



# VA HEALTH CARE

Fact Sheet 16-4

August 2008

## Combat Veteran Eligibility

### Enhanced Eligibility For Health Care Benefits

On January 28, 2008, "Public Law 110-181" titled the "National Defense Authorization Act of 2008" was signed into law. Section 1707 amended Title 38, United States Code (U.S.C.), Section 1710(e)(3), extending the period of eligibility for health care for veterans who served in a theater of combat operations after November 11, 1998, (commonly referred to as combat veterans or OEF/OIF veterans).

Under the "Combat Veteran" authority, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides cost-free health care services and nursing home care for conditions possibly related to military service and enrollment in Priority Group 6, unless eligible for enrollment in a higher priority to:

- **Combat veterans who were discharged or released from active service on or after January 28, 2003**, are now eligible to enroll in the VA health care system for 5 years from the date of discharge or release. This means that combat veterans who were originally enrolled based on their combat service but later moved to a lower priority category (due to the law's former 2-year limitation) are to be placed back in the priority for combat veterans for 5 years beginning on the date of their discharge or release from active service.

**NOTE:** The 5-year enrollment period applicable to these veterans begins on the discharge or separation date of the service member from active duty military service, or in the case of multiple call-ups, the most recent discharge date.

- **Combat veterans who were discharged from active duty before January 28, 2003**, but who did not enroll in VA health care system now have 3 years to enroll and receive care as combat veterans. This 3-year period of enhanced eligibility begins on January 28, 2008, and expires on January 27, 2011.

Combat veterans, while not required to disclose their income information, may do so to determine their eligibility for a higher priority status, beneficiary travel benefits, and exemption of copays for care unrelated to their military service.

## Who's Eligible?

Veterans, including activated Reservists and members of the National Guard, are eligible if they served on active duty in a theater of combat operations after November 11, 1998, and have been discharged under other than dishonorable conditions.

## Documentation Used To Determine Service In A Theater Of Combat Operations

- Military service documentation that reflects service in a combat theater, or
- receipt of combat service medals and/or,
- receipt of imminent danger or hostile fire pay or tax benefits.

## Health Benefits Under The “Combat Veteran” Authority

- Cost-free care and medications provided for conditions potentially related to combat service.
- Enrollment in Priority Group 6 unless eligible for enrollment in a higher priority group.
- Full access to VA's Medical Benefits Package.

## What Happens After The Enhanced Eligibility Period Expires?

Veterans who enroll with VA under this authority will continue to be enrolled even after their enhanced eligibility period ends. At the end of their enhanced eligibility period, veterans enrolled in Priority Group 6 may be shifted to Priority Group 7 or 8, depending on their income level, and required to make applicable copays.

## What About Combat Veterans Who Do Not Enroll During Their Enhanced Authority Period?

For those veterans who do not enroll during their enhanced eligibility period, eligibility for enrollment and subsequent care is based on other factors such as: a compensable service-connected disability, VA pension status, catastrophic disability determination, or the veteran's financial circumstances. For this reason, combat veterans are strongly encouraged to apply for enrollment within their enhanced eligibility period, even if no medical care is currently needed.

## Copays

Veterans who qualify under this special eligibility are not subject to copays for conditions potentially related to their combat service. However, unless otherwise exempted, combat veterans must either disclose their prior year gross household income OR decline to provide their financial information and agree to make applicable copays for care or services VA determines are clearly unrelated to their military service.

**Note:** While income disclosure by a recently discharged combat veteran is not a requirement, this disclosure may provide additional benefits such as eligibility for travel reimbursement, cost-free medication and/or medical care for services unrelated to combat.

## Dental Care

Eligibility for VA dental benefits is based on very specific guidelines and differs significantly from eligibility requirements for medical care. Combat veterans may be authorized dental treatment as reasonably necessary for the one-time correction of dental conditions if:

- They served on active duty and were discharged or released from active duty under conditions other than dishonorable from a period of service not less than 90 days and
- The certificate of discharge or release **does not** bear a certification that the veteran was provided, within the 90-day period immediately before the date of such discharge or release, a complete dental examination (including dental X-rays) and all appropriate dental service and treatment indicated by the examination to be needed and
- Application for VA dental treatment is made within 180 days of discharge or release

## Additional Information

Additional information is available at the nearest VA medical facility. VA facilities listing and telephone numbers can be found on the internet at [www.va.gov/directory/](http://www.va.gov/directory/), or in the local telephone directory under the "U.S. Government" listings. Veterans can also call the Health Benefit Service Center toll free at 1-877-222-VETS (8387) or visit the VA health eligibility website at [www.va.gov/healtheligibility/](http://www.va.gov/healtheligibility/).