

**VISUAL IMPAIRMENT AND ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY PROFESSIONALS  
SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM**

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive is issued to implement the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Visual Impairment and Orientation and Mobility Professionals Scholarship Program (VIOMPSP). **AUTHORITY:** Title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) 7501 through 7505.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CHANGES:** This Directive implements and sets forth VHA policy for VIOMPSP.
- 3. RELATED ISSUES:** VIOMPSP was established by Congress on May 5, 2010, under Section 302 of Public Law 111-163, The Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Service Act of 2010. It is codified at 38 U.S.C. 7501 through 7505.
- 4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** Healthcare Talent Management (10A2A4) is responsible for the contents of this VHA Directive. Questions may be referred to Scholarship & Clinical Education Services at 504-565-4901.
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** None.
- 6. RECERTIFICATION:** This VHA Directive is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working day of 2016.

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## VISUAL IMPAIRMENT AND ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY PROFESSIONALS SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

**1. PURPOSE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive implements the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Visual Impairment and Orientation and Mobility Professionals Scholarship Program (VIOMPSP). **AUTHORITY:** Title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) 7501 through 7505. **NOTE:** *The Secretary of Veterans Affairs has delegated authority to the Under Secretary for Health to issue regulations implementing VIOMPSP, 38 U.S.C. 7501 through 7505, in accordance with 38 U.S.C. 501, 512, and 7421. The Under Secretary for Health has delegated authority to implement and administer the requirements of VIOMPSP to the VHA Office of Workforce Management and Consulting.*

### 2. BACKGROUND

a. Congress established VIOMPSP on May 5, 2010, under Section 603 of Public Law 111-163, The Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Service Act of 2010. It is codified at 38 U.S.C. 7501 through 7505.

b. The purpose of VIOMPSP is to increase the supply of qualified blind rehabilitation specialists for VA and the Nation. VA competes with private sector organizations and other governmental agencies for scarce health care staff. VIOMPSP authorizes VA to provide for the payment of scholarship participant's tuition and allowable fees. Educational assistance, such as that afforded under VIOMPSP, is an excellent recruitment tool that can help VA in meeting its current and projected workforce needs for Blind Rehabilitation Specialists and Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialists for which recruitment and retention is difficult. VIOMPSP will help VA meet its need for qualified healthcare staff by obligating scholarship recipients to complete a service obligation at a VHA healthcare facility after graduation and licensure or certification.

**3. POLICY:** It is VA policy to establish and implement VIOMPSP. VHA will provide financial assistance to VIOMPSP participants in a program of study leading to a degree in orientation and mobility, low vision therapy, or a dual degree at an accredited (as determined by the Secretary) educational institution that is in a State.

### 4. RESPONSIBILITIES:

a. **VHA Workforce Management and Consulting (WMC) Office.** The Workforce Management and Consulting Office is responsible for allocating adequate resources to implement, manage, and administer VIOMPSP requirements.

(1) **Scholarships and Clinical Education.** The Director, Scholarships and Clinical Education, is responsible for implementing and managing VIOMPSP nationally. This includes, but is not limited to, policy development and implementation, funding allocation, program oversight, and program evaluation. Other specific responsibilities of the Director include:

(a) Ensuring annually, that participant selections and the number of scholarships awarded are determined using the VHA Workforce Succession and Strategic Plan, and are intended to assist in alleviating shortages, or anticipated shortages, of personnel in visual impairment or orientation and mobility programs at the national, Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN), and facility levels.

(b) Publicizing the scholarship program to educational institutions throughout the United States, with an emphasis on disseminating information to such institutions with high numbers of Hispanic students and to Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

(c) Publishing a Program Guide, which at a minimum includes a fair summary of a participant's rights, responsibilities, and liabilities.

(d) Establishing a Selection Committee in collaboration with the Office of Blind Rehabilitation Services, other subject matter experts, field/facility hiring officials, and program office staff.

(e) Reviewing and approving the Selection Committee's recommendations.

(f) Ensuring participants are informed of program mobility requirements and complete a mobility agreement upon scholarship acceptance.

(g) Administering funding for VIOMPSP, subject to the availability of appropriated funds for such purpose, and ensuring procedures are in place to account for how appropriated funds are obligated.

(h) Providing procedures for managing program data collection, maintenance, storage, and reporting.

(i) Monitoring participants to ensure applicable credentials are obtained in a minimal amount of time following graduation.

(j) Collaborating with local facilities to select, appoint, or assign participants under VA hiring guidelines, to a position for which the degree prepared the participant as soon as possible, but no later than 90 days after the date that the participant receives his or her degree, or the date the participant obtains any required applicable credentials, whichever is later.

(k) Notifying participants, when selected for a position to fulfill the VIOMPSP service obligation, of the work assignment and its location no later than 60 days before the date on which the participant must begin work.

(l) Monitoring and tracking participant service obligation completion.

(m) Processing requests for waiver or suspension of any obligation for service or payment incurred under VIOMPSP.

(n) Ensuring debt collection procedures are initiated if the individual fails to satisfy the requirements of the VIOMPSP Agreement.

(2) **(1) National Healthcare Recruitment Service.** The National Healthcare Recruitment Service is responsible for assisting HR Development, Retention and Policy in identifying anticipated workforce needs based on strategic workforce planning; participating in identifying and selecting high potential applicants; assisting participants within 6 months of graduation with identifying and preparing for suitable job placement; and collaborating with VHA facilities to identify placement opportunities for program participants. In addition, National Healthcare Recruitment Service is responsible for marketing and outreach strategies that target potential HPSP applicants. These strategies include implementing VHA national media marketing initiatives and publicizing the scholarship program to educational institutions throughout the United States.

(3) **Recruiting and Staffing Services (R&SS).** Human Resources and Staffing Services is responsible for assisting Scholarship & Clinical Education Services in developing and posting VIOMPSP program announcements via USAJOBS, accepting application packages, performing the initial screening of applicants, issuing certificates of eligibility, and performing background investigations for applicants recommended by the Selection Committee.

(4) **Finance and Business Operations Services (FBOS).** Finance and Business Operations Services is responsible for providing financial operations support in administering VIOMPSP budget allocations and processing payment obligations related to VIOMPSP participants.

b. **Office of Finance.** The Office of Finance is responsible for allocating adequate resources to support VIOMPSP requirements.

(1) **Financial Services Center.** The Financial Services Center is responsible for vendorizing VIOMPSP participants and educational institutions and timely processing participant tuition payments.

(2) **Office of Financial Business Operations.** The Office of Financial Business Operations, Fiscal Operations Service (047J) is responsible for obligating and processing certified invoices for VIOMPSP participants, issuing bills of collection, and forwarding unresolved participant debts to the Debt Management Center for final resolution.

(3) **Debt Management Center.** The Debt Management Center is responsible for collecting debts resulting from participation in VIOMPSP.

c. **Office of Patient Care Services.** The Office of Patient Care Services is responsible for assisting with implementation of VIOMPSP requirements. The Office of Blind Rehabilitation Services will assist WMC annually to ensure participant selections and the number of scholarships awarded are determined using the VHA Workforce Succession and Strategic Plan, and are intended to assist in alleviating shortages, or anticipated shortages, of personnel in visual

impairment or orientation and mobility programs at the national, VISN, and facility level. The Office of Blind Rehabilitation Services is responsible for:

- (1) assisting WMC annually in identifying the number of scholarship to be awarded;
- (2) identifying subject matter experts and field/facility hiring officials for selection committee membership;
- (3) participating on the VIOMPSP selection committee to identify and select high potential applicants;
- (4) assisting WMC with preparing participants within 6 months of graduation for suitable job placement; and
- (5) collaborating with WMC and VHA facilities to identify placement opportunities for program participants.

d. **Selection Committee.** The VIOMPSP selection committee will consist of a collaboration of subject matter experts, field/facility hiring officials, and program offices. The selection committees will:

- (1) assist in developing the selection criteria and guidelines for selecting scholarship participants at differing education or training levels;
- (2) review application packages and recommend primary applicants for final approval;
- (3) ensure selection of applicants are based on merit without regard to race, sex, color, national origin, disability, religion, age, sexual orientation, and status as a parent; and
- (4) ensure applicants recommended for selection meet all eligibility requirements, have demonstrated a high likelihood that they will be successful in completing their education and training, and that they will be successful in employment in such field.

e. **Facility Directors.** Facility Directors are responsible for working with WMC representatives and using VA hiring guidelines to select, appoint, or assign VIOMPSP participants once participants are eligible for selection, appointment, or assignment to a position in the occupation for which VIOMPSP prepared the participants. As soon as possible after participants meet eligibility requirements, Facility Directors will:

- (1) in the case of participants who are not full-time employees in the VHA, use VA hiring guidelines to select or appoint such participants as such employees; and
- (2) in the case of participants who are employees in the VHA but are not serving in positions for which such participants' course of education or training prepared such participants, use VA hiring guidelines to assign such participants to such positions.

f. **Human Resources Management Officers.** Human Resource Management (HRM) Officers will provide assistance in carrying out the provisions of Title 38 Code of Federal Regulations, Section 17.632. HRM officers are responsible for:

(1) assisting WMC and Facility Directors in identifying suitable positions and in selecting, assigning, or appointing VIOMPSP participants to such positions;

(2) ensuring a copy of the participant's *VIOMPSP Agreement* (VA Form 10-0491L) is entered in the employee's official personnel folder; and

(3) reporting to WMC any participants who fail to complete their required service obligation periods.

g. **Participant/Employee.** Individuals selected for participation in VIOMPSP are responsible for:

(1) reading, understanding, signing, and satisfying all requirements specified in the *VIOMPSP Agreement* (VA Form 10-0491L) and Program Guide;

(2) maintaining enrollment, attendance, and an acceptable level of academic standing as defined by the school and program for which the scholarship was awarded;

(3) reporting educational progress and expenses to program officials;

(4) informing WMC immediately of any change impacting the terms of the agreement;

(5) ensuring prior to any change, that the change complies with program criteria. **NOTE:** *Changes may require approval or pre-approval from WMC. Thus, the participant should notify WMC in advance of the change whenever possible, but in all cases notification should occur within 10 days of the change unless otherwise specified;*

(6) ensuring that VIOMPSP officials have access to educational or training institution official transcripts, and other information and documents required to assess the participant's academic standing, status, and progress;

(7) meeting or exceeding performance requirements for current VA position, if participant is a current VA employee;

(8) submitting the final official transcript containing the degree conferral date from the academic institution attended to WMC within 90 days of completing the academic program;

(9) obtaining applicable credentials within 180 days after degree conferral and becoming eligible for assignment or appointment to the position for which the VIOMPSP-sponsored education or training program prepared the participant;

(10) serving as a full-time VHA employee in position for which the VIOMPSP-sponsored education or training program prepared the participant for a period of three years, to be served

within the first six years a after the participant has completed such program and in a location determined by VA; and

(11) maintaining program eligibility requirements throughout participation in the program.

**5. REFERENCES**

- a. Public Law 111-163, The Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Service Act of 2010.
- b. Title 38 Code of Federal Regulations 17.600 through 17.636.
- c. Title 38 United States Code 501, 512, 7401, 7421, and 7501 through 7505.

**DRAFT**