



Written testimony provided to the New York State Assembly Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Diane Darbyshire, Senior Policy Analyst

LeadingAge New York

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LeadingAge NY represents over 400 not-for-profit and public providers of long term and post-acute care (LTPAC), aging services and senior housing, as well as provider-sponsored managed long term care (MLTC) plans. Veterans are eligible for many different benefits, but often are not informed on what they are entitled to. LeadingAge NY would like to provide input concerning the budget and programs for veterans and the State's efforts to keep veterans alert of services and benefits available.

Some senior veterans and their spouses living in adult care facilities (ACFs) and assisted living entities are eligible for Aid and Attendance benefits, which is administered by the Veteran's Affairs Agency. Aid and Attendance is a benefit that can support people who do not have sufficient funds to offset some of the cost of living in an ACF or assisted living setting. Unfortunately, the processing of those applications has been very slow, delaying access to the needed benefit.

Residents of ACF/assisted living settings eligible for Aid and Attendance benefit from the assistance of the facility's case manager in assisting them to submit an application for the benefit, if the resident needs or desires this assistance. Unfortunately, even in those instances where a complete application has been submitted, the application process can take up to *a year and a half*. While the benefit is paid retroactively, the resident must rely on the facility to subsidize them during the process. Not all facilities can or will do this.

Many ACF/assisted living residents have dementia, and this further delays the distribution of Aid and Attendance funds. An in-person assessment of the individual must be conducted by the Veteran's Affairs Agency, and that can take a great deal of time to schedule and complete. While this process may be implemented to ensure the integrity of the application, it delays access to the needed benefit. There are likely other ways to verify the information and the fact that the person does indeed have dementia.

In addition, we have heard the very unfortunate stories of applicant's passing away during the application process, and the application being dismissed as a result. In the circumstance where an ACF or assisted living facility has been subsidizing the resident until the retroactive Aid and Attendance payment is issued, the facility loses thousands of dollars.

We have also been told that applicants have been unable to connect with an individual regarding their application, and calls are not returned. We have also heard reports that applications—which are difficult to compile--have been lost by the Veteran's Affairs agency.

While the administration of the Aid and Attendance benefit is a federal issue, there are real impacts felt here in New York as a result of these problems. First and foremost, veterans go without the benefit that they need and lawfully deserve. As noted above, ACF and assisted living providers that have extended themselves to serve veterans have had to subsidize them, and risk losing thousands of dollars.

This is a veteran's issue, and a health care issue. If low-income veterans cannot access the services they need, when they need them, they will unnecessarily have to go to a nursing home, on Medicaid, at cost to the state. If someone is in the community and needs these services, *they can't wait for over a year to receive them.*

We urge the State to work with our federal partners to improve the Aid and Attendance application process to make it simpler, and ensure our veterans can access the benefits they deserve in a timely manner. Our veterans deserve better.