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VA Removes Annual Income Reporting Requirement

On March 25, 2014, VA announced the elimination of the annual requirement for most Veterans enrolled in VA's health care system to report income information. Instead, VA will automatically match income information obtained from the Internal Revenue Service and Social Security Administration. This change will reduce the burden on Veterans, improve customer service and make it much easier for Veterans to keep their health care eligibility up-to-date."

Some Veterans applying for enrollment for the first time may still be required to submit income information. There is no change in VA's long-standing policy to provide no-cost care to indigent Veterans, Veterans with catastrophic medical conditions, Veterans with a disability rating of 50 percent or higher, or for conditions that are officially rated as "service-connected." VA encourages Veterans to continue to use the health benefits renewal form to report changes in their personal information, such as address, phone numbers, dependents, next of kin, income and health insurance. For more information, visit www.va.gov/healthbenefits/cost or call VA toll-free at 1-877-222-VETS (8387).



Each April since 1987, the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc., sponsors Alcohol Awareness Month to increase public awareness and understanding, reduce stigma and encourage local communities to focus on alcoholism and alcohol-related issues.

Alcohol Free Weekend: April 4-6, 2014

An integral part of Alcohol Awareness Month is **Alcohol-Free Weekend (April 4-6, 2014)**, which is designed to raise public awareness about the use of alcohol and how it may be affecting individuals, families, and the community. During this seventy-two-hour period, NCADD extends an open invitation to all Americans, young and old, to participate in three alcohol-free days and to use this time to learn more about alcoholism and its early symptoms.

Limit Alcohol

If you do choose to drink alcohol, drink in moderation

- Have no more than 2 drinks a day if you are a male, nor more than 1 drink a day if you are female or a male over the age of 65.

Avoid binge drinking. Binge drinking is having:

- More than 4 drinks on one occasion if you are male and 3 drinks on one occasion if you are female or are a male over the age of 65.

Prevention Tip: Alcohol can worsen any sleep problem. Drinking less alcohol and getting more sleep can help you deal with pain better.

Manage Stress



If you are having difficulty coping with life's demands, we call this 'stress.' A life without some stress would be boring. Most of us like some challenges, but too much stress creates problems.

People who are overly stressed often report difficulty concentrating, feelings of worry and fear, a sense that the body is wound up (for example, tense muscles, sweaty palms, and a pounding heart), irritability with others, or exhaustion. Too much stress over a long period of time can put your health at risk.

If you or someone you know is in an emotional crisis call The Veterans' Crisis Line at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) and press 1 for Veterans.

Stress management suggestions:

- **Problem Solving**—Learn problem-solving skills as this can often improve your ability to cope. Your health care team may offer a class or information sessions on problem-solving.
- **Physical Activity**—Take a brisk walk or engage in other physically demanding activities. This may reduce your stress. Regular physical activity is best.
- **Relaxation Training**—Learning relaxation and mindfulness can help you manage stress. Daily relaxation may protect you from the impact of stress on your body. You can find self-help books on relaxation at libraries and book stores. Your health care team may offer relaxation or mindfulness training, or you can use the NCP Manage Stress Workbook. In addition, relaxation recordings can be very helpful.
- **Expression**—Speak up in respectful ways. Sharing thoughts and feelings in an assertive and respectful manner can sometimes help buffer stress. Ask your health care team for guidance.
- **Time Management**—List what needs to get done, make plans for addressing items, and stick to the plan. There are several self-help books on time management at libraries and book stores.
- **Positive Thinking**—Stress is often associated with negative, self-critical thinking. Focus your attention on positive thoughts about yourself, your accomplishments, things you feel proud of or grateful for, etc. It can help to list 3-5 things you feel grateful for each day.
- **Pleasant Activities**—Make time for fun. Plan regular, enjoyable activities and see if this reduces your stress.

To learn more, visit [VA's National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention](http://www.prevention.va.gov/Healthy_Living/Manage_Stress.asp#information) at http://www.prevention.va.gov/Healthy_Living/Manage_Stress.asp#information

VA Celebrates National Volunteer Recognition Week April 6-13

VA Volunteers are an essential part of the VA team. Every day VA Volunteers make a difference in the lives of our Veterans. We salute our VA Volunteers this month and thank them for the gift of 'self' they bring to our medical facilities each day. These individuals contribute their time, their talents, and their resources so that others may feel better. In 2013, VA Volunteers in this Network alone contributed over 154,883 hours of services and more than \$600,327 in donations (monetary donations exceeded \$227,000). When visiting a VA medical facility this month, take time to say, "thank you" to a VA Volunteer.



April 2014

VA Midwest
Health Care Network
Honoring Service. Empowering Health.

NETWORK UPDATE

www.visn23.va.gov

Military Exposures— What You Need to Know

Vietnam Veterans and many other Veterans who served our Nation during conflict may have been exposed to a wide variety of hazards and potentially harmful substances during their military service. VA has a website dedicated to helping Veterans learn about exposures and related health concerns. We want you to be aware of signs and symptoms associated with these exposures so you can get the medical care you need. Talk with your VA health care provider if you believe you are experiencing health problems associated with exposure. To learn more about health concerns associated with [Agent Orange](#), [Gulf War Illnesses](#), [Radiation Exposure](#), [Toxic Embedded Fragments](#), [Birth Defects](#), [Infectious Diseases](#), [Cold Injuries](#), [Traumatic Brain Injury](#), [Occupational Hazards](#) and much more, visit VA's Public Health website at <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/health-concerns.asp>. Knowing more can make a difference in your overall health and wellness. If you aren't able to access information online, talk with your VA provider about possible military exposures.

VA Annual Budget Proposed by the President



Continuing the transformation of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) into a 21st century organization, the President has proposed a \$163.9 billion budget, a 6.5 percent increase over Fiscal Year 2014, to support VA's goals to expand access to health care and other benefits, eliminate the disability claims backlog, and end homelessness among Veterans. The budget includes \$68.4 billion in discretionary spending, largely for healthcare, and \$95.6 billion for mandatory programs – mostly disability compensation and pensions for Veterans. The \$68.4 billion total in discretionary spending includes approximately \$3.1 billion in medical care collections from health insurers and Veteran copayments.

Here are highlights from the President's 2015 budget request for VA.

Health Care

With a medical care budget of \$59.1 billion, including collections, VA is positioned to provide care to 6.7 million patients in the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1. The patient total includes over 757,000 people whose military service began after Sept. 11, 2001. Major spending categories within the health care budget are in mental health, prosthetics, spinal cord injuries, traumatic brain injuries, readjustment counseling, and long term care.

Expanding Access

The President's proposed budget would also ensure that care and other benefits are available to Veterans when and where they need them. Among the programs that will expand access under the proposed budget are telehealth funding, health care services specifically designed for women, activation of new and enhanced health care facilities, major construction projects, improved customer service applications for online self-service portals and call center agent-assisted inquiries. To learn more about the President's proposed budget for VA visit: <http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2528>

Calendar of Events – April 2014

- Apr 1 Nebraska** - [Veterans Freedom Music Festival Planning Meeting](#) - 5:00 PM - 6:00 PM (CST) Prairie Room, 600 S. 70th St., Lincoln
- Apr 1 St. Cloud** - [Veteran Community Resource Fair](#) - 9:00 AM - 3:00 PM (CST) Atwood Memorial Center, SCSU campus
- Apr 1 St. Cloud** - [Veterans' Law Clinic](#) - 12:00 PM - 2:00 PM (CST) St. Cloud VA Medical Center, Building 28, Room 126
- Apr 2 St. Cloud** - [Groundbreaking Ceremony for New Kitchen at the VA Medical Center](#) - 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM (CST) St. Cloud VA Medical Center, south side of Bldg. 8 (Auditorium)
- Apr 2 Nebraska** - [Omaha VA Pantry for Veterans](#) - 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM (CST) 825 Dorcas St, Ste. 200, Omaha, NE
- Apr 2 Nebraska** - [Veteran Group Exercise Class](#) - 5:15 PM - 6:15 PM (CST) Omaha VA Medical Center 3rd Floor TV Studio, 4101 Woolworth Ave, Omaha, Nebraska
- Apr 4 Minneapolis** - [Red Cross Blood Donation at the Minneapolis VA](#) - 8:00 AM - 2:00 PM (CST) 2nd Floor Flag Atrium
- Apr 4 St. Cloud** - [Central MN Car Show](#) - River's Edge Convention Center, St. Cloud, MN
- Apr 5 St. Cloud** - [Central MN Car Show](#) - River's Edge Convention Center, St. Cloud, MN
- Apr 5 St. Cloud** - [Take 6 Live in Concert](#) - 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM (CST) St. Cloud VA Health Care System Auditorium (Bldg. 8)
- Apr 6 St. Cloud** - [Central MN Car Show](#) - River's Edge Convention Center, St. Cloud, MN
- Apr 7 St. Cloud** - [Veterans Affairs Radio Show](#) - KNSI AM 1450/FM 103.3
- Apr 7 Nebraska** - [VA Food Pantry](#) - 10:00 AM - 11:30 AM (CST) VA Clinic, Bldg 40, Room 105, 600 S. 70th St, Lincoln NE
- Apr 7 Nebraska** - [Veterans Group Exercise Class](#) - 5:15 PM - 6:15 PM (CST) Omaha VA Medical Center 3rd Floor TV Studio, 4101 Woolworth Ave, Omaha, Nebraska
- Apr 9 Nebraska** - [Veteran Group Exercise Class](#) - 5:15 PM - 6:15 PM (CST) Omaha VA Medical Center 3rd Floor TV Studio, 4101 Woolworth Ave, Omaha, Nebraska
- Apr 11 Nebraska** - [Free Tax Assistance for Veterans and VA employees](#) - 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM (CST) 600 S. 70th St, Lincoln, Neb (auditorium)
- Apr 11 Minneapolis** - [Red Cross Blood Donation at the Minneapolis VA](#) - 8:00 AM - 2:00 PM (CST) 2nd Floor Flag Atrium
- Apr 11 St. Cloud** - [Montevideo CBOC Caregiver Support Group](#) - 1:30 PM - 2:30 PM (CST) Montevideo CBOC
- Apr 15 St. Cloud** - [Veterans' Law Clinic](#) - St. Cloud VA Medical Center, Building 28, Room 126
- Apr 16 St. Cloud** - [Voices for Veterans Radio Show](#) - 8:10 AM - 8:45 AM (CST) WJON AM 1240
- Apr 16 St. Cloud** - [Quarterly Memorial Service](#) - 1:00 PM - 1:30 PM (CST) St. Cloud VA Chapel
- Apr 16 Nebraska** - [Omaha VA Pantry for Veterans](#) - 825 Dorcas St, Ste. 200, Omaha, NE
- Apr 17 Minneapolis** - [Red Cross Blood Donation at Minneapolis VA](#) - 8:00 AM - 2:00 PM (CST) 2nd Floor Flag Atrium
- Apr 18 Nebraska** - [VA CoffeHaus](#) - 600 S. 70th St, Lincoln, Neb (canteen on lower level)
- Apr 22 Nebraska** - [Veterans Freedom Music Festival Planning Meeting](#) - 5:00 PM - 6:00 PM (CST) Prairie Room, 600 S. 70th St., Lincoln
- Apr 25 Minneapolis** - [Red Cross Blood Donation at the Minneapolis VA](#) - 8:00 AM - 2:00 PM (CST) 2nd Floor Flag Atrium
- Apr 25 Minneapolis** - [Albert Lea VA Clinic Grand Opening](#) - Veteran Program 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM (CST) Albert Lea
- Apr 26 Minneapolis** - [Women Veterans Conference](#) - Veteran Program 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM (CST) Minnesota Humanities Center, 987 Ivy Ave. E, St. Paul, MN

* Dates and times are correct as of March 27, 2014. Information may have changed, please check local VA Health Care System websites for the latest information.

For More information, call the Network Office at (651) 405-5600 or
Log on at www.visn23.va.gov or email sharyl.schaepe@va.gov