

Army Retirement Services

Current News



Veterans, survivors:

To get the economic stimulus payment, you need to file a tax return

Note: If you have already filed or plan to file a tax return this year, you don't need to read this article. However, certain veterans and survivors who don't usually file a return must file this year to qualify for the Economic Stimulus Payments that will be paid this summer.

Who is affected

To stimulate the economy, Congress and the President decided pay "rebates" to Americans who file tax returns. They extended eligibility to veterans and Social Security recipients who don't usually have to file a tax return.

The minimum payment for those who qualify is \$300 for individuals and \$600 for married couples filing a joint income tax return. The payments will be calculated by the IRS based on tax returns filed now through the end of 2008 reporting income received and taxes due for the 2007 tax year.

Those who have no tax liability and are not required to file a tax return may qualify for a minimum payment of \$300 (\$600 if filing a joint return) if they send the IRS a simple tax return that reflects \$3,000 or more in qualifying income. For the purpose of the stimulus payments, qualifying income includes veterans' disability compensation, and pension or survivors' benefits received from the Department of Veterans Affairs in 2007.

What you need to do

Those who are not required to file a 2007 return but whose total qualifying income (including earned income, Social Security, certain Railroad Retirement and any of the veterans' benefits stated above) would equal or exceed \$3,000, should file a simple tax return reporting the income and benefits to establish eligibility. You can use a Form 1040A and report the total of your benefits on Line 14a, or you can use a Form 1040 and report the total of your benefits on Line 20a. Please note that both of these lines refer only to Social Security, but you should enter the total of all your benefits received there, whether your only benefits were veterans' benefits, or a combination of any of the three (Social Security, Railroad Retirement, or veterans'). If you have any earned income, it is reported on a separate line, Line 7, of either form.

Your name, Social Security number and signature (those entries for both you and your spouse if filing jointly), as well as your address, filing status and whether or not you'd like to receive your payment via Direct Deposit, are the only other items needed on the tax return. No other lines need be filled in. A sample 1040A showing the minimal information needed can be viewed on the IRS Website at irs.gov and used as a model for completing the form.

The IRS emphasized that **people with no filing requirement who turn in a tax return to qualify for the economic stimulus payment will not get a tax bill.** People in this category will not owe money because of the stimulus payment. The stimulus payments are not taxable.

Your Surveys Say....

That you do want to comment on your Army Echoes. Thanks for all your responses to our Reader survey. The web team has created a version that can be answered online. You can find it at <http://www.armygg1.army.mil/rso/ArmyEchoesReaderSurvey.asp>

TRICARE covers shingles vaccine, but deductibles may still apply

(Following is TRICARE's recent update to the article we printed in the Jan-Apr Echoes.)

FALLS CHURCH, VA - For beneficiaries 60 and older, TRICARE now covers Zostavax, the vaccine designed to prevent shingles. TRICARE officials caution that "covered" doesn't necessarily mean "free" for TRICARE Standard or TRICARE for Life beneficiaries.

Zostavax is covered under the TRICARE medical benefit and is not reimbursable under the pharmacy benefit. Vaccines are not a part of the TRICARE pharmacy benefit because they cannot be self-administered. Beneficiaries must have vaccinations administered in a doctor's office.

According to TRICARE officials, the physician should supply the Zostavax and include its price on the itemized bill for the office visit and the injection. TRICARE will reimburse a provider for administering the Zostavax vaccine in its office as a part of the TRICARE medical benefit.

Just as with any TRICARE medical benefit, beneficiaries are responsible for their deductibles and cost shares.

TRICARE for Life 'explanation of benefits' goes digital

FALLS CHURCH, VA – TRICARE for Life (TFL) beneficiaries can print a copy of their Explanation of Benefits (EOB) at home. Now, the only paper EOBs that TFL beneficiaries living in the U.S. and U.S. territories will receive are monthly summaries. The exception to this is if a claim includes services that are rejected, and those services have appeal rights; or if the EOB is mailed with a payment to the beneficiary. TRICARE overseas beneficiaries will continue to get their EOBs as usual.

Beneficiaries have the option to receive an electronic notification every time a claim processes. They can then log on to the secure web site at <https://www.TRICARE4U.com>, to view and print the EOB.

The EOB will be available online and beneficiaries will be able to access EOBs for any claim processed during the last 27 months. Beneficiaries who sign up for this option will **not** receive a monthly paper summary. TFL beneficiaries will receive letters notifying them of the changes, either with their current EOBs or any other correspondence.

If you have questions, you can call 1-866-773-0404. Those needing a Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) can call 1-866-773-0405.

TRICARE covers lap-band surgery

FALLS CHURCH, VA – TRICARE beneficiaries whose weight poses a serious health risk have a new surgical alternative available. For those who medically qualify, TRICARE covers laparoscopic adjustable gastric banding, also called lap-band surgery. Although the TRICARE policy change was made recently, coverage is retroactive to Feb. 1, 2007.

"We at TRICARE are careful to only cover procedures that have been proven safe and effective, and are accepted by the medical community," said MG Elder Granger, TRICARE Management Activity Deputy Director. "We've added this procedure because, for some beneficiaries, it may be the right course of action to preserve their health."

Granger adds that, like gastric bypass, gastric stapling or gastroplasty, lap-band surgery is only for those suffering morbid obesity. In medical terms, that means their body weight is 100 pounds over ideal weight for their height and bone structure, and their weight is associated with severe medical conditions known to have higher mortality rates. Body weight that is more than twice the ideal weight for the person's height and bone structure may also indicate morbid obesity.

In addition, TRICARE will cover the surgery if a patient has had an intestinal bypass or other surgery for obesity and, because of complications, requires a second surgery.

Coverage details are in the TRICARE Policy Manual under "morbid obesity", at <http://manuals.tricare.osd.mil>.

Beneficiaries nearing Medicare eligibility -- take steps to stay eligible for TRICARE

FALLS CHURCH, VA - TRICARE beneficiaries who are turning 65 and are eligible for premium-free Medicare Part A must enroll in and pay for Medicare Part B to remain eligible for TRICARE benefits, even if they live outside of the U.S..

Exceptions include when the beneficiary is enrolled in the U.S. Family Health Plan (<http://www.usfhp.org>). Visit <http://www.tricare.mil/mybenefit/home/overview/Eligibility/WhosEligible/MedicareBeneficiaries> to learn more.

Beneficiaries should apply for Medicare benefits three to four months before turning 65. Prompt enrollment allows beneficiaries to avoid the Medicare Part B surcharge for late enrollment (10% for each 12-month period eligible but not enrolled in Part B). To sign up for Medicare Part B, call the Social Security Administration at (800) 772-1213, or visit your local Social Security office.

VA increases travel reimbursement for eligible veterans

WASHINGTON – More than a million eligible veterans saw their mileage reimbursement more than double starting Feb. 1, for travel to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities.

The 2008 appropriations act provided funding for VA to increase the beneficiary travel mileage reimbursement rate from 11 cents per mile to 28.5 cents per mile, effective Feb. 1, 2008. After little more than a month on the job, VA Secretary James Peake, a retired Soldier, used his authority to establish the first increase in the mileage reimbursement in 30 years,

fulfilling a pledge he made during his Senate confirmation hearing.

While increasing the payment, VA, as mandated by law, also equally increased the deductible amounts applied to certain mileage reimbursements. The new deductibles are \$7.77 for a one way trip, \$15.54 for a round trip,

with a maximum of \$46.62 per calendar month. However, these deductibles can be waived if they cause a financial hardship to the veteran.

When you travel for VA care

VA's new 'Travel Nurse' program hits the road

WASHINGTON — To deal with a nationwide nurse shortage and to improve the quality of care for veterans, the VA has created a "Travel Nurse Corps" to enable VA nurses to travel and work throughout their medical system.

"VA is committed to putting health care facilities closer to veterans," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. "The Travel Nurse Corps will make it easier to bring our world-class health care professionals closer to veterans, too. And it will make it easier for us to shift personnel during times of crisis."

The Travel Nurse Corps, headquartered at the Phoenix VA Health Care System, is beginning as a three-year pilot program. Initially, it will place as many as 75 nurses at VA medical centers across the country. The goals of the program are to improve recruitment, decrease turnover of experienced nurses and maintain high standards of patient care.

Under the program, participating

nurses may be temporarily assigned to distant medical centers and clinics to help nursing staffs that have vacancies, to reduce wait times or the reliance upon contractors, or to maintain high-skill services and procedures.

The VA has also announced plans to create a Rural Health Care Advisory Committee to enhance VA services to veterans in rural areas. The Travel Nurse Corps will work with this national VA panel to support VA health care in rural areas.

The program is also designed to establish a potential pool for national emergencies and serve as a model for an expanded VA travel corps with nurses with varying specialties. The program is designed to reduce the use of contracted nurses, preserving resources to be used elsewhere to care for veterans.

To learn more, go to <http://www.travelnurse.va.gov>, email travelnurse@va.gov or call (866) 664-1030 or, in Phoenix, (602) 200-2398.

When the VA takes the care to you

VA to pilot remote benefits delivery program

FORT HARRISON, MT — Rural Montana veterans have easier access to VA benefits information and assistance through an innovative, first-of-its-kind, remote benefits delivery pilot program using videoconferencing technology and staffing support.

This new video conferencing program, along with VA staff and Valley Veterans Service Center (VVSC) volunteers, will provide face-to-face assistance to veterans who don't live near the Fort Harrison VA regional benefits office. Located in Hamilton, VVSC is a grass-roots organization run by volunteers to assist veterans in Southwestern Montana.

With the help of a trained volunteer, a veteran will

be able to go to the VVSC to conduct a videoconference with Ft Harrison VA regional office staff to address their benefits and claims needs. VVSC will schedule appointments with veterans on Fridays during normal business hours.

Last year, VA spent more than \$312 million on behalf of the state's 100,000 veterans and their families. About 16,000 veterans and their Families received disability compensation, pension and other related VA benefits, totaling more than \$154 million annually.

For more information, go to <http://www.va.gov> or call 1-800-827-1000.

New program brings ACAP services to your computer

Retired Soldiers can access the services of the Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP) right at your computer with ACAP Express. The Army Human Resources Command launched the new web-based service to improve access to ACAP services. *ACAP Express* lets you use the Internet to register for ACAP Services, schedule a wide range of classes, and use online tools to create resumes and cover letters.

Previously these services were only available once you scheduled them in-person at an installation ACAP office. You can now go online at any time, from any location, to <https://www.acapexpress.army.mil>, log in using AKO login, then schedule appointments for all services offered at the ACAP Center. To use the website, you must have a valid Army Knowledge Online (AKO) account and know your username and password. However, you do **not** need to use a CAC (Common Access Card) to access the website's features. You can use *ACAP Express* from the home,

office or anywhere else that allows an Internet connection.

ACAP services include:

- √ Department of Labor Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Employment Workshops
- √ Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits briefings and Disabled Transition Assistance Program (DTAP) briefings.
- √ Classes on resume writing, federal job applications, interviewing, job fair preparation, benefits and salary negotiation, financial planning, and Internet job searches.

ACAP has offices at most Army installations. A complete listing of ACAP Centers can be found on the *ACAP Express* website as well as the Army's public ACAP website at www.acap.army.mil. Contact your installation ACAP office for questions regarding *ACAP Express* or any other ACAP services. Note: While Family members of retired Soldiers are eligible for ACAP services and ACAP online, they are not eligible for ACAP Express.



DoD is looking for volunteers for Civilian Language Corps

WASHINGTON – Uncle Sam wants skilled speakers of Russian, Mandarin Chinese, Swahili or any other of 10 “critical languages,” to join a Defense Department pilot program designed to build a cadre of trained linguists.

By 2010, the National Language Service Corps hopes to amass a pool of 1,000 civilian language experts, willing to volunteer their foreign tongues on behalf of the United States if an immediate national need arises.

“The concept of the language corps really appeared because there was a recognition that there’s simply no way the federal government — or for that matter, state or local governments — can ever

plan and program their work force to address all the language issues that might come up,” said Robert O. Slater, Director of the National Security Education Program, which administers NLSC.

“We’ve recognized in the past five to 10 years that language skills are a difficult commodity to find in the United States,” he said. “The concept of a corps would be one that identifies this kind of expertise and warehouses it, because we never know when we’ll need it; we never know what disaster will strike.”

To shore up foreign language gaps within the U.S. government, the Defense Department will establish an elite community of

speakers — known as the “dedicated pool” — and assign linguistic units to specific government agencies. In addition, the current U.S.-wide dearth of organized critical linguists would be filled by the “national pool,” consisting of a broader array of talent to be called upon during times of need.

The Pentagon has begun working with Congress on establishing a budget for language corps recruiting, training and compensation for volunteers called to serve, Slater said.

U.S. citizens interested in volunteering or who want more information should call 1-888-Say-NLSC (729-6572) or visit the NLSC Web site.