

HEALTH & WELFARE

LITTLE-KNOWN BENEFIT AIDS VETERANS

A little-known veterans benefit for long-term care expenses is available to wartime veterans and their spouses. But the benefit is being overlooked by thousands of families. *The Special Pension for Veterans Aid and Attendance* pays up to \$1,644 a month (\$19,736 annually) toward assisted living, nursing home or in-home care for veterans 65 and older who served at least 90 days (one day being during wartime – stateside or overseas). Veterans and their spouses can receive up to \$23,396 annually, and spouses of deceased veterans \$12,681. Yet, an estimated \$22 billion a year goes unclaimed. In 2007, only 134,000 seniors nationwide received the benefit, which was established in 1952. This Special Pension (part of the VA Improved Pension program) allows for veterans and surviving spouses who require the regular attendance of another person to assist in eating, bathing, dressing, undressing or taking care of the needs of nature to receive additional monetary benefits. It also includes individuals who are blind or a patient in a nursing home because of mental or physical incapacity. Assisted care in an assisted living facility also qualifies. This is a “pension benefit” and is not dependent upon service-related injuries for compensation. Most veterans who are in need of assistance qualify for this pension. The Aid and Attendance Benefit is considered to be the 3rd tier of a VA program called Improved Pension. The other two tiers are Basic and Housebound. Each tier has its own level of benefits and qualifications. If you or your loved one does not qualify for Aid and Attendance, you may want to check to see if you qualify for another level of the Pension. Eligibility, application form and other general information about these benefits can be obtained at <http://www.vetassist.org/faq.htm> or by calling or visiting a local regional office. If the claimant meets the criteria, he/she is likely eligible for the benefit of one of the three tier levels.

CHANGE IN INCOME ELIGIBILITY FOR VA BENEFITS

In addition to the above, VA eligibility rules were changed on June 15, 2009, making it easier for more veterans to enroll in VA's health care system. The VA will now enroll some veterans who had previously been denied health care eligibility because of incomes exceeding the national means test or geographic means test for financial thresholds. The new provision allows veterans who have incomes above these thresholds by 10% or less to receive VA health care, increasing eligibility for over 270,000 veterans. Any veteran who applied for enrollment after January 1, 2009, and was denied due to income, will automatically have that application reconsidered. Veterans, who applied before January 1, 2009, will need to reapply to take advantage of the relaxed income restrictions. For more information, call VA at [1-877-222-8387](tel:1-877-222-8387) or visit the VA Health Eligibility web-site at www.va.gov/healtheligibility.