

# Avery Veterans Corner

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## Crucial VA changes

If you are a wartime veteran, or a family member of a wartime veteran, you have probably heard conflicting information regarding proposed changes to the eligibility rules for the Aid & Attendance Pension (A&A) offered through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). This is a brief summary of the eligibility requirements for the current A&A rules, and an update on the proposed rule changes.

### Eligibility for the Aid & Attendance Pension

A&A is a tax-free monthly benefit paid to wartime veterans or their spouses/dependents. The benefit ranges from \$8,000 to \$34,000/year, depending on a number of factors, including the following eligibility requirements:

1. Service: applicants must be “wartime” veterans (or their spouse/dependent). “Wartime” means at least 90 consecutive days of active duty service, at least one day of which was during a recognized wartime period.
2. Health: generally, applicants must be “disabled” (i.e. they must be 65 or older and require assistance with at least two “activities of daily living”) – regardless of whether they are at home or in a healthcare facility;
3. Income: applicants’ income must be significantly reduced by qualified recurring monthly medical expenses; and
4. Assets: applicants may not have significant assets.

On Jan. 23, 2015, the VA published a proposal to significantly change the rules regarding eligibility for A&A benefits. Proposed changes included:

- Establishing a “bright line” rule for net worth limitations;
- Establishing a three-year “look back” period for asset transfers prior to application for benefits;
- Imposition of a penalty period (of ineligibility for benefits), with respect to any improper transfers of assets during the “look back” period; and
- Limitations on qualifying medical expenses.

The proposal was largely aimed at counteracting perceived abuses of the program (i.e. applicants sheltering significant assets in order to qualify for the benefit). However, the statistics do not support these concerns. 2015 U.S. Census data shows approximately 19 million military veterans alive in 2014. VA utilization data from 2012 shows only 315,000 recipients of A&A benefits.

In other words, only two percent of veterans receive the A&A benefit.

For questions concerning veteran's benefits and to obtain needed forms call Georgia Henry, Avery County Veterans Service Office, at (828) 733-8211.

Comments and suggestions on the Veterans' Corner or Disabled American Veterans can be emailed to Mike Halus at [averycountyveterans@gmail.com](mailto:averycountyveterans@gmail.com) or call (828) 260-0620.