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Connecting Veterans and Veterans Organizations to Federal Transportation Assistance

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Overview

Many veterans have transportation needs that affect their daily lives. Specifically, veterans often require access to medical facilities for their own care and may not have access to transportation.

More than 9 million veterans are enrolled in the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA's) health care system, and more than 6 million receive health care services through the VA's Veterans Health Administration (VHA) medical facilities. Transportation can be a barrier to care for a variety of reasons, including rurality, lack of access to a vehicle, condition-specific challenges, and the cost of travel.

To help veterans overcome these barriers, there are a number of federally supported VA transportation assistance programs. Some, such as the Beneficiary Travel Program (BTP), the VHA-Uber Health Connect, and Veterans Transportation Service, provide reimbursement or direct assistance with rides. Others, including the Highly Rural Transportation Grants, provide funding to organizations transporting veterans.

In addition, other federal agencies offer programs that are not primarily targeted toward veterans but that may support veterans, such as the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center, Innovative Coordinated Access and Mobility Grants, and Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Individuals with Disabilities—Section 5310.

Locating information about these programs, their availability, and their requirements can be challenging. This report compiles information that congressional offices can use to assist constituents with issues related to veterans transportation—for individual veterans and organizations that wish to aid veterans. Constituents may also wish to investigate programs administered by state and local governments, as well as local volunteer efforts.

Direct Assistance for Veterans, Caregivers, and Survivors

Several VA programs directly assist veterans with transportation to VA medical facilities. These options may include reimbursement for travel or access to a network of volunteer drivers.¹ In addition, other federal services help connect veterans to transportation assistance involving destinations outside of VA facilities. This section highlights the major current programs and provides additional sources and contact information.

Beneficiary Travel Program (BTP)

Some veterans are able to schedule and provide their own transportation to VA medical facilities, but they may struggle to pay for their transportation. Such veterans may be able to have their transportation costs (such as mileage and other travel expenses) reimbursed.² Veterans eligible for the Beneficiary Travel Program may receive reimbursement for their travel to and from VA facilities. Eligibility criteria are detailed on the VA website and within statute and regulations.³

¹ Veterans visiting a VA medical center are required to have a veterans health identification card (VHIC). Information on obtaining this identification is available at <https://www.va.gov/health-care/get-health-id-card/>.

² A discussion of what is reimbursed and how much is covered is available at <https://www.va.gov/resources/reimbursed-va-travel-expenses-and-mileage-rate/>.

³ Eligibility criteria are outlined in 38 U.S.C. §111 and 38 C.F.R. §70.10.

Veterans are eligible if they are traveling for care at a VA health facility or for VA-approved care at a non-VA health facility in the community, and meet specific disability, service-connection, or income related criteria. Transportation costs may include special modes of transportation (such as an ambulance),⁴ as well as travel by airline and train, under certain conditions.⁵ This program may also pay for transportation, related lodging, and meals for nonveteran caregivers if the person is a family caregiver under the National Caregiver Program traveling to receive caregiving training or support the veteran's care, the caregiver is the veteran's medically required attendant traveling to support the veteran's care, or the caregiver is the veteran's transplant care donor or support person.

Veterans and caregivers can explore their eligibility, file a claim for reimbursement online, find frequently asked questions about filing a claim, and receive more information about VA travel pay reimbursement at

- “VA travel pay reimbursement,” <https://www.va.gov/health-care/get-reimbursed-for-travel-pay/>.

VHA-Uber Health Connect (VUHC)

Veterans who cannot provide their own transportation may have the option of scheduling a ride to their VA medical center by contacting the VA Medical Center (VAMC) transportation office and requesting a rideshare. Since January 2022, selected VA medical facilities have participated in the VUHC, which facilitates the transportation of veterans through the rideshare by scheduling the rideshare reservations.⁶ On May 1, 2024, the VA announced that the program was being expanded across VA facilities and that it would be renamed at the end of 2024 as the Veterans Transportation Program Beneficiary Travel Rideshare Services.⁷ As of the publishing of this report, a name change has not been issued.

Veterans are not required to download the rideshare applications (apps) to participate.

According to the VA, the goals of this program include reducing missed appointments, improving the health care transportation experience, and achieving cost savings for VA medical facilities.⁸

Eligibility criteria for this program are the same as for participation in the Beneficiary Travel Program.⁹ Veterans can review eligibility, program requirements, frequently asked questions, and contact information at

⁴ The definition of “special mode of transportation” appears in 38 C.F.R. §70.2 Definitions as “an ambulance, ambulette, air ambulance, wheelchair van, or other mode of transportation specially designed to transport disabled persons (this would not include a mode of transportation not specifically designed to transport disabled persons, such as a bus, subway, taxi, train, or airplane). A modified, privately-owned vehicle, with special adaptive equipment and/or capable of transporting disabled persons is not a special mode of transportation for the purposes of this part.”

⁵ The VA is in the process of changing the rates paid for special transportation services. A discussion of this change is available in the final rule published in the *Federal Register* on February 16, 2023, “Change in Rates VA Pays for Special Modes of Transportation.” The summary of the final rule states, “The new payment methodology will apply in the absence of a contract between VA and a vendor of the special mode of transportation. For transport by ambulance, VA will pay the lesser of the actual charge or the amount determined by the Medicare Part B Ambulance Fee Schedule established by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. For travel by modes other than ambulance, VA will establish a payment methodology based on States’ posted rates or the actual charge.”

⁶ A map of the Veterans Integrated Services Networks (VISNs) participating in the program is available at <https://www.innovation.va.gov/ecosystem/views/vuhc/>.

⁷ See “VHA-Uber Health Connect Initiative,” at <https://www.innovation.va.gov/ecosystem/views/vuhc/>.

⁸ See “VHA-Uber Health Connect Initiative,” at <https://www.innovation.va.gov/ecosystem/views/vuhc/>.

⁹ Eligibility criteria are outlined in 38 U.S.C. §111 and 38 C.F.R. §70.10.

- VA, “What is the VHA-Uber Health Connect (VUHC) Initiative?” at <https://www.innovation.va.gov/ecosystem/views/vuhc/assets/documents/VHA-Uber-Health-Connect-Initiative-FAQ.pdf>.

Veterans Transportation Service (VTS)¹⁰

Veterans who are unable to manage either their own transportation or schedule a rideshare, or who may not be eligible for the Beneficiary Travel Program, can find assistance with the Veterans Transportation Service. VTS is a network of transportation options that assists veterans who are visually impaired, immobilized, elderly, or living in remote areas to travel to their VA health care appointments.¹¹ Veterans eligible for VA health care benefits who have an appointment at VA medical center may participate in VTS, subject to guidelines for ridership and the capacity of local VA facilities. Each local VA-authorized facility has ridership guidelines based on their capabilities.¹² Veterans schedule these appointments through the points of contact or online scheduling links provided by each participating VA medical center.

Veterans can identify the points of contact and scheduling guidance at

- VA, “Veterans Transportation Service Locations,” at <https://www.va.gov/HEALTHBENEFITS/vtp/map.asp>.

Many VTS locations prompt veterans to request a ride through the VetRide Self-Service Portal at <https://ssp.vetride.va.gov/app/>.

Volunteer Transportation Network (VTN)

VA’s Volunteer Transportation Network serves veterans needing transportation to and from a VA or VA-authorized facility. The program allows volunteers to use “government-owned vehicles, including donated vehicles, county vehicles, Disabled American Veterans (DAV) department (state) or chapter (local) vehicles, public transportation, and contracted transportation.”¹³ Veterans may also use transportation services provided by volunteer or community transportation providers such as Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs).¹⁴ Individuals can register to become volunteers at

- VA, “Welcome to the Center for Development & Civic Engagement Portal,” at <https://www.cdceportal.va.gov/>.

Availability, eligibility, and guidelines for using the VTN are determined by each VA facility, and information is available on each VA facility website. Rides are scheduled by contacting the VTN coordinator and the local facility.¹⁵ A directory of VA medical facilities by state is available at

¹⁰ 38 U.S.C. §111A.

¹¹ More on VTS is available in VHA Directive 1695(1), “Veterans Transportation Services” (amended November 22, 2022) and available for download at <https://www.va.gov/vhapublications/publications.cfm?pub=1>. Eligibility criteria are outlined in 38 U.S.C. 111A and 38 C.F.R. Part 70 Subpart B.

¹² See “Veterans Transportation Services,” at https://www.va.gov/HEALTHBENEFITS/vtp/veterans_transportation_service.asp.

¹³ More on the program is available at <https://www.volunteer.va.gov/VolTransNetwork.asp>.

¹⁴ The homepage of some individual VHA facilities may list these organizations or local VSOs may provide these contacts.

¹⁵ The DAV provides a directory of the VA centers in which they operate; see <https://www.dav.org/wp-content/uploads/HSCDirectory.pdf>.

- VA, “Facilities by State,” at <https://www.va.gov/directory/guide/allstate.asp>.

Veterans Burial Allowance and Transportation Benefits

Survivors of veterans may be eligible to receive burial allowances for needs related to the veteran’s burial and funeral, such as transportation. Only survivors of veterans who were receiving a VA pension or VA disability compensation, or who were receiving military retired pay in place of VA compensation, are eligible, and only specific survivors may apply for this benefit.¹⁶ The burial allowance amounts differ based on the date of death and whether the death was service-connected or nonservice-connected.

For more information on criteria and the application process, along with the current burial allowance amounts, see

- VA, “Veterans burial allowance and transportation benefits” at <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/veterans-burial-allowance/>.

Automobiles and Adaptive Equipment for Disabled Veterans and Service Members¹⁷

The VA provides an automobile allowance and adaptive equipment for veterans with a service-connected disability¹⁸ for those with a covered condition.¹⁹ The VA is not permitted to give the automobile allowance directly to veterans, but rather provides the allowance to the sellers of the vehicle. The VA states, “The law prohibits VA from making payments for automobile/conveyance grants directly to Veterans or service members. The VA is required to pay the benefit to the seller.”²⁰

The VA may provide the adaptive equipment allowance either to the veteran or the seller. The VA states, “[t]he adaptive equipment benefit may be paid more than once, and it may be paid to either the seller or the Veteran/service member.”²¹

¹⁶ Eligibility criteria are outlined in 38 U.S.C. §2308 and 38 C.F.R. §3.1709.

¹⁷ Information on this program is in 38 U.S.C. Chapter 39, “Automobiles and Adaptive Equipment for Certain Disabled Veterans and Members of the Armed Forces,” at <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title38/part3/chapter39&edition=prelim>.

¹⁸ The definition of *service-connected disability* is specified in 38 U.S.C. 1151 and explained on the VA’s website at <https://www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/special-claims/1151-claims-title-38/>.

¹⁹ Covered conditions include loss, or permanent loss of one or both feet; or loss, or permanent loss of use, of one or both hands; or permanent decreased vision in both eyes: 20/200 vision or less in the better eye with glasses, or greater than 20/200 vision but with a visual field defect that has reduced peripheral vision to 20 degrees or less in the better eye, or a severe burn injury, or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), or ankylosis in one or both knees or hips (this qualifies a person only for an adaptive-equipment grant). See <https://www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/special-claims/automobile-allowance-adaptive-equipment/>.

²⁰ More information is available at https://www.knowva.ebenefits.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ssnew/help/customer/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001018/content/554400000173638/M21-1-Part-XIII-Subpart-i-Chapter-2-Section-A-Automobile-and-Adaptive-Equipment-Allowance-Under-38-USC-Chapter-39?query=automobiles%20and%20adaptive%20equipment#4.

²¹ See https://www.knowva.ebenefits.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ssnew/help/customer/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001018/content/554400000173638/M21-1-Part-XIII-Subpart-i-Chapter-2-Section-A-Automobile-and-Adaptive-Equipment-Allowance-Under-38-USC-Chapter-39?query=automobiles%20and%20adaptive%20equipment#1.

More information on this program, eligibility,²² and the application process is available at

- “Automobile allowance and adaptive equipment,” at <https://www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/special-claims/automobile-allowance-adaptive-equipment/>.
- The current automobile allowance rate is provided at “Current special benefit allowances rates,” at <https://www.va.gov/disability/compensation-rates/special-benefit-allowance-rates/>.

Additional Transportation Resources for Individuals

The transportation programs noted above focus on options for veterans, caregivers, and survivors, primarily visiting VA facilities. Additional programs and services that can support transportation to locations beyond a VA facility may be available for veterans (and others) who meet eligibility criteria. The resources below provide guidance regarding locating these transportation options that may be available for veterans and may also be available for those meeting other eligibility criteria (such as those who are older adults, those with disabilities, or those living in a particular location). CRS reports are publicly available at <https://crsreports.congress.gov>.

- DIAL, Disability Information Access Line (<https://dial.acl.gov/home>): Provides information about services such as transportation, housing support, and disability rights through an online chat, an ASL (American Sign Language) chat, and phone or text options (1-888-677-1199). Users can also search to identify local resources by entering a specific address, city, state, and/or ZIP code.
- Eldercare Locator (<https://eldercare.acl.gov>): Connects older adults and caregivers with local resources, benefits, and services, including rides to medical appointments, home and community-based long-term services and supports, caregiver training, health insurance counseling, legal services, elder abuse prevention, meals, housing, and adult protective services, through an information and referral service and hotline (1-800-677-1116).
- State/Territory Benefits (<https://myarmybenefits.us.army.mil/Benefit-Library/State/Territory-Benefits>): Provides a directory of state and territory specific benefits. States and territories can offer transportation options for veterans through their affiliation with local Veterans Service Organizations. Calling the state office or visiting its web portal can provide access to this local information. A directory of state veterans affairs offices is also available at <https://discover.va.gov/external-resources/>. State benefits may have a different definition of “veteran” than the one used by the VA.
- CRS Report R47605, *Connecting Older Adults to Information on Benefits and Services*.
- CRS Report R48191, *Connecting Constituents to Health Information and Services: Resources for Congressional Offices*.

Federal Assistance for Organizations

Nonprofit organizations may seek federal funding opportunities to support veterans with transportation, either to VA facilities or to other locations. The following federal programs and funding options may be available to these organizations. Many of these programs are broad and

²² Eligibility criteria are outlined in 38 U.S.C. §3901 and 38 C.F.R. §17.156.

are not targeted specifically to veterans' transportation needs. Individual organizations would need to confirm their eligibility and the availability of these funding opportunities. Absent from this list are inactive programs, such as the Veterans Transportation and Community Living Initiative (VTCLI), which was initiated in 2011 as part of a collaboration among the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), Department of Defense, Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Department of Labor, and the VA. The grant supported nonprofits that helped "veterans, military families, and others connect to jobs and services in their communities by improving access to local transportation options." It is currently listed in DOT's list of expired programs at <https://www.transit.dot.gov/funding/grants/grant-programs/expired-grant-programs>.

Highly Rural Transportation Grants (HRTG)²³

Managed by the VA, Highly Rural Transportation Grants provide funding to accredited VSOs and State Veterans Service Agencies to transport veterans in eligible counties to VA or VA-authorized health care facilities.²⁴ Also referred to as the "Grants for Transportation of Veterans in Highly Rural Areas program," HRTG provides transportation programs in counties with fewer than seven people per square mile.²⁵ For this program, eligible veterans are those who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who were discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable.

For more information, see the following:

- Eligible counties are listed on the website at https://www.va.gov/HEALTHBENEFITS/vtp/highly_rural_transportation_grants.asp, which includes selected counties in Alaska, California, Idaho, Maine, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Washington State, and Wyoming.
- Information for applicants is available at https://www.va.gov/HEALTHBENEFITS/vtp/grant_applicants.asp. Definitions of "highly rural" and guidance for eligibility are available in the *Code of Federal Regulations*, Title 38, Section 17.700–17.730.²⁶

National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC)

A program of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center assists professionals and organizations interested in transportation services. They provide resources, referrals, and one-on-one consultations, and address topics such as Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance and paratransit.

- The NADTC Resource Guide, *Federal Funding for Transportation Programs Serving Older Adults and People with Disabilities*, is available at <https://www.nadtc.org/resources-publications/resource/federal-funding-for-transportation-programs-serving-older-adults-and-people-with-disabilities/>.
- Contact NADTC by email at contact@nadtc.org or phone at (866) 983-3222.

²³ Enacted by P.L. 111-163, Section 307.

²⁴ For more information on accredited Veterans Service Organizations, see CRS Report R46412, *Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs): Frequently Asked Questions*. Eligibility criteria are provided in 38 C.F.R. 17.170 at <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-38/chapter-I/part-17/subject-group-ECFR6024d68c362d50e>.

²⁵ The program was last reauthorized by P.L. 116-159, although it has continued to operate.

²⁶ See <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-38/chapter-I/part-17/subject-group-ECFR6024d68c362d50e>.

Innovative Coordinated Access and Mobility Partnership Grants

Managed by the FTA, Access and Mobility Partnership Grants seek to improve access to public transportation through partnerships among health, transportation, and other service providers. The program provides funding in support of innovative projects to improve the coordination of transportation services and nonemergency medical transportation services.

- Information on eligibility, along with examples of programs recently funded, is available at <https://www.transit.dot.gov/funding/grants/grant-programs/access-and-mobility-partnership-grants>.

Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Individuals with Disabilities—Section 5310

Managed by the FTA, the Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Individuals with Disabilities—Section 5310 is a formula grant to assist states, local government, and nonprofit organizations in meeting the transportation needs of older adults and those with disabilities. Funding is apportioned to the state Department of Transportation or a designee chosen by the governor, which then selects subrecipients for funding. Subrecipients may include states or local government, nonprofit organizations, or operators of public transportation. Funds may be allocated to “traditional” projects, which are defined as capital projects in 49 U.S.C. 5302(3), or “nontraditional” projects, which may include alternative transportation to serve older adults and people with disabilities.

- Guidance concerning the grants is available at <https://www.transit.dot.gov/funding/grants/enhanced-mobility-seniors-individuals-disabilities-section-5310>.
- Regional offices managing the program are listed at <https://www.transit.dot.gov/about/regional-offices/regional-offices>.

Formula or Block Grants with Flexible Funding

The following federal programs have broader eligible-use provisions and are not specifically geared toward (or limited to) transportation-related projects or geared toward (or limited to) services for veterans, but they may *potentially* be used by organizations for transportation services for veterans. The programs include the Senior Centers and Supportive Services for Older Adults, the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), and the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG).

- Senior Centers and Supportive Services for Older Adults (also known as “Home and Community-Based Supportive Services”) is a formula grant administered by the HHS Administration for Community Living. It supports a range of services and may be used to fund transportation. Funds are distributed through state and area agencies on aging. Information on the program is available at <https://acl.gov/programs/community-inclusion-integration-and-access/senior-centers-and-supportive-services-older>. State agencies are listed and linked at <https://www.hhs.gov/aging/state-resources/index.html>.
- The Social Services Block Grant (SSBG)²⁷ is a formula grant administered by the HHS Administration for Children and Families. It awards funds directly to states, which then determine how they will be used based on local needs. SSBG funds

²⁷ See CRS Report 94-953, *Social Services Block Grant: Background and Funding*.

are used to support a variety of initiatives for children and adults, and may include services such as transportation (see <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ocs/law-regulation/ssbg-legislation-uniform-definition-services>). More information on SSBG is available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ocs/programs/ssbg/about>. Contact information for state agencies that administer SSBG funds is available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ocs/contact-information/ssbg-grantee-contact-information>.

- The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)²⁸ is a formula grant administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Funding can be used for a range of community development activities, including public services such as transportation.²⁹ Information is available at <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/cdbg/>. Contact information for state and local communities that administer CDBG funds is available at <https://www.hudexchange.info/grantees/contacts/>.

Additional Resources for Organizations

The following resources and CRS products provide information on specific funding sources or support in identifying funding sources for organizations serving veterans (although some sources may also be helpful for organizations serving other populations as well). This list is not comprehensive. CRS reports are publicly available at <https://crsreports.congress.gov>.

- The Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility Program Inventory identifies examples of federal programs that provide funding for human services transportation for older adults, persons with disabilities, and/or persons with low income. A spreadsheet listing programs is linked from <https://www.transit.dot.gov/regulations-and-guidance/ccam/about/ccam-program-inventory>.
- Individual state governments may offer assistance to organizations to support veterans. Organizations can consult the state grants pages or the state veterans affairs offices listed at <https://discover.va.gov/external-resources/> to inquire if such funding is available.
- CRS Report RL34012, *Resources for Grantseekers*.
- CRS Report RL34035, *Grants Work in a Congressional Office*.
- For guidance on identifying grant programs, congressional staff can consult the “Grants and Federal Assistance” page on the CRS.gov website at <https://www.crs.gov/Resources/Grants>.

²⁸ See CRS Report R43520, *Community Development Block Grants and Related Programs: A Primer*.

²⁹ See “Categories of Eligible Activities” at https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/DOC_17133.PDF.