

# New Partnership Benefits Disabled Employees

A new partnership between the Department of Veterans Affairs and a program managed by the Department of Defense is providing assistive technology and other types of accommodations for disabled employees at no cost to VA.

The devices and services offered by the Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program (CAP) through this partnership are available to employees with visual, hearing, cognitive, and dexterity disabilities. They include magnification systems for visually impaired employees, teletypewriters for hearing-impaired workers, and alternative computer keyboards for those with dexterity disabilities.

The Defense Department started this program in 1990 to eliminate employment barriers for its workers with disabilities. Today, it's the federal government's centrally funded accommodations program. In addition to the assistive technology, the program provides training on how to use it, plus software upgrades, to employees at nearly 50 federal agencies. Since its inception, the program has filled more than 28,000 requests for accommodations.

Noemi Pizarro-Hyman, VA's national program manager for people with disabilities, says the devices and services offered by CAP are available to any new or current VA employee in the country who needs and qualifies for them. The first step is to conduct a needs assessment, which involves identifying the accommodations that are most suitable for the employee's specific situation. Normally, the assessment is conducted by CAP staff, although they will honor assessments made by, for example, the Blind Rehabilitation Center.

Next, CAP disability experts work with employees and supervisors to research the available options. Once the employee and supervisor decide what products they want, they fill out a request form and fax, mail or e-mail it to the CAP Office. They can also complete the form online through the CAP Web site at [www.tricare.osd.mil/cap](http://www.tricare.osd.mil/cap).

The program staff processes the form and buys the equipment, which usually arrives in seven to 10 days.

When the equipment arrives, they install it and train the employee on how to use it. They also survey their customers every month to find out how well the equipment is working and whether improvements are needed.

According to Pizarro-Hyman, about 9 percent of VA's current workforce are assistive technology users. But that figure is expected to grow as VA strives to meet its goal under Executive Order 13163, which calls on the federal government to hire and advance employees with disabilities at all levels and occupations in the workforce. The legislation sets a government-wide goal of hiring 100,000 employees with

disabilities; VA's portion of that target is 17,700 new hires.

The partnership with CAP increases VA managers' ability to hire people with disabilities without the cost of accommodations being an issue. It also supports another piece of legislation, Executive Order 13164, which requires federal agencies to establish procedures for providing reasonable accommodations to disabled employees.

For more information on the CAP partnership, contact Pizarro-Hyman at (202) 273-8921 or (202) 345-7590, or visit the CAP Web site. Information also is available on the VA Office of Diversity Management & EEO Web site at [www.va.gov/dmeeo](http://www.va.gov/dmeeo). □

## LTC Insurance Open Season

Open season for the new Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program runs from July 1 through Dec. 31. Under this program, about 20 million members of the federal family—civil service and postal employees and retirees, active-duty and retired military personnel, and certain family members—can apply for federally-sponsored long term care insurance.

### What is this new program?

The Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program provides insurance to help you pay for chronic, long term care (such as help getting out of bed, eating or dressing) that you may develop due to an illness, accident, or the normal aging process. You may be healthy now, but who knows what will happen next year, in five years, or even in 20 years or beyond. About half of us will need long term care at some point in our lives. And you can't count on Medicare and your Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) plan to provide it.

### Who is sponsoring it?

The Office of Personnel Management sponsors the program, established by Public Law 106-265, the Long-Term Care Security Act.

### What companies are providing the insurance?

Two top insurance companies—Metropolitan Life Insurance Company and John Hancock Life Insurance Company—joined ranks and won the competition to provide coverage under this program. They formed a partnership called Long Term Care Partners.

### Will I be guaranteed coverage?

Not all employees who apply for the insurance will be eligible for the standard insurance. However, all employees who apply will be offered something, perhaps non-standard insurance (different benefits and/or higher premiums) or a non-insurance product. It's not like the FEHB program where everyone eligible who applies for a given policy gets the same coverage and pays the same premium.

### I have a lot more questions about this new program. Who can answer them?

You can visit the Office of Personnel Management Web site at [www.opm.gov/insure/ltc](http://www.opm.gov/insure/ltc). You can also call or visit the Web site of LTC Partners. They have a toll-free number, 1-800-LTC-FEDS (1-800-582-3337), and the Web site address is [www.ltcfeds.com](http://www.ltcfeds.com). □