


Avery Veterans Corner

 By Mike Halus Special to The AJT

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Aid and Attendance Benefit

Veterans and survivors who are eligible for a VA pension and require the aid and attendance of another person, or are housebound, may be eligible for additional monetary payment. These benefits are paid in addition to monthly pension, and they are not paid without eligibility for a pension. These additional benefits range from \$1,100 — \$2,800 a month. For a veteran to qualify for Aid & Attendance, his/her household assets cannot exceed \$80,000 (\$40,000 if single), and this figure does not include a personal residence, a reasonable amount of land on which it sits, personal property and personal use automobiles.

Many otherwise eligible veterans don't apply for benefits believing they can't qualify. However, an estate planning tool — an irrevocable trust — can allow a veteran or his spouse to transfer assets so they can fall within the household asset requirement.

An irrevocable trust is a type of trust that by design can't be modified, amended, changed or revoked. It is used to achieve a variety of estate planning goals by removing property from the trustmaker's estate and providing asset protection for surviving spouses, descendants, and other beneficiaries.

The VA Aid & Attendance benefit does not have a long "look back" period, unlike Medicaid, which has a look back period of five years. What this means is that the period that the VA takes into consideration for any assets transferred into a trust prior to submitting an application for benefits is very short, unlike Medicaid which, in determining eligibility, takes into account any assets transferred within the last five years.

One aspect that can be included in the trust is special needs language. This language allows the trust to supplement any government benefits that the beneficiary may be receiving or could be eligible for, such as VA benefits, without disqualifying the beneficiary from the government benefits just because they are the beneficiary of a trust.

For example, a veteran may be receiving monthly Aid & Attendance benefits that cover 12 hours per week of home care. But the veteran may really need 40 hours per week of home care. The special needs language in the trust allows the beneficiary (the veteran) to withdraw enough money from the trust each month to cover the additional hours of care.

For more information about the eligibility and qualification process, contact your VSO or VA at 1-(800)-827-1000, or call Senior Helpers at (361) 894-8901.

For Internet assistance, go to your local county library.

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 or call (828) 260-0620.