

**INFORMATION SHEET  
OPTIONS FOR VA AUDIOLOGY SERVICES**

(updated 2 NOV 99)

**SITUATION:** The Department of Defense is facing financial and manpower limitations which frequently result in reduced medical services for retirees at military hospitals. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), however, continues to allocate 100% of its resources to serving veterans, regardless of whether they are retired from the military or they completed only a single tour. The VA currently has over 100 medical treatment facilities, located throughout the United States, which have been authorized to provide audiologic care (including the dispensing of hearing aids) to former members of the Uniformed Services. In other words, for those who are eligible, the VA may be a convenient (if not your only) avenue for free, high-quality hearing health care. It is critical to note that not every veteran is entitled to hearing aids through the VA. First, **you must establish your eligibility through your local VA Regional Office.**

**HOW TO ESTABLISH ELIGIBILITY FOR VA CARE:** In most instances, the VA eligibility/claim forms will be initiated at the "Transition Point" as part of your military outprocessing. If not already completed, you should submit your VA claim as soon as possible after separation from active duty. It is strongly recommended that all veterans (and those of you about to become veterans) contact the Regional VA Office in your area of residence for information about the full range of veteran's benefits and claims procedures.

If you call ***1-(800) 827-1000***, you will automatically be connected with the VA Regional Office in your calling area. You should request a copy of the VA Pamphlet entitled "**FEDERAL BENEFITS FOR VETERANS AND DEPENDENTS**", which will provide an excellent summary of your entitlements and claim procedures. Furthermore, veteran's service organizations can assist you with questions about VA entitlements and provide assistance in filing your claim. Retirees should note that **THERE IS NO STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS IN FILING A VA DISABILITY CLAIM;** successful claims have been filed as long as 20 or 30 years after separation from active duty.

If you are still on active duty, you should establish copies of your military medical records (particularly any hearing tests, physical profiles, medical board findings, records of hearing aid issues, or other documents) to substantiate your claim that a hearing loss is "service-connected" (that is, incurred or aggravated during your active duty). Preparing a "true copy" of the records, certified by a Judge Advocate General's office, would help your case. Although it is the responsibility of the VA to retrieve your original military medical records for adjudication purposes, the process may be greatly expedited if you can provide an orderly and accurate set of documents which supports your claim.

Keep in mind that the VA considers hearing loss, ear disease (chronic infections, surgery, etc.), tinnitus (head noises), and balance problems as separate disability categories. When you are asked to state your problem areas, you must list each medical complaint which is relevant to your situation; do not simply report "ear problems" as your complaint. You should indicate if there any other medical problems which are noted in your military record, no matter how minor they may seem to you. The VA may deny your contention, but if you do not list a medical problem on your claim form, that problem will not be considered for a disability rating.

**HOW LONG DOES THIS PROCESS TAKE?** The anticipated time for the entire process (filing your claim, being called for a physical examination at the a VA Medical Center, having the findings reviewed by an adjudication board, and then receiving notification of the results) may take anywhere from six to twelve months (or even longer), depending on the workload in your region. Disability payments, however, are retroactive to the date you filed your claim.

**WHAT DO I DO AFTER RECEIVING MY RATING OF SERVICE CONNECTION?** If you are granted Service Connection (SC), you will also be given a percentage of disability rating between 0% and 100%, depending on the severity of your impairment. **NOTE!! A rating of 0% DOES NOT MEAN that you are ineligible for services** from the VA. This finding means that the VA confirms that your disability is service connected, but that it is not considered severe enough to warrant compensation payment. **A 0% rating for hearing loss DOES entitle you to lifetime treatment for that service-connected disability** and also entitles you to request a re-evaluation of your claim at any time in the future, if you feel there has been a deterioration in your condition. Furthermore, **Service Connected veterans with 10% or more disability for medical problems (other than hearing loss) may also now receive hearing aid services from the VA, effective 1 OCT 1996. Even if you were told (prior to that date) that you “could not receive hearing aids”, you may now be able to obtain hearing aid services, if you have 10% or more disability for another medical condition**

If the VA determines that your physical condition is Not Service Connected (NSC), and you legitimately feel that it is, you should pursue the appeal procedures which will be detailed in your Letter of Notification (a very important document for you). Non Service Connected veterans (even 30-year military retirees) will only be seen at a VA medical facility on a space-available basis and may be asked to pay for their treatment.

It is not uncommon to find that the sum of the disability awards for separate medical problems may not be the same as the total award granted to the veteran. For example, someone might receive 20% for hypertension, 20% for back injury, and 10% for hearing loss but have a total award of 30% (not 50% as would be expected from a simple addition formula). As you may know, if a military retiree is awarded disability compensation, that individual will receive a monthly check from the VA which is **tax-free**, but the military retirement allotment is reduced by the amount of the VA disability payment.

**WHO CAN OBTAIN HEARING AIDS FROM THE VA?** There are several categories of veterans who are entitled to receive free hearing aids through the VA, including:

1. Service Connected for hearing loss, ear disease or tinnitus, etc. **EVEN with a 0% disability rating.**
2. Service Connected, ANY medical condition, at a rate of **10% or more.**
3. Former Prisoners of War.
4. All veterans of World War I.

**BENEFITS OF THE VA HEARING AID PROGRAM:** The VA's Hearing Aid Program is nationally recognized for its excellence. VA audiologists use state-of-the-art instruments and are highly skilled professionals. The hearing aids issued by all Department of Defense facilities are obtained through the same evaluation and contracting system used by VA clinics. The VA Hearing Aid Program offers many benefits to eligible veterans which makes it attractive even to retirees who may also be entitled to receive care at military medical facilities. For example:

1. VA Audiology services are geographically located in almost every area of the country, with no anticipated projections for "downsizing" or reduction in benefits.
2. The primary hearing aid system, is provide at no cost to you. In addition, a free backup hearing aid (or aids) may be provided, in case the primary system is lost or damaged.
3. Hearing aid repairs, whenever feasible, are accomplished by the VA through the mail, at no cost to you.
4. Free batteries are provided by the VA through the mail for the life of the hearing aid. A range of assistive listening devices may be issued on a case-by-case basis, at no cost.
5. The opportunity exists to register military-issue or privately-purchased hearing aids with the VA; these aids will then be eligible for VA batteries and repair.
6. A nation-wide hearing aid database exists to assure a continuity of service, if the veteran moves to a different area.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:** *The information provided in this handout is for your guidance only and may be subject to change. This handout should not be construed as an official VA or DoD policy document.* You are urged to contact your Regional VA Office at **1-800-827-1000** for assistance, if needed. Typically, a VA representative is also available at most major military outprocessing centers. Your local veteran organizations can also be an excellent source of advice and assistance. If you have specific questions about VA audiology services, obtaining hearing aids, scheduling audiology appointments, etc., and you have already established and verified your eligibility, you should contact the Audiology & Speech Pathology Service of your local VA Medical Center (not the Regional Office).