Health and Wellness Expo will be on 15 September from 9 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. at the Hidden Valley Community Church, 605 N Bennett Rd., Dodgeville. Participants will be able to meet with several vendors and service providers from the area. There will be door prizes, a drop-off for disposal of old medications and health screenings. All items are first come first served, while supplies last.

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**Veterans
Newsletter**

NOTABLE DATES

September 4th – Labor Day

November 5th – Daylight Saving Time ends

November 23rd – Thanksgiving Day

October 31st – Halloween

November 11th – Veterans Day

Veterans Service Officer Training Conference

(CVSO available via e-mail or telephone only)

October 9-12, 2023

VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE CLOSINGS IN 2022

Labor Day

Thanksgiving Holiday

Christmas Holiday

Monday, September 4th

Thursday/Friday, November 23rd & 24th

Friday/Monday, December 22nd & 25th