

7 FAM 540

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

(CT:CON-297; 04-24-2009)
(Office of Origin: CA/OCS/PRI)

7 FAM 541 INTRODUCTION

7 FAM 541.1 Summary

(CT:CON-116; 10-19-2005)

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is responsible for providing federal benefits to veterans and their dependents by operating programs for health care, financial assistance, education, rehabilitation, insurance, and burial at national cemeteries. The Regional Federal Benefits Officer acts as the VA's agent abroad, assisting veterans and beneficiaries with both the origination of new benefits claims and the administration of existing ones.

7 FAM 541.2 Authorities

(CT:CON-116; 10-19-2005)

- a. Authority for consular assistance to the VA and veterans abroad is found in 22 U.S.C. 3904 (3) -Functions of Service (Foreign Service).

22 U.S.C. 3904 (3) provides ...

Members of the Service shall, under the direction of the Secretary—

(3) Perform functions on behalf of any agency or other Government establishment (including any establishment in the legislative or judicial branch) requiring their services.

- b. Authority for veterans' services is found in:

- (1) 38 U.S.C. – Veterans Benefits; and
- (2) 38 CFR Parts 0-18 Department of Veterans Affairs.

7 FAM 541.3 Eligibility for Veterans Benefits

(CT:CON-275; 11-26-2008)

Generally, 24 continuous months of active military service is required to

establish eligibility for most VA benefits. However, disabilities that result from a personal injury or disease that was incurred or aggravated during military service also establish eligibility, regardless of the amount of time served. Since eligibility varies by VA program, the best way to review specific criteria is to visit the VA Web site. You may also consult the “Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents” booklet available in both English and Spanish, on the VA Web site and clicking on Contact VA. In addition veterans may contact the VA on the web or at 1-800-827-1000 (Stateside only for telephone number).

7 FAM 541.4 OBTAINING VA FORMS

(CT:CON-116; 10-19-2005)

VA forms are available on the VA forms Web site.

7 FAM 541.5 Veterans Can file for benefits on-line

(CT:CON-116; 10-19-2005)

Veterans may complete applications for certain benefits on line through VA’s Veterans On-line Applications (VONAPP) Web site.

7 FAM 541.6 Role of the Consular Officer

(CT:CON-116; 10-19-2005)

- a. Federal law establishes entitlement to federal benefits. Each federal benefits-paying agency establishes policies and procedures under which the laws are administered. When policies and procedures are applied outside the United States, your assistance is required.
- b. Posts are expected to provide a broad range of services, e.g., advising applicants about benefits, providing the necessary forms, assisting them in completing the forms, arranging medical appointments, developing claims, providing referrals and following up with VA when necessary. Seek advice from your regional VA office when you don’t have the answers. Your Regional Federal Benefits Officer is also an alternative avenue for consultation in resolving policy and procedural issues.

7 FAM 541.7 Role of CA/OCS/PRI

(CT:CON-116; 10-19-2005)

- a. The Office of Policy Review and Interagency Liaison (PRI) is the Department’s liaison with the VA and other federal benefits-paying agencies and consular posts abroad as well as with members of the public and Congress. PRI provides guidance, disseminates information and

implements new programs/benefits. PRI also resolves problem cases referred to the Department by other federal agencies or the consular post involved.

- b. In essence, PRI shares the administrative and managerial responsibilities with the VA and other federal benefits-paying agencies for the Federal Benefits Programs abroad to ensure efficient and fraud-free payment of benefits as well as the provision of services.
- c. We have also set up ASKPRI@state.gov, an e-mail address within OCS/PRI, where you may send questions and be assured that the appropriate person gets your question and responds as soon as possible. We encourage you to also provide complex case examples on ASKPRI@state.gov so CA/OCS/PRI can share them with other posts for advice/suggestions or for their information.

7 FAM 541.8 Limitations on Consular Officers Regarding Veterans Affairs Work and Disclosure of Information (Privacy Act)

(CT:CON-116; 10-19-2005)

- a. You may not disclose information concerning a claimant of veteran's benefits and programs that can be retrieved by personal identifiers contained in a system of records, except:
 - (1) As expressly authorized by VA;
 - (2) After written authorization by the individual who is the subject of the record, or,
 - (3) In accordance with the 12 exceptions to the conditions of disclosure in the Privacy Act, as amended (5 U.S.C. 552a(b)(1) – (12). 7 FAM 060 provides detailed guidance about the Privacy Act.
- b. Any unauthorized disclosure is subject to criminal penalties pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 552a. (See 7 FAM 069.2.)

7 FAM 542 VA COMPENSATION AND PENSION BENEFITS VETERANS ABROAD MAY NEED HELP PURSUING

(CT:CON-275; 11-26-2008)

The following are brief definitions and descriptions of the major benefits available through the Department of Veterans Affairs to eligible veterans and their dependents who are living abroad. For more detailed information and

eligibility criteria, see the VA Foreign Services Internet page.

Burial Benefits: Eligible veterans may be entitled to a burial allowance, a burial flag, a headstone, niche, or grave marker, a Presidential Memorial Certificate, and/or burial in a state or national cemetery. For more information see the VA Burial and Memorial Benefits Internet page.

Death Pension: Surviving spouses and unmarried children of a deceased veteran with at least one day of wartime service and a minimum of 90 days active military service may be eligible for a non service-connected pension based on need. Spouses must not have remarried and children must be under age 18, or under age 23 and attending a VA-approved course.

Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC): A monthly monetary benefit payable to surviving spouses, certain children, and low-income parents of service members or veterans who died from:

- A disease or injury incurred or aggravated in the line of duty while on active duty or active duty for training
- An injury incurred or aggravated in the line of duty while on inactive duty training
- A service-connected disability or a condition directly related to a service-connected disability

DIC may also be paid to survivors of veterans (surviving spouse and children only) who were totally disabled from service-connected conditions at the time of death, even though their service-connected disabilities did not cause their deaths.

The survivor qualifies if the veteran was:

- Continuously rated totally disabled for a period of 10 years immediately preceding death
- Continuously rated totally disabled from the date of military discharge and for at least five years immediately preceding death
- Or a former POW who died after September 30, 1999, and who was continuously rated totally disabled for a period of at least one year immediately preceding death

Disability Compensation: Disability compensation is a monthly monetary benefit payable to veterans disabled by injury or disease that was incurred or aggravated during active military service.

Education: Monetary assistance may be available to veterans, surviving spouses and dependent children through the Montgomery GI Bill (Active Duty), Montgomery GI Bill (Selected Reserve), Veterans' Educational Assistance Program (VEAP), Reserve Educational Assistance Program

(REAP), and Survivors' Dependents' Education Assistance programs. Outside of the United States, the training at the foreign school must be at an institution of higher learning leading to a standard college degree, or the equivalent and the program of education at the foreign institution must have been approved by VA. For more information visit the VA Educational Benefits Internet page.

Insurance: Two life insurance and two disabled insurance programs are currently open for new policyholders. Servicemen's Group Life Insurance is open to active-duty and reserve members of the uniformed services. Veterans' Group Life Insurance is renewable five-year term coverage available to individuals for one year and 120 days after release from active duty. Service Disabled Insurance is available to veterans with service-connected disabilities. Veterans Mortgage Life Insurance is not available to individuals living abroad. For more information on insurance plans, visit VA Insurance Web site or call 1-800-669-8477 within the United States.

Pension: Veterans with low incomes may be eligible for this monetary support if they have 90 days or more of active military service, one day of which was during a period of war. The veteran must be permanently and totally disabled for reasons other than military service or the veteran's own willful misconduct. Certain VA pensioners and parents in receipt of DIC are required to report their income annually (annual verification). They should report the income on Eligibility Verification Reports (EVRs), which are automatically mailed to beneficiaries. Each beneficiary also receives a Form VA-21-0510, Eligibility Verification Instructions. The EVR forms and instructions can be obtained at the VA forms Web page. You can type in Eligibility Verification Reports in the Title/Keyword(s) block to access the different CVR forms. For more information, review VA Fact Sheets Compensation and Pension Benefits and Veterans Benefits Administration on the VA Internet page.

RFBO: Regional Federal Benefits Officer. For a current listing of the RFBOs go to the CAWeb Intranet page and search under Citizens Services, Non-Emergency, Federal Benefits.

Veteran: A Veteran, for VA benefits purposes, is anyone who has served in the active military, naval, or air service and was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable. Reservists may also qualify for benefits after fulfillment of certain duty.

Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment: An eligible service-connected disabled veteran may receive employment assistance, self-employment assistance, training in a rehabilitation facility, and college and other training needed to overcome an employment handicap caused by his/her service-connected disability. While in training, eligible veterans may receive subsistence allowances in addition to their disability compensation or

retirement pay. The veteran must be training in a training program approved by a Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist. For more information see the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Benefits VA Internet page.

7 FAM 543 HOW THE CLAIMANT APPLIES FOR BENEFITS AND WHAT IS THE CONSULAR ROLE IN VERIFICATION OF INFORMATION?

(CT:CON-116; 10-19-2005)

Developing a claim is a critical responsibility beginning with the application. The VA regional office of jurisdiction processes benefit claims including applications, case inquiries, changes of address, etc. for veterans and dependents residing in foreign countries. It may take 9-12 months to process some complex cases.

7 FAM 543.1 First Time Claimants

(CT:CON-275; 11-26-2008)

- a. First-time claimants for disability compensation or pension must submit their claims to the appropriate VA regional office:
 - (1) A completed Form VA -21-526, Veterans' Application for Compensation and/or Pension, and proof of service (DD-214, DD-215, or for WWII veterans, a WD form) (See the VA forms Web site); as well as
 - (2) Supporting documents of the disability (treatment and medical records); and
 - (3) If proof of service is not available the claimant must provide a military service number, branch and dates of service.
- b. Dependents and survivors must in addition provide:
 - (1) Copies of their birth certificates (dependent children only) reflecting their relationship(s) to the beneficiary;
 - (2) Copies of marriage certificate(s) as proof of relationship to beneficiary; and
 - (3) Passports, national photo identity card (foreign nationals) as proof of identity.
- c. First-time claimants for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) should submit to the appropriate VA regional office:
 - (1) Form VA-21-534, Application for Dependency and Indemnity

Compensation, Death Pension and Accrued Benefits by a Surviving Spouse or Child (Including Death Compensation if Applicable).. (Part VII through IX need not be completed, unless the claimant also wishes consideration of pension entitlement). Form VA-21-535, Application for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation by Parent(s) (Including Accrued Benefits and Death Compensation When Applicable), is to be used by parents. The form should be completed in its entirety.

- (2) The following information must be included with Form VA-21-535: a copy of the veteran's death certificate (must show cause of death); copies of marriage/birth certificates; divorce decrees, if applicable; and a military discharge certificate.

Note: The aforementioned VA forms can be obtained on the VA forms Web page.

7 FAM 543.2 Role of the Consular Officer

(CT:CON-116; 10-19-2005)

- a. Foreign Service officers are authorized to act on behalf of the VA; therefore, claims filed in a foreign country will be considered as filed in the Department of Veterans Affairs as of the date of receipt by the Department representative.
- b. You should:
 - (1) Verify identity of the claimant;
 - (2) Offer advice on filling out applications;
 - (3) Encourage first-time applicants to submit their claims through the Veterans On-line Applications (VONAPP) or provide forms, which are available on the VA forms Web site;
 - (4) Review applications for completeness and accuracy. Some veterans may need special assistance in completing the forms. (If fraud is suspected, see "Management of a Federal Benefits Unit" section for guidance. (See 7 FAM 590);
 - (5) Mail completed applications if requested; and
 - (6) Make appropriate inquiries or referrals on the beneficiary's behalf.

7 FAM 543.3 Date-stamping Documents

(CT:CON-116; 10-19-2005)

- a. VA considers most claims effective upon receipt by either the VA or its agents (Department of State representatives).

The effective date of a claim is a critical issue. Because the effective date of claim may dictate the effective date of payment, you must be certain that advice, counseling, claims development and submissions are prompt and accurate.

b. You should:

- (1) Date-stamp documents the day received at post;
- (2) Use space provided (usually upper right hand corner) or stamp in a prominent area;
- (3) Initial and place your title under the date stamp; and
- (4) Verify that no alterations have been made to the supporting documents.

c. As agents of VA, consular personnel may certify the documents. The following statement must be used when certifying documents:

The original document (or record) of which this is a copy (or, from which this excerpt was taken) appears to be genuine and unaltered and to have been made at the time purported. This document consists of (number of pages) pages.

Signature of Consular Officer

Typed Name of Consular Officer

Title of Consular Officer

Name of Post

City, Country

Date

Seal

d. To preserve originals (birth certificates, marriage certificates and discharge papers) copies may be date-stamped. Return originals to the owner.

Send completed applications to VA on the date they are stamped so VA can begin processing.

7 FAM 543.4 Where Veterans Should Send Claims, Applications, Inquiries, Address Changes, etc. When Abroad

(CT:CON-275; 11-26-2008)

a. Claims should be sent to the addresses noted below. Also see claims section under specific programs.

Compensation and Pension Claims:
Canada
(Benefits)
VA Medical and Regional Office Center
215 North Main Street
White River Junction, VT 05009
FAX: 802-296-5174
Email: vsc.vbawrj@va.gov

Mexico, South and Central America,
Caribbean
(Benefits Only)
VA Regional Office
6900 Almeda Road
Houston, TX 77030
FAX: 713-794-3705
Email: foreign.vbahou@va.gov

Philippines
(Benefits and Medical Treatment)
VA Out-patient Clinic
1131 Roxas Boulevard
Pasay City, Philippines
FAX: 632-831-4454
Email: Manlvaro.inquiry@VBA.VA.gov

**All Other Countries
(Benefits Only)
VA Regional Office
Foreign Claims**
1000 Liberty Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

FAX: 412-395-6057
Email: VAVBAPIT/RO/embassy@VBA.VA.gov

Headstones/Markers (All countries)

Memorial Program Service (41A1)
Department of Veterans Affairs
5109 Russell Road
Quantico, VA 22134-3903
FAX: 202-501-3058
Email: MPS.headstones@mail.VA.Gov

Insurance (All countries)
VA Regional Office and Insurance Center
P.O. Box 13399
5000 Wissahickon Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19101
FAX: 215-381-3502
Email: issjmcca@VBA.VA.gov

Educational Assistance (All countries)
VA Regional Office
130 South Elmwood Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14202-2466
FAX: 716-857-3192
Email: vavbabuf/esu/foreignschools@vba.va.gov

b. When Submitting An Inquiry To VA:

- (1) Provide the veteran's full name and claim number or SSN on all inquiries (including those from a widow/widower or children);
- (2) State the question/situation clearly; and
- (3) Include all necessary dates in this format: (month/day/year, e.g., May 24, 1941).

Note: Claimants may submit inquiries directly to VA by going to VA's Inquiry Routing and Information System (IRIS). Normally a response should be received within five working days. Do not give claimants VA

E-mail addresses reserved for inquiries from Posts.

7 FAM 544 DISABILITY EVALUATION EXAMINATIONS

7 FAM 544.1 How to Request an Examination

(CT:CON-116; 10-19-2005)

- a. VA requires examinations to establish the presence or absence of a claimed disease, injury, or residual condition, and, if existent, the extent of disability.
- b. The VA regional office of jurisdiction will notify the claimant directly that a request for examination has been sent to the Foreign Service post of jurisdiction. The request will include examination protocols which the examining physician should follow.

7 FAM 544.2 Role of the Consular Officer

(CT:CON-275; 11-26-2008)

- a. Form VA-21-2507, Request for Physical Examination, will be forwarded to the post and will specify the type of examination(s) required noting the condition(s) claimed by the beneficiary. Evaluation guidelines will be provided for all examinations.
- b. You should assist the veteran by actually scheduling the examinations with a physician(s) or medical facility recommended by the post medical officer. Do not give the form to the veteran to schedule his/her own appointment.
- c. Inform the physician or medical facility that VA Foreign Medical Program Office in Denver, Colorado will be responsible for the cost of the examination and that payment is made in U.S. currency.
- d. You should advise the health care provider to let the post know if payment has not been received within 90 days after the examination report has been returned to Post. In such a case, you should advise the VA's Foreign Medical Program of the delinquency.
- e. You should forward examination reports and invoices to VA through the post scheduling the examination as specifically instructed on the transmittal letter sent with the Request for Examination. Examination reports and a copy of Form VA-21-2507 should be returned to the VA regional office that requested the examination. The physician's invoice and a copy of Form VA-21-2507 should be sent to the Foreign Medical

Program Office in Denver, Colorado. Advise the physician that the report and invoice should be made on the physician's letterhead and address all items included in the examination protocol(s). Advise the physician that reports should be completed within 30 days of the examination.

- f. The process of sanitizing the mail in the Department of State destroys information which is printed on any type of heat sensitive paper, i.e., thermal paper; this includes medical reports, compensation and pension medical examinations, EKG printouts and any other reports which are printed on heat sensitive paper. Therefore, you should photocopy material printed on heat sensitive paper and forward the photocopy with the examination to the VA Regional Office of jurisdiction. The photocopies should be certified. The original documents should be retained for six months in the event VA needs to retrieve them.
- g. What if the claimant fails to report for examination? You should return Form VA-21-2507 to the VA Regional Office of jurisdiction for cancellation if the claimant does not report for the examination as scheduled and does not contact Post to reschedule within one week after missing the appointment.
- h. What if the veteran asks to reschedule an examination? The veteran must provide a reasonable justification for rescheduling in writing. The rescheduled examination should be conducted within 30 days of the date the request for rescheduling is received by Post.
- i. What if travel is necessary for a Disability Examination? The VA will send the veteran Form VA-07-3542, Authorization to Report Voucher for Mileage Allowance (or an allowance for another mode of transportation) as part of the examination request. The veteran should send the completed mileage voucher, to:

Foreign Medical Program Office (FMP) Health Administration Center P.O. Box 65021 Denver, CO 80206-9021 Telephone: 303-331-7590
--

7 FAM 545 MEDICAL TREATMENT AND SERVICES

(CT:CON-116; 10-19-2005)

Reimbursed medical care and medical equipment is limited to services that are required to treat adjudicated service-connected conditions. See below for specific information by geographic region. Prescriptions and prosthetic

appliances may also be provided.

NOTE: For further information, visit the VA Foreign Medical Program and VA Health Administration Center sites.

7 FAM 545.1 Foreign Medical Program (FMP) for all Countries Except the Philippines

(CT:CON-275; 11-26-2008)

- a. Application (Prior to treatment): Veterans should register with the FMP before obtaining health services. The registration form can be obtained by contacting the FMP office or going to the VA Foreign Medical Program site.

Foreign Medical Program Office (FMP)
Health Administration Center
P.O. Box 65021
Denver, CO 80206-9021
Telephone: 303-331-7590
U.S. toll-free: 1-877-345-8179
FAX: 303-331-7803

- b. Authorization:

- (1) FMP will confirm eligibility and forward an FMP authorization directly to the veteran.
- (2) The authorization will identify him/her VA adjudicated service-connected condition(s) for which treatment is authorized and provide a certification that the Department of Veterans Affairs will assume payment for treatment that is medically necessary for those identified conditions and is accepted by the VA/US medical community.
- (3) Pre-authorization is not required. FMP approves medical equipment requests and authorizes the veteran to purchase the item locally at VA expense.

- c. Claims:

- (1) May be submitted by the veteran/fiduciary or the provider of services;
- (2) Must be submitted directly to FMP office;
- (3) Must be submitted no later than two years from the date of treatment/service; and

- (4) Must include:
- (a) Veteran’s full name;
 - (b) VA Claim Number;
 - (c) U.S. Social Security number;
 - (d) Provider’s full name and billing address;
 - (e) Provider’s itemized billing statement with a medical diagnosis of condition(s) treated, a narrative description of each service, the billed charge, and the date(s) of service;
 - (f) Medical record documentation (i.e., outpatient notes, hospital discharge summaries and operative reports) which justifies the necessity of the service and its relationship to the veteran’s adjudicated service-connected condition(s); and
 - (g) Claims for prescription drugs indicating the names and quantities of each drug dispensed, and/or prosthetic appliances.
- d. Payments: All payments are made in U.S. currency based on the exchange rate effective on the date of service. For episodes of hospitalization, the exchange rate is based on the date of discharge.
- e. Where to Send: Authorization requests, claims, inquiries, etc. dealing with the Foreign Medical Program, except the Philippines, should be directed to:

<p>Foreign Medical Program Office Health Administration Center P.O. Box 65021 Denver, CO 80206-9021 FAX: 303-331-7803</p>

7 FAM 545.2 Foreign Medical Program (FMP) Philippines

(CT:CON-275; 11-26-2008)

- a. General: The VA Regional Office & Outpatient Clinic Manila administers VA medical care in the Philippines. Medical care may be provided for service-connected disabilities and, with limitations, for the non-service-connected disabilities of those veterans who also have recognized service-connected disabilities. Outpatient medical care for treatment of service-connected disabilities will be provided at the VA Outpatient Clinic Manila and through contract inpatient and/or outpatient, fee basis providers. Outpatient medical care for treatment of the non-service-connected

disabilities mentioned above is limited to the care that can be provided at the VA Outpatient Clinic Manila.

- b. Application (Prior to treatment) You should advise veterans to submit their requests for VA authorized treatment in writing and send them to:

VA Outpatient Clinic
1131 Roxas Boulevard
Pasay City, Philippines
FAX: 011-632-838-4566

Include the same information as indicated in 7 FAM 544.2.

- c. Claims Reimbursement for medical care not authorized by the Manila Clinic will be requested through Form VA -10-583, Claim for Payment of Cost of Unauthorized Medical Services, and submitted to the address specified in 7 FAM 544.1. Payment for unauthorized medical care will be made by the Manila Clinic directly to the claimant in Philippine currency.
- d. Authorization: Upon receipt of a treatment request, the Manila VA Outpatient Clinic will confirm eligibility through the Manila VA Regional Office. Upon verification of eligibility, the VA clinic will coordinate medical care directly with the veteran. Unless the need for emergency care precludes otherwise, pre-authorization will be required for medical care and services not provided through the Manila VA Outpatient Clinic.

7 FAM 545.3 Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA)

(CT:CON-275; 11-26-2008)

- a. General: The Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA), medical care for dependents and survivors, is a health benefits program in which VA shares with eligible beneficiaries the cost of certain healthcare services and supplies. You should encourage veterans to visit the VA medical program HAC Web site because the coordination with TRICARE and MEDICARE is complex and requires special expertise.
- b. Who is eligible for CHAMPVA benefits? To be eligible for CHAMPVA, normally the family member cannot be eligible for TRICARE (formerly called CHAMPUS) and; must be in one of these categories:
- (1) The spouse or child of a veteran who has been rated 100% permanently and totally disabled for a service connected disability by a VA regional office;
 - (2) The surviving spouse or child of a veteran who died from a VA-

- related service-connected disability; or who, at the time of death, was rated 100% permanently and totally disabled; or
- (3) The surviving spouse or child of a military member who died in the line of duty, not due to misconduct (in most of these cases, these family members are eligible for TRICARE, not CHAMPVA).
- c. Eligibility: To be eligible for CHAMPVA benefits when over age 65, the family member must also meet the following conditions:
- (1) If the family member turned 65 before June 5, 2001, and only has Medicare Part A, he/she will be eligible for CHAMPVA without having to have Medicare Part B coverage;
- (2) If the family member turned 65 before June 5, 2001 and has Medicare Parts A and B, he/she must keep both Parts to be eligible; and
- (3) If the family member turned age 65 on or after June 5, 2001, he/she must be enrolled in Medicare Parts A and B to be eligible.
- d. What does CHAMPVA cover? In general, CHAMPVA shares with beneficiaries the cost of most health care services and supplies that are medically or psychologically necessary. Special rules and/or limitations, however, apply to certain services. Some services (even when prescribed by a physician) are not covered at all. Clarification on covered/non-covered services as well as limitations can be obtained by contacting the VA Health Administration Center (Denver).
- e. How can a veteran's family member apply for CHAMPVA benefits? Applicants should complete Form VA-10-10d, Application for Medical Benefits for Dependents or Survivors – CHAMPVA. Upon receipt of a completed Form VA-10-10d, the eligibility of the veteran sponsor and the applicant's relationship to the veterans will be confirmed with the respective VA regional office. Those determined eligible will be issued a CHAMPVA Authorization Card (A-Card) and a CHAMPVA Handbook – detailing benefits and claim filing instructions.
- f. Where to send applications, claims, correspondence and inquiries:

VA Health Administration Center (HAC)
CHAMPVA Foreign
P.O. Box 65023
Denver, CO 80206-9023
Telephone: 303-331-7599
U.S. toll-free: 1-800-733-8387
FAX: 303-331-7804
VA Health Administration Center web page

- g. Filing Deadlines: claims for health care benefits must be received by the Health Administration Center no later than one year after the date of service or, in the case of inpatient care; the claim must be filed within one year of the discharge date. Claims filed after these deadlines will be denied.
- h. How can a family member apply for the CHAMPVA reimbursement? Filing Instructions - Either the beneficiary or provider (doctor, hospital or clinic) may submit claims. However, a CHAMPVA Claim Form (Form VA-10-7959A) must accompany claims from beneficiaries. In addition, a copy of the provider's itemized billing statement(s) must accompany all claims. Beneficiary claims that are not accompanied by a completed CHAMPVA Claim Form will result in the payment going directly to the provider (doctor, hospital or clinic). The HAC provides translation services, so bills in foreign languages are acceptable.

For more information, visit the VA Health Administration Center web page.

7 FAM 545.4 TRICARE

(CT:CON-116; 10-19-2005)

- a. TRICARE is a regionally managed health care program for active duty and retired members of the uniformed services, their families, and survivors. Although similar to CHAMPVA, TRICARE is a separate and distinct program. It brings together the health care resources of the Defense Department, supplementing them with civilian health care professionals.
- b. In order to take advantage of TRICARE, retirees and their eligible family members living abroad must be enrolled in Medicare Part B, have a valid I.D. card and be properly registered in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS). Because Medicare does not provide health care coverage abroad, retirees living abroad will be responsible for the same cost shares and deductibles under TRICARE.

For more information about enrolling in Medicare B, visit the Social Security Administration Web site.

- c. Most military bases have a TRICARE coordinator. Retirees and their eligible family members should be advised to consult them.

For more information, visit the TRICARE Web site or call 1-888-777-9343 from abroad.

7 FAM 545.5 Dental Examinations and Treatment

(CT:CON-116; 10-19-2005)

Visit Web site Foreign Medical Program Manual.

7 FAM 546 BENEFIT CHECKS

7 FAM 546.1 Methods of Payment

(CT:CON-275; 11-26-2008)

- a. Currently, VA has establishing international direct deposit (IDD) of VA checks to Germany, Ireland and the United Kingdom. VA hopes to expand IDD to as many foreign counties as possible.
- b. If IDD is not possible, U.S. citizen applicants may arrange to have direct deposit to a U.S. account through their banking facility in the U.S. Otherwise, the VA mails monthly benefit checks via International Priority Airmail (IPA) directly to the recipient. In countries where IPA is not feasible, the checks are mailed via APO/FPO facilities or pouched to the consular posts.
- c. If the checks are sent in bulk shipments to your post, you are then responsible for distributing the checks to the recipients through the local postal service or other appropriate means. For further information, see 7 FAM 520.

7 FAM 546.2 What if a Benefit Check is not Received?

(CT:CON-297; 04-24-2009)

- a. See 7 FAM 523.
- b. The VA needs to know:
 - (1) Name of the beneficiary (veteran, widow, child of veteran, parent of veteran);
 - (2) VA claim number or Social Security number of the veteran and the payee number if known (00-veteran, 10-widow, 11-19 or 31 for children, etc);
 - (3) Date of the check (for example, January 1, 2002);
 - (4) Type of benefit (pension, compensation, education, etc.) if known;
 - (5) Current address of claimant; and
 - (6) If the address has changed since the previous check was issued, VA will input the new address, reissue the check, and direct it to the

corrected address. A change of address must be processed by the 15th of the month to be effective on the next check. If the replacement check is returned, benefits will be suspended immediately.

- c. What you should do for bulk shipments:
- (1) Verify that a payment has been issued with the check list enclosed in the bulk shipment;
 - (2) Allow a minimum of 10 calendar days after date of payment to elapse; and
 - (3) See 7 FAM *526d(1)* and 7 FAM *527.1*.
- d. What you should do if the check were sent by International Priority Airmail. See 7 FAM *526c*, 7 FAM *527.2* and 7 FAM *527.3*.
- e. What the Claimant should know:
- (1) If the Department of Treasury finds no indication that the check has been negotiated, they will issue a courtesy replacement check. (It will take up to four weeks or more to replace a current month non-negotiated check.);
 - (2) If the Department of Treasury determines that the missing check was actually negotiated, they will send the payee an image of the check and Form FMS-3858, Claims Package that includes the Form FMS-1133, Claim against the United States for the Proceeds of a Government Check;
 - (3) If the payee agrees that he/she did in fact sign the check, no further action is necessary. (This usually takes six weeks to provide.); and
 - (4) If the payee claims that he/she did not endorse the check and forgery is alleged, the payee must complete the Form FMS-1133, Claim against the United States for the Proceeds of a Government Check and return it to the address provided. Upon receipt of the claim form, Treasury will adjudicate the claim. If Treasury determines that a forgery has occurred, a settlement check is authorized to the payee or a transfer is authorized to the agency. (Forgery investigations usually take about one year and replacement checks are not issued until Treasury completes the investigation.).

Once a replacement check has been requested, under no circumstances should the beneficiary cash the original check. It should be returned to the Treasury. If both checks are cashed, an overpayment will be created and benefits will be withheld

from a future check without notification.

7 FAM 547 EDUCATION BENEFITS

7 FAM 547.1 Who is Eligible?

(CT:CON-275; 11-26-2008)

- a. Veterans of the post-Korea conflict period, including current members of the Armed Forces, are eligible.
- b. For education benefits to be paid outside the United States, the beneficiary must be enrolled in a program of study approved by VA.
- c. For more information, visit the VA Educational Benefits Web site or contact the following office:

Director, Education Service (225B)
VA Central Office
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420
Telephone: 888-442-4551
FAX: 202-275-2636

7 FAM 548 OTHER SERVICES

7 FAM 548.1 Burial Flags

(CT:CON-275; 11-26-2008)

- a. Summary: Foreign Service posts serve as the issuing agents for U.S. burial flags. The number of flags to be maintained at each post is determined by the veteran population in the consular district, but a minimum of two should always be available. A burial flag should not be removed from its carton until used for a veteran's funeral.

See VA Web page ...Burial and Memorial Benefits

- b. Number of Flags May Be Distributed: The VA is authorized to issue only one flag per deceased veteran. Once a flag is presented it can't be replaced under any circumstances.
- c. Eligibility: The following deceased veterans are eligible to receive a United States flag to drape the casket or accompany the urn. Those who:

- (1) Served in any war;
 - (2) Died while on active duty;
 - (3) Served after January 31, 1955;
 - (4) Served at least one enlistment or had been discharged or released from active service for a disability incurred or aggravated in the line of duty; and
 - (5) Are entitled to retired pay for service in the National Guard or Reserves at the time of death, or would have been entitled to retired pay, but for being under 60 years of age.
- d. Application: Review paragraph seven of instructions for Form VA-21-2008, Application for United States Flag for Burial Services outlining preference of entitlement prior to issuance of a flag. Form VA-21-2008 is available at the VA forms Internet page. Complete Form VA-21-2008 before issuing a burial flag. If available, a copy of the death certificate and military separation or discharge document should be included.
- e. U.S. Citizen Victims of Terrorism: Review “Burial Flags” section of 7 FAM 1800 Consular Crisis Management for guidance about transporting the remains of U.S. citizen victims of terrorism abroad and the propriety of using burial flags.
- f. Authorized uses of the flags: Flags may be used to ...
- (1) Drape the casket of the veteran prior to interment, entombment, or interment;
 - (2) Accompany remains of the veteran in transit to the place of final disposition;
 - (3) Burial purposes in connection with the death of in-service personnel who die at points where armed forces cannot supply such flags in time for burial; and
 - (4) As a memorial after final disposition as indicated on Form VA-21-2008.
- g. Ordering New Flags: Order replacement flags periodically or after one has been issued so you always have the required minimum (2) available by completing Form VA-21-2008 and faxing it to the VA Foreign Desk of your VA Regional Office of Jurisdiction. Post name and mailing address should be shown in the “Notification of Issuance of Flag” section on the form.
- (1) Houston Regional Office (Mexico, South and Central America, Caribbean) 713-794-3705 (fax);
 - (2) White River Junction Medical Regional Office (Canada) 802-296-5174 (fax); and

- (3) Pittsburgh Regional Office (All other countries) 412 395-6057 (fax).
- h. Storage of Burial Flags: Burial Flags should be stored away from other regular stock of display flags.
 - i. For more information, see the VA Burial and Memorial Benefits Internet page.

7 FAM 548.2 Fiduciary Field Investigations

(CT:CON-116; 10-19-2005)

- a. On occasion, VA may request you to conduct a field visit to a VA beneficiary to determine if he/she is competent to handle his/her funds or to observe daily living in the household when claimant may be competent, but incapacitated. VA will provide specific written instructions, including travel reimbursement procedures, on a case-by-case basis. If you find the beneficiary to be incompetent, VA will request you to assist in the appointment of a fiduciary specifying the necessary documentation at that time.
- b. VA may also request you to investigate the fitness and suitability of guardians or other court fiduciaries as well as recognition of legal custodians for minor or incompetent beneficiaries.

7 FAM 548.3 Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program

(CT:CON-116; 10-19-2005)

Visit VA Educational Benefits Internet page and VA foreign schools section on the Internet.

7 FAM 548.4 Military Medals and Military Records

(CT:CON-116; 10-19-2005)

For information about military medals and military records, see the National Personnel Records Center, Military Personnel Records Internet page.

7 FAM 548.5 Loan Guaranties

(CT:CON-116; 10-19-2005)

Loan guaranties are only available in the United States and its territories.

7 FAM 549 NOTIFY THE DEPARTMENT OF

VETERANS AFFAIRS OF CHANGES OF STATUS AND ADDRESS OF BENEFICIARIES

7 FAM 549.1 Change of Address

(CT:CON-116; 10-19-2005)

Report all changes of address including beneficiary's name, claim number, citizenship, old address, new address, and effective date of new address to the VA Foreign Desk (VA Regional Office of Jurisdiction) by fax or by telegram.

7 FAM 549.2 Report Deaths of Beneficiaries

(CT:CON-275; 11-26-2008)

You should notify the VA Regional Office of Jurisdiction (VA Foreign Desk) of the death of a VA beneficiary by fax or telegram. The report should include the beneficiary's name, claim number, date of death, place of death and information for survivor benefits (name, address and telephone number of surviving family member (see 7 FAM 276.1).

7 FAM 549.3 Marriages, Birth of Dependents and Other Changes of Status

(CT:CON-116; 10-19-2005)

Report marriages of beneficiaries, birth of dependents, and other changes of status that may affect benefits to the VA Foreign Desk (Regional Office of jurisdiction).