

VOLUNTEER TRANSPORTATION NETWORK (VTN)

1. REASON FOR ISSUE. This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook defines the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Volunteer Transportation Network (VTN) and its relationship to a VHA facility.

2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES. This is a complete revision of VHA Handbook 1620.2; the major changes refer to:

- a. Providing oversight.
- b. Ensuring that a security background check and a safe driving record check is completed.
- c. Conducting an annual review of documentation.
- d. Deleting references to "parallel the standards of wage-grade van drivers."

3. RELATED ISSUES. VHA Directive 1620 and VHA Handbook 1620.1

4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE. The Voluntary Service Office (10C2) is responsible for the contents of this Handbook. Questions may be addressed to 202-273-8952.

5. RECISSION. VHA Handbook 1620.2, dated May 2, 2001, is rescinded.

6. RECERTIFICATION. This VHA Handbook is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working day of May 2012.

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VOLUNTEER TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook defines the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Volunteer Transportation Network (VTN) and its relationship to a VHA facility.

2. BACKGROUND

a. Changes in the level of funding for the Beneficiary Travel program led the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to accept alternative options for transportation of eligible veterans seeking VA services. VTN was established to provide needed transportation for veterans seeking services from a VA facility and/or an authorized facility. VTN guidelines permit volunteer participation in providing transportation to veterans using a volunteer's privately-owned conveyance or a government-owned vehicle, including donated vehicles, county vehicles, and DAV Department (State) or Chapter (local) vehicles.

b. Since 1987, the DAV, with the support of VA Voluntary Service (VAVS), has staffed and funded a nationwide DAV volunteer-based transportation network. In some instances, DAV Departments and/or Chapters have donated vehicles to VA medical facilities. The DAV established and funded the position of Hospital Service Coordinator (HSC), an individual who is a VAVS volunteer and who assumes the responsibility for coordination of the DAV VTN. The HSC coordinates with VA staff to ensure the availability and utilization of the full range of community transportation resources to meet the needs of the local facility.

3. AUTHORITY

VA authorizes volunteer participation in providing transportation to veterans who are seeking VA services or benefits, and to accompanying caregivers, or service animals, if the caregivers' or service animals' presence is medically indicated (see Title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) 111(h)).

4. VOLUNTEER TRANSPORTATION NETWORK (VTN)

The VTN is designed to provide transportation services to veterans seeking benefits at VA facilities, including Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) offices, and who have no other means of transportation. Volunteer transportation services consist of, but are not limited to:

- a. Private vehicles;
- b. DAV Department or Chapter vehicles;
- c. Public transportation;
- d. Contracted transportation; and

- e. Government-owned vehicles, including donated vehicles and county vehicles.

5. SCOPE

a. VA medical center staffs are encouraged to establish VTNs and/or cooperate with DAV representatives and other organizations to provide assistance, within available resources, in the development, implementation, and operation of a VTN that meets the needs of their facility.

b. An HSC or Volunteer Coordinator must be in place and registered as a VAVS volunteer before the VTN can become operational. Space accommodations for the position may be determined locally.

c. The VA facility Director assigns program responsibility to Voluntary Service, which uses the following instructions as guidance for implementing the program.

(1) Facilities and/or Veterans Integrated Services Networks (VISNs) without an existing VTN are strongly encouraged to establish a task group to determine the transportation needs of eligible beneficiaries, research existing transportation services, and analyze potential support from voluntary organizations and individuals. The task group needs to be composed of representatives from Health Administration Service (HAS) or an equivalent program office, Social Work Service, Voluntary Service, DAV, and other services and/or service organizations, as deemed appropriate.

(2) Appropriate HAS and Voluntary Service personnel are to collaborate with the DAV HSC or VTN coordinator in establishing local procedures to schedule transportation to meet the needs of the veteran patient. *NOTE: The HSC or Volunteer Coordinator assumes coordination of the VTN.*

(3) Linkage needs to be established between the DAV HSC and the VA Medical Center Community Service Coordinator to ensure the availability and utilization of the full range of community transportation resources.

(4) Using Appendix A as a model, each facility and/or VISN must develop a policy memorandum governing the acceptance and use of transportation volunteers.

(5) A training program for volunteers who accept assignments as volunteer drivers and other assignments as deemed necessary, needs to be established. Training programs need to be held in locations most convenient to the volunteers being trained (see App. B).

(6) A facility and/or VISN with a VTN is required to administer physical examinations and health screenings for volunteer drivers at a minimum of every 4 years on a regular basis, at the local facility and/or VISN.

NOTE: Guidance for volunteers transporting veterans in privately-owned vehicles is found in Appendix D.

6. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE VOLUNTARY SERVICE PROGRAM MANAGER (VPM)

The responsibilities of the Voluntary Service Program Manager (VPM) include, but are not limited to:

a. Assisting in recruiting transportation volunteers and providing oversight in ensuring:

(1) Volunteers have proof of a safe driving record and a valid driver's license. Current automobile insurance or private liability insurance is required for all VTN drivers. Proof is to be verified by the VPM. This documentation is kept in the volunteer's file in the Voluntary Service Office. The volunteer must inform the HSC, or coordinator of any changes in his or her driving record, insurance, or any other pertinent changes in information throughout the volunteer's term of service.

(2) Volunteers complete and sign the waiver of compensation on VA Form 10-7055, Application for Voluntary Service, or facsimile.

(3) Volunteers complete a volunteer orientation with the VPM, or designee.

(4) All appropriate training required is completed.

(5) Volunteers' vehicles are in good working condition, have the proper vehicle registration, and pass any applicable state inspection when using a personal vehicle to transport VA patients.

b. Interviewing, orienting, and scheduling the necessary job-specific training for volunteer drivers.

c. Ensuring that the appropriate security background check and safe driving record check of the volunteer driver is secured, prior to assigning the potential volunteer driver any driving duties.

d. Maintaining volunteer files and establishing a mechanism by which each volunteer's credentials, training, and health records can be updated regularly.

e. Maintaining a record of the volunteers' hours.

f. Bestowing appropriate recognition on volunteers for the hours of service contributed.

g. Reporting significant events to the VAVS Office (10C2), i.e., major accidents and incidents, and transportation network concerns and issues which have not been resolved at the local level.

h. Ensuring that a Volunteer Position Description is on file and is communicated to the volunteer driver.

- i. Ensuring that annual safe driver training is provided to all volunteer drivers.
- j. Ensuring an annual inspection of the volunteer driver 's documents to ensure that these documents are current, i.e. driver's license, proof of current insurance, etc.
- k. Ensuring that physicals are obtained for all volunteer drivers, at a minimum of every 4 years, and that all health information is documented in the volunteer's folder.
- l. Ensuring that additional annual training occurs in patient safety and the handling of emergency situations, and that all training is documented in the volunteer's folder at the local facility.
- m. Creating a VHA local policy regarding the VTN specific to that facility and referencing VHA Handbook 1620.02.

7. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE HOSPITAL SERVICE COORDINATOR (HSC) OR VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

The HSC or Volunteer Coordinator is responsible for:

- a. Setting up a VTN Office and making sure that it is adequately staffed.
- b. Coordinating the volunteers assigned to the VTN.
- c. Keeping adequate records of the VTN. This includes keeping a record of the:
 - (1) Names of volunteers;
 - (2) Individual volunteer hours;
 - (3) Mileage traveled;
 - (4) Date, time, place, and names of veterans transported; and
 - (5) Incidents and/or accidents.
- d. Coordinating the VTN activities with the Chief, Voluntary Service to ensure:
 - (1) VA recognition of all volunteers involved as transportation network VAVS volunteers, and
 - (2) The transportation network VAVS volunteer's hours are recorded as official VAVS hours.
- e. Ensuring that all transportation provided by volunteers has been approved by the designated VA employee as an official VAVS activity, if other than the VAVS assignment of patient transport.

f. Keeping the VA Medical Center VAVS representative informed of the activities of their organization volunteers in the VTN.

g. Recruiting transportation volunteers who meet the criteria outlined in subparagraph 6a(1) through 6a(5).

h. Publicizing the VTN and the need for more volunteers.

i. Working with the DAV National Service Officer (NSO) and/or the DAV Department supervisor to establish a budget for the VTN (for the HSC, if applicable).

j. Reporting office activities to the DAV Department, DAV National Headquarters and the Medical Center Voluntary Service Office on a monthly basis, or more often if warranted, i.e., major accidents and/or incidents, workload, transportation network concerns, and issues that have not been resolved at the local level.

8. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE TRANSPORTATION VOLUNTEER DRIVER

The Transportation Volunteer Driver is responsible for:

a. Providing Voluntary Service and DAV with proof of a safe driving record, a valid driver's license, and current automobile or private insurance.

b. Notifying the HSC of any changes related to the safe driving record or insurance.

c. Receiving required training and required volunteer physicals and health screenings.

d. Carrying out the assignment as outlined by the Volunteer Position Description.

d. Reporting to the HSC, or Volunteer Coordinator, the following:

(1) Name(s) and number of patients transported;

(2) Miles driven;

(3) Volunteer hours; and

(4) Any significant events, i.e., traffic accidents and problems encountered while on duty.

9. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS (DAV) HSC

The DAV HSC is responsible for working in close cooperation with the VPM in providing oversight and coordination of the VTN, and is instrumental in helping recruit volunteer drivers for the VA medical facility. When possible, this individual is stationed at a VA medical facility.

**SAMPLE OF FACILITY MEMORANDUM FOR TRANSPORTATION VOLUNTEER
DRIVERS**

Date:

To:

SUBJ: Transportation Volunteer Drivers

1. Transportation Volunteer Drivers are regularly scheduled volunteers whose assignment is specifically stated as providing transportation to and from Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities for veterans in the community who seek services or benefits from VA. Transportation Volunteer Drivers may utilize their own vehicles in the process of escorting veterans to and from VA facilities, and provide this service without compensation (WOC) from VA, the veteran patient, and/or a service organization (with the possible exception of out-of-pocket expenses).

2. Transportation Volunteer Drivers must meet the following criteria:

a. Provide proof of safe driving record and a valid driver's license. Current motor vehicle bodily-injury liability and property damage insurance, or personal insurance is required for all Volunteer Transportation Network (VTN) drivers. This documentation must be reviewed annually by the Voluntary Service Office to ensure all documentation is current, and copies must be kept in the volunteer's personnel file in the Voluntary Service Office. The volunteer must inform the Hospital Service Coordinator (HSC) of any moving violations, traffic accidents, expiration of automobile insurance, and/or any other pertinent information throughout the volunteer's term of service.

b. Complete and sign the waiver of compensation on VA Form 10-7055, Application for Voluntary Service.

c. Pass driver physicals and health screenings as required by current Veterans Health Administration (VHA) policy.

d. Complete a volunteer orientation with the Voluntary Service Program Manager (VPM), or designee.

e. Receive all annual training required by the assignment.

f. Provide a vehicle in good working condition that has the proper vehicle registration and has passed any applicable state inspection when using a personal vehicle to transport VA patients.

g. Pass the appropriate security background check.

3. Specific assignments may be made to volunteer drivers by the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) HSC, or designee, or the VPM. VA staff may contact the HSC Office when transportation is required. Every attempt must be made by the HSC to make the necessary

arrangements as soon as possible. At times, VTN Drivers may not be available and service to the veteran might be delayed. In such instances, veterans who require transportation assistance may personally contact local DAV chapters for assistance in making suitable arrangements. Appropriate personnel must submit the names of the veterans to the Beneficiary Travel Clerk upon arrival on station. Veterans utilizing the VTN are not eligible for travel funds.

4. Transportation Volunteer Drivers are considered “WOC employees” within the purview of the Federal Tort Claims Act (FTCA). Therefore, while they are acting in the scope of their employment, they are afforded the protection of FTCA. This coverage extends only to the period in which they are performing the assignment. For example, a volunteer driver who makes a side trip to the bank or laundry is operating outside the scope of their assignment and are, therefore, not covered under FTCA. For this reason, it is required that all Transportation Volunteer Drivers carry adequate motor vehicle bodily-injury liability and property damage insurance, or personal insurance, regardless if they drive a privately-owned vehicle during their VA assignment or not. It is also required that Transportation Volunteer Drivers refrain from making side trips while in the performance of their assignment unless emergency situations dictate otherwise, and that they take the most direct route to and from the VA medical facility.

5. Transportation Volunteer Drivers must record their hours on the assignment sheet. They may record the time from the beginning of the assignment until completion of the assignment.

6. Rescission: None.

7. Follow-up Responsibility: Voluntary Service Program Manager (VPM) (135).

Medical Center Director
Distribution

TRAINING OUTLINE FOR VOLUNTEER DRIVERS

1. Purpose of the Volunteer Transportation Network

- a. Disabled American Veterans (DAV) leadership role,
- b. Eligibility of veterans needing transportation, and
- c. Unique needs of local facility.

2. Volunteer Involvement and Benefits

- a. Driver qualifications,
- b. Personal insurance requirements,
- c. Protection by Federal Tort Claim Act (FTCA),
- d. Health benefits,
- e. Volunteer meal coverage,
- f. Credit for volunteer hours (awards),
- g. Identification,
- h. Local parking regulations and locations, and
- i. Job-specific training.

3. Assignment Description for the Volunteer Transportation Driver. The Volunteer Transportation Driver must:

- a. Meet appropriate personnel qualifications and physical requirements (the volunteer must meet both);
- b. Know the hours required by assignment;
- c. Know the volunteer's responsibilities, including the need to contact local authorities in case of emergency;
- d. Understand the need for using the direct route when on assignment;
- e. Understand the recording of information (see App. C);

- f. Undertake the supervision of assignments; and
- g. Understand the reasons for terminating the assignment and/or the volunteer. They include:

(1) Driving record (see Title 5 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Section 930.113, Motor Vehicle Operators);

(2) Health (5 CFR Section 339.201, Physical and Medical Qualifications);

(3) Complaints (5 CFR Section 930.113, Motor Vehicle Operators);

(4) Inappropriate use of vehicle; and

(5) Inappropriate conduct or behavior.

4. Specific Responsibilities of Volunteer Drivers

a. Valid automobile or personal insurance is required for all Volunteer Transportation Network (VTN) drivers, regardless if the vehicle is privately owned or not.

b. Valid driver's license.

c. Telephone availability.

d. A definite time availability.

e. Completed volunteer orientation, plus the training for this specific program.

f. Maintenance of accurate and complete trip reports.

g. A vehicle in good working condition that has passed an applicable state inspection, with the proper vehicle registration for the personal transport of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) patients.

h. Successful completion of physical or health screening.

i. Passage of appropriate security background check.

5. Additional Training Needs

a. Familiarity with the area assigned for pick-up of patients.

b. Knowledge of how to communicate and/or deal with disabled veterans and their families.

- c. Appropriate use of vehicles to:
 - (1) Train for wheelchair transport and other devices (e.g., oxygen), if applicable.
 - (2) Train for emergency procedures, including:
 - (a) Cell phone usage,
 - (b) Availability of emergency numbers to call,
 - (c) Location of local emergency medical facilities along route,
 - (d) Location and usage of fire extinguisher,
 - (e) Location and usage of road hazard signs, and
 - (f) Other procedures to be determined (TBD) locally.
- d. Scheduled appointments.
- e. Non-scheduled appointments.
- f. Patient activities.

6. Responsibilities of the Hospital Service Coordinator (HSC) or Volunteer Coordinator

- a. Coordinate the program with appropriate services;
- b. Provide all volunteer drivers with the HSC's or Coordinator's name, office location, and telephone number;
- c. Receive the transportation request and determine the transportation eligibility of patient;
- d. Supervise all the volunteer transportation drivers;
- e. Contact the volunteer transportation driver and make the assignment;
- f. Provide funds for transportation, as needed, to indigent and/or needy patients;
- g. Assist the VA medical center and the DAV in providing publicity for the program;
- h. Prepare and distribute all reports to Department and National DAV Headquarters; and
- i. Report all incidents and accidents to the designated VA or DAV staff, as appropriate.

SAMPLE OF A TRANSPORTATION VOLUNTEER CONTACT SHEET

1. DATE OF CONTACT: _____
2. NAME OF VETERAN: _____
3. ADDRESS OF VETERAN: _____
4. SPECIAL DIRECTIONS: _____
5. TELEPHONE NUMBER OF VETERAN: _____
6. PICK UP TIME: _____
7. DATE OF APPOINTMENT: _____
8. PLACE OF APPOINTMENT: _____
9. FOR FUTHER INFORMATION CALL: _____
10. EMERGENCY NUMBER: _____
11. VOLUNTEER ASSIGNED: _____
12. TELEPHONE NUMBER OF VOLUNTEER: _____
13. DATE OF CONTACT: _____
14. ASSIGNMENT COMPLETED: DATE: _____ TIME: _____
15. SPEEDOMETER READING OUT: _____
16. SPEEDOMETER READING IN: _____
17. TOTAL MILES: _____ TOTAL HOURS: _____
18. COMPLETED BY: _____
19. RECEIVED BY HSC OR OTHER SUPERVISOR: _____

VOLUNTEERS TRANSPORTING PATIENTS IN CARS OWNED BY VOLUNTEERS

1. The potential for liability on the part of the Government arising from permitting volunteers to use their privately-owned vehicles to transport Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) patients depends upon whether or not the volunteer is deemed to be an employee of the Government and acting within the scope of volunteer's employment. Where these requirements are satisfied, the Government must be liable under the Federal Tort Claim Act (FTCA), Title 28 United States Code (U.S.C.) Subsection 2671-2680, for damage to, or loss of, property, personal injury, or wrongful death caused by the negligent or wrongful act or omission of the employee. FTCA defines "employees of the government" to include persons acting on behalf of a Federal agency in an official capacity, temporarily in the service of the United States (U.S.), whether with or without compensation (WOC). Volunteer workers serving on a WOC basis need to be regarded as employees of the Government within the purview of the FTCA.
2. Moreover, by virtue of 28 U.S.C., Section 2679(b) through (e), the remedy against the Government under the FTCA is exclusive of any other action or proceeding by reason of the same subject matter against the employee driver whose act or omission gives rise to a claim. When such an employee is sued individually, whether in Federal or State court, the Attorney General, after determination that the employee was acting within the scope of employment, certifies such status to the Federal court, which thereafter dismisses the individual from the suit, substituting the U.S. as the sole Federal defendant. If the suit is initially filed in State court, this dismissal or substitution process occurs after the action is removed by the Attorney General to the Federal Court. Employees who operate Government motor vehicles, or privately-owned vehicles on Government business, need to consider carrying private liability insurance to cover the situation in which the employee may not be afforded the protection of the Act. In other words, an employee would not be covered under the Act if the employee has an accident while driving a vehicle not in the scope of employment, such as when deviating from a generally traveled route in order to pick up personal laundry or to perform other personal errands. Additionally, as a rule, it is held that an employee is not within the scope of employment while driving between the employee's home and place of duty. In conformity with the provisions of the Act, the final decision as to immunity rests with the Attorney General of the U.S. and, ultimately, the Federal Court; therefore, personal liability insurance might be a prudent investment to insure adequate protection to the individual employee.
3. Regarding injuries to employees in the course of their duties, the provisions of the Federal Employees' Compensation Act (FECA), 5 U.S.C. Section 8101, et seq., are applicable to VA volunteers. The Act provides for compensation and medical services for the disability or death of an employee resulting from personal injury sustained incident to the employee's service. The determination that the injury or death was "incident to service" must be made by the Department of Labor (DOL) or, ultimately, by the courts.
4. Finally, the Military Personnel and Civilian Employees Claims Act of 1964, as amended, authorizes the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, or designee, to settle and pay claims for not more than \$40,000 made by an employee for damage to, or loss of, property incident to the employee's service. Volunteers are eligible claimants under the statute (see VA Manual M-02-1, subpar.

17.03a (2)). However, no claim is to be paid if the loss or damage was caused by the employee's own negligence. If the employee has a right to recovery for the loss or damage from a carrier or insurer, a claim for such recovery must be filed before the claim against the U.S. is to be considered. The procedure in VA regulations must be followed (see Title 38 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Subsection 14.664-669). The circumstances are very narrow under which damage to, or loss of, a privately-owned motor vehicle may be held to be incident to service and thus compensable. The motor vehicle must have been required to be used for official Government business, not including travel between quarters and place of duty, parking, or vehicles incident to such travel, or use of the vehicle for the convenience of the owner.