

How to Obtain Coverage of Emergency Care for Veterans in Non-VA Facilities

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has the authority to pay for emergency healthcare provided to veterans in non-VA facilities. The VA will pay for emergency care provided in a non-VA facility if the VA “authorizes” such care shortly after the care is provided, or, for “unauthorized” care, if certain conditions are met.

(1) Payment of Authorized Services: The VA should grant authorization when (i) the care provided in the non-VA facility was for a medical emergency that posed a serious threat to your life or health, and (ii) a VA facility was “not feasibly available,” considering how far you would have had to travel and the urgency of your medical condition.

**** Request Authorization within 72 hours of Admission ****

Whenever possible, you should request authorization from the VA within 72 hours after admission to the non-VA facility (even if you have already been discharged). To request authorization, call the Fee Basis Department of the local VA medical center. Keep detailed notes of the telephone request, and send a follow up letter to the VA.

If a request for authorization is made within 72 hours of admission and approved, that authorization will be considered a “prior authorization.” If a request is made after 72 hours and approved, that authorization will only cover expenses incurred after the request was made.

(2) Payment of Unauthorized Services: Even if you did not get authorization, the VA can pay for, or reimburse the cost of, emergency services provided in a non-VA facility. The rules and timeframes for payment of “unauthorized” services are different depending on whether the care was for a service-connected or non-service-connected disability.

**** Request Payment within 90 Days of Discharge ****

If the emergency care was for a non-service-connected disability, you have to request payment or reimbursement within 90 days of discharge from the non-VA facility. To request payment, call the Fee Basis Department of the local VA medical center or 1-877-222-VETS. A VA representative will help you gather and submit any documents needed. If the emergency care was for a service-connected disability, you have to request payment within 2 years from the date the care was provided.

Certain conditions must be met for the VA to pay for unauthorized medical care in a non-VA facility (see 38 CFR § 17.120 & 38 CFR § 17.1002). A VA Fee Basis representative can explain these conditions to you.

**** Request both methods of payment!** When you are admitted into the non-VA facility, request authorization. If authorization is denied or unclear, then request payment of unauthorized services once you are discharged from the facility.

Appeal Rights: If your claim for payment of authorized or unauthorized medical services is denied by the VA, you have the right to appeal this decision. For free legal help with your appeal, call the Pennsylvania Health Law Project’s HELPLINE at **1-800-274-3258**.