

Disabled veterans may face skirmishes for some VA benefits

By Jan Warner and Jan Collins, Special to the Times

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Q: My father, a World War II veteran, is 86 years old, and my mother is 83. As my parents aged and talk turned to nursing homes, Dad was of the unshakable opinion that Veterans Affairs would take care of them.

Dad had a stroke this year and required six weeks of hospitalization and rehabilitation. He is nearly blind, his memory comes and goes, and he can't be left alone. Mom and I realized that she could not care for him at home given her own health problems.

My parents' total monthly income is less than \$1,200. They have the modest home where they have lived for 50 years, a 15-year-old car, and a little more than \$10,000 in the bank.

Figuring that Dad must be right about VA benefits, I began researching. I have never received more misinformation and disinformation:

Each representative I talked to gave me different information about the program's resource and income limits. To me, the application was a maze.

I went to a lawyer for help but was told that it is a federal crime for a lawyer to help clients complete the VA application or to charge a fee to assist clients in getting such benefits.

I finally figured it out for my parents and got them qualified. But why does the VA keep its programs for disabled seniors so confusing?

A: Your question about the special Veterans Affairs pension program known as "Aid and Attendance" echoes similar requests we have received from readers throughout the nation.

While our limited space does not allow us to attempt to explain the qualification criteria of "A and A," we can lead you to resources that may help.

Generally, if the veteran and spouse require regular help with eating, bathing, dressing, undressing or using the toilet, and if the asset and income levels are met, monetary benefits may be available through the VA.

Depending on the circumstances, patients in nursing homes and even assisted-living facilities may qualify.

Unfortunately, many families with veterans or surviving spouses who need money to help care for ailing loved ones don't apply for this program because they don't know about it.

Qualification for this benefit does not depend on service-connected injuries, and most veterans who need this help will qualify. Aid and Attendance can help pay for care in a nursing home or assisted-living facility.

Depending on income and other factors, a veteran is eligible for up to \$1,519 per month, a couple for up to \$1,801, and a surviving spouse, up to \$976.

The current asset limit is \$80,000, excluding the home and vehicles.

Taking the next step: The best resource we have found is Veteran Aid, which can be found at www.veteranaid.org.

Jan Warner is a member of the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys; Jan Collins is editor of the Business and Economic Review, published by the University of South Carolina. Write to them on www.nextsteps.net.
