



# Beneficiary Travel (BT)

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Who is eligible for Beneficiary Travel (BT)?**

- Veterans with disabilities rated 30% or more service-connected (SC): travel for care relating to any condition
- Veterans with disabilities rated less than 30%: travel for care relating to their SC condition(s)
- Veterans receiving Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) pension benefits: travel for care of any condition. Veterans with annual income below the maximum applicable annual rate of pension: travel for care of any condition
- Veterans who are unable to defray the cost of travel (as defined in current BT regulations)
- Veterans traveling to a VA facility for a Compensation and Pension (C&P) exam
- Eligible Veterans in certain situations related to obtaining service dogs
- Certain Veterans in limited emergency situations
- Beneficiaries of other Federal agencies, when authorized by that agency
- Allied beneficiaries when authorized by appropriate foreign government agency
- Certain non-Veterans when related to care of a Veteran (Caregivers under the National Caregivers Program, medically required attendants, VA transplant care donor and support person, or other claimants subject to current regulatory guidelines)

### **Are those included in 'special' groups of Veterans such as spinal cord injured (SCI), Combat Veteran (CV) or catastrophic disabled (CD) automatically eligible for BT?**

No. Only Veterans traveling to a VA transplant center are automatically eligible for BT; all others, including Non-VA transplant care must meet BT eligibility criteria.

### **What types of travel can VA provide or reimburse for?**

VA has authority to provide to eligible persons reimbursement for mileage driven in a private vehicle, and transportation by common carrier/public transportation (any business that offers public transportation at a set rate). In addition, when medically justified by a VA health care provider, special mode of transportation (ambulance, wheelchair van, etc.) may be approved for BT-eligible Veterans.

### **What are the current BT mileage reimbursement rates? Why are rates different for Veterans and VA employees?**

The current mileage reimbursement rate is 41.5 cents per mile, subject to appropriate deductibles. The mileage rates are different for Veterans and VA employees, according to law.

### **Can mileage reimbursement or special mode transportation be withheld from a BT-eligible Veteran?**

Travel benefits may be withheld when it is clinically determined that travel allowance would be counterproductive to a Veteran's care, treatment or therapy being provided and such determination is recorded in the patient's medical record.

### **Why is a deductible withheld from BT payments? What is the withheld money used for?**

VA is required by law to withhold certain amounts from BT mileage reimbursement payments. The withheld money is available for travel payment of other Veterans or for medical care.

### **What are the deductible amounts? Is the monthly deductible cap for each facility or is it for travel to all VA facilities for health care? Who is exempt from the deductible?**

Current deductibles are \$3 per one-way trip and \$6 per round trip, with a maximum deductible of \$18 per calendar month or six one-way (3 round) trips, whichever occurs first. These are the totals for travel to all VA or authorized non-VA facilities within a month. The following individuals are exempt from the deductible:

- Veterans traveling in conjunction with a C&P examination
- Non-Veterans (donors, caregivers and attendants)
- Veterans requiring a special mode of transportation
- Veterans for whom VA determines the imposition of the deductible would cause a severe financial hardship (see next question)

### **Can a waiver of the deductible be requested?**

Yes. A waiver may be requested either orally or in writing when the deductible causes a "severe financial hardship" for a Veteran. A severe financial hardship occurs when:

- A Veteran is in receipt of a VA pension (Aid and Attendance (A&A) and Housebound (HB) benefits for 100% SC Veterans are "special monthly compensation," and are not considered a VA pension.)
- A non-service connected Veteran's income for the year prior to application or the projected income for the year of application (current year) does not exceed the appropriate VA pension level
- A service-connected Veteran's income is at or below the VA income limit for the year prior to application or projected for the year of application. For more information about VA income limits, visit VA Income Thresholds.

VA will automatically grant the waiver without request from the Veteran when it can determine a Veteran qualifies for a waiver of the deductible.

### **How is need for "special mode" transportation determined? What eligibility requirements must be met?**

Special mode transportation includes ambulance, ambulette, air ambulance, wheelchair van and other modes that are specially designed to transport certain disabled individuals. Special mode DOES NOT include public transportation, such as (any business that offers public transportation at a set rate) or a privately-owned vehicle with special adaptive equipment and/or capable of transporting disabled persons.

To be eligible for special mode transportation, two criteria must be met:

- A Veteran has to first meet one or more BT administratively eligibility (see first question) and
- A VA clinician must determine and document that a special mode of transportation is medically required to transport the Veteran in relation to VA or VA-authorized health care. Should it be clinically determined at one VA facility that special mode transportation is required, this should be accepted at all VA facilities unless there is an indication a Veteran's condition may have changed.

### **Can a Veteran not eligible for BT but who has extenuating circumstances receive BT?**

There is no authority to provide transportation through the BT program for those who do not meet eligibility requirements, except in the case of VA organ transplant care.

### **Is there anything VA can do to obtain travel for ineligible beneficiaries?**

Veterans who do not meet BT eligibility may qualify for other transportation resources, including the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) transportation network, Veterans Transportation Service (VTS) and local, state or other Federal programs. VA will assist the Veteran in exploring available options.

### **Does VA have authority to provide transportation for non-VA community care or visits when a BT-eligible Veteran chooses to use private health insurance to pay for care?**

VA has authority to pay for transportation of BT-eligible Veterans to a non-VA health care appointment only if the care is being paid for by VA.

### **What if a Veteran chooses to go to his “preferred” facility instead of the closest VA facility that can provide the required care?**

Veterans have the choice to go to any VA facility they choose for care; however, travel can only be paid to the nearest facility that can actually provide the needed care. If a Veteran chooses to go to a facility other than the one closest to his or her home, he or she is responsible for any costs beyond that for transportation to the nearest facility, including mileage and special mode transportation. If VA determines, either for administrative or clinical reasons that a specific facility, including one that may be more distant, is the appropriate place for care, then travel is paid to that facility.

### **How does VA determine distance for BT mileage reimbursement purposes?**

VA determines mileage using the shortest route by time. VA uses Bing maps to calculate the mileage. Deviations are allowed when an identified route is impassable or documented as clinically inappropriate.

### **What if a Veteran has a PO Box and physically lives elsewhere?**

BT is intended to assist Veterans with transportation costs from their place of residence, or other place they are staying if not their permanent residence, to the closest VA or VA-authorized health care facility that can provide the required care, treatment or services. To determine appropriate travel reimbursement, the Veteran must establish a place of residence or where travel started. A Veteran may be asked to provide documentation establishing his or her address.

### **Can VA provide transportation for Veterans in emergency situations?**

Yes. VA can provide travel in certain emergency situations.

- Transport from a VA facility to a community facility for emergency treatment: If a Veteran develops an emergency while receiving care at a VA facility and the facility cannot provide the needed care, transport to a community provider and back to the VA facility can be provided at VA expense, regardless of the Veteran's BT eligibility when the non-VA care is approved for VA payment.
- Transport from any point other than a VA facility to a community facility for emergency treatment: If the emergency episode of care at the non-VA facility is approved for VA payment then transport from the point of emergency to the non-VA facility can be approved for VA payment. ; However, once medically stabilized at the community provider, the Veteran must meet BT and medical eligibility criteria for further transportation at VA expense.

### **Can VA pay for transport of an attendant, donor, Caregiver or other non-Veteran?**

VA has the authority to pay for transportation and associated incidental costs (lodging, food, etc.) at VA expense of non-Veterans including attendants and donors when one of the following applies:

- It is clinically determined by a VA provider that, due to the Veterans mental or physical condition, an attendant is required when transporting the Veteran.
- The non-Veteran is the donor or potential donor of tissue, organ or parts to a Veteran receiving VA or VA-authorized non-VA transplant health care

- In the case of an Allied Beneficiary, travel and reimbursement has been authorized by the appropriate foreign government agency
- Travel and reimbursement is authorized by another Federal Agency when VA care is provided to a beneficiary of that agency
- The individual is a “Caregiver” under the national Caregiver program and is traveling in relation to initial training as a potential caregiver or travel is in conjunction with an associated Veteran’s VA or VA-authorized health care

**Is VA required to pay for lodging and meals associated with VA travel?**

VA may provide reimbursement for the actual cost, up to 50% of the local government employee rate for meals and/or lodging, when appropriate and upon presentation of receipts. The need for lodging and/or meals is determined on a case-by-case basis and is based on the Veteran’s medical condition, distance required to travel and any other extenuating circumstances. Such items should generally be requested and authorized in advance of travel however, certain unusual circumstances may allow for approval after travel has occurred. Reimbursement is not provided solely because the Veteran chooses to stop or take a less direct route to VA or VA-authorized care.

**Does VA have authority to pay ferry fares; bridge, road and tunnel tolls; luggage fares; or parking associated with VA travel?**

Reimbursement for these and/or other accessories of travel may be provided on presentation of an appropriate receipt. Prior to travel individuals traveling at VA expense should be aware of items that may be reimbursed, any travel restrictions (such as the amount of luggage authorized) and the need to provide receipts to obtain reimbursement. Reimbursement is determined on a case-by-case basis based on individual needs and condition of the beneficiary.

**Does VA have authority to transfer Veterans to where they “grew up” or where their family resides?**

VA has limited authority to provide travel for such requests. Transport may be approved for BT-eligible Veterans if the cost to the government is less than to the originating home of record. Otherwise, only Veterans receiving inpatient care at a VA facility or a non-VA facility at VA expense and who are in a terminal condition (estimated less than 6 months to live) can be transferred to a suitable health care facility in an area other than where they lived when they entered the VA facility. This transfer can occur only from one VA facility to another, or when VA is paying for care at a non-VA facility and future care will be at VA expense. Veterans receiving care on an outpatient basis are not eligible for such transportation.

**How will the BT payment be determined if a Veteran changes residence while undergoing VA health care, especially if he or she is an inpatient?**

Payment for the return trip will be for the distance (mileage) to the Veteran’s new residence. However, payment may not exceed the amount that would be allowed from the facility where the care or services could have been provided that is nearest to the new residence.

For example, if during a period of care or services in Baltimore, a beneficiary changed his or her address to Detroit, payment for the return trip would be limited to that allowed for traveling to the new residence from the nearest facility to the new residence in Detroit where the care or services could have been provided.

### **How long do beneficiaries have to submit a claim for travel reimbursement?**

Claims for travel reimbursement or payment must be filed in accordance with the following guidelines:

- Mileage reimbursement: Application either in person or in writing must occur within 30 calendar days after completion of travel.
- Special mode of transportation: Except in cases of emergency, special mode transportation should be approved and arranged in advance of travel.
- Emergency transportation: VA should be notified as soon possible, but no later than 30 days from the date of travel, when special mode transport not authorized by VA prior to travel to a non-VA facility occurs.
- Change in BT eligibility: If a person becomes eligible for BT after the travel takes place, payment may be made if the person applies for travel benefits within 30 days of the date when the person became eligible for travel benefits.

The date of an application for BT is the postmark date if mailed or the date of submission if hand delivered or requested verbally.

### **Are BT eligible Veteran-Employees who have an appointment at the VA facility where they work on a day they work eligible for BT reimbursement? What about volunteers?**

BT-eligible Veteran employees and Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) patients will be provided round-trip mileage reimbursement in the same manner as other travel-eligible Veterans when they receive scheduled VA health care on the same day they are working. In cases of unscheduled visits, if the employee or CWT patient is seen as a Veteran (rather than an employee), he or she may be reimbursed for one-way travel the same as other Veterans. Volunteers are not employees and are therefore eligible for BT whether or not they volunteer on the same day as their appointment.

### **Are Veterans who travel together entitled to BT reimbursement? What about the Veterans who take the DAV system or other "free" transportation?**

To collect travel benefits for transporting to VA care or treatment, a Veteran or other eligible beneficiary must actually incur an expense. Should one or more Veterans travel together in a private vehicle, only the owner of the vehicle is actually incurring expenses and is the only person who may obtain travel reimbursement. However, when multiple Veterans share a vehicle where passengers must pay for their transport, such as a taxi or when one Veteran pays another Veteran for transport, then all are eligible to travel reimbursement at either the mileage reimbursement rate or actual expense, whichever is less. Such persons must provide a receipt to indicate an incurred expense to receive reimbursement. Veterans, who take no-pay transportation, such as DAV transportation, VA VTS or other no-cost city or state transportation, are only eligible for reimbursement for any travel to and from their residence to point of pick-up or drop-off, as they are not otherwise incurring an expense.