

**EVALUATION AND TREATMENT OF FORMER PRISONERS OF WAR BY CARE  
AND BENEFITS TEAMS**

- 1. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES:** None.
- 2. RELATED ISSUES:** None.
- 3. POLICY OWNER:** The Executive Director, Care Management and Social Work Services (12CMSW), Office of Patient Care Services, is responsible for the content of this directive. Questions may be addressed to the National Director of Social Work at [vha12cmswcaremgmtswsection@va.gov](mailto:vha12cmswcaremgmtswsection@va.gov).
- 4. RESCISSIONS:** VHA Directive 1650, Special Care and Benefits Teams Evaluating or Treating Former Prisoners of War, dated July 31, 2018, is rescinded.
- 5. RECERTIFICATION:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) directive is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working day of July 2028. This VHA directive will continue to serve as national VHA policy until it is recertified or rescinded.
- 6. IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE:** This directive is effective upon publication.

**BY DIRECTION OF THE OFFICE OF  
THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH:**

/s/ M. Christopher Saslo  
DNS, ARNP-BC, FAANP  
Assistant Under Secretary for Health  
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**NOTE:** All references herein to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and VHA documents incorporate by reference subsequent VA and VHA documents on the same or similar subject matter.

**DISTRIBUTION:** Emailed to the VHA Publications Distribution List on July 31, 2023.

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## EVALUATION AND TREATMENT OF FORMER PRISONERS OF WAR BY CARE AND BENEFITS TEAMS

### 1. POLICY

It is Veterans Health Administration (VHA) policy that Care and Benefits Teams (CBTs) for Former Prisoners of War (FPOW) are established at all Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities caring for FPOWs to ensure that FPOWs receive the highest quality care and benefit services. **AUTHORITY:** 38 U.S.C. §§ 1705, 1710, 1712B and 7301(b); 38 C.F.R. § 17.36.

### 2. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. **Under Secretary for Health.** The Under Secretary for Health is responsible for:

(1) Ensuring overall VHA compliance with this directive.

(2) Reviewing recommendations from VA's Advisory Committee on FPOWs and taking appropriate action on recommendations related to health care and rehabilitation of FPOWs. **NOTE:** *The Advisory Committee on FPOWs is authorized under 38 U.S.C. § 541 and advises the Secretary of VA on the administration of benefits under title 38 United States Code for the needs of Veterans who are FPOWs, in the areas of compensation, health care and rehabilitation.*

b. **Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Patient Care Services/Chief Nursing Officer.** The Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Patient Care Services/Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) is responsible for supporting Care Management and Social Work Services (CMSW) with implementation and oversight of this directive.

c. **Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Operations.** The Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Operations is responsible for:

(1) Communicating the contents of this directive to each of the Veterans Integrated Services Networks (VISNs).

(2) Assisting VISN Directors to resolve implementation and compliance challenges in all VA medical facilities within that VISN.

(3) Providing oversight of VISNs to ensure compliance with this directive and its effectiveness.

d. **Executive Director, Care Management and Social Work Services.** The Executive Director, CMSW, is responsible for:

(1) Providing oversight for VISN and VA medical facility compliance with this directive and ensuring corrective action is taken when non-compliance is identified.

(2) Overseeing the development and implementation of this directive and programs to address safety and health issues in the FPOW population.

(3) Ensuring the FPOW Care and Benefits Oversight Group (CBOG) Lead establishes, maintains and provides oversight of the FPOW CBOG. See paragraph 2.e. for FPOW CBOG Lead responsibilities.

(4) Ensuring the FPOW CBOG Lead maintains an updated FPOW Advocate Directory listing the VA medical facility FPOW Advocate's name and contact information on the VHA FPOW SharePoint site, available at: <https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/vhaswp/SitePages/AFPOWP.aspx>. **NOTE:** This is an internal VA website that is not available to the public.

(5) Updating required training for FPOW CBT members as needed (see paragraph 3).

e. **Former Prisoner of War Care and Benefits Oversight Group Lead.** **NOTE:** The FPOW CBOG includes members from the Offices of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, Primary Care, Geriatrics and Extended Care and Disability and Medical Assessment. The National Director of Social Work serves as the FPOW CBOG Lead or delegates this role to an individual within CMSW. The FPOW CBOG Lead is responsible for:

(1) Establishing, maintaining and providing oversight of the FPOW CBOG. This includes ensuring the FPOW CBOG:

(a) Develops and coordinates trainings related to FPOW CBTs (see paragraph 3) and reports any training needs or updates to the FPOW CBOG Lead.

(b) Maintains close coordination with Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) Compensation and Pension (C&P) Service and VBA Outreach, Transition and Economic Development to ensure FPOWs are educated about available benefits and evaluated for C&P benefits.

(2) Maintaining an updated FPOW Advocate Directory listing the VA medical facility FPOW Advocate's name and contact information on the VHA FPOW SharePoint site at: <https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/vhaswp/Lists/Former%20Prisoner%20of%20War%20Advocate%20Directory/AllItems.aspx>. **NOTE:** This is an internal VA website that is not available to the public.

f. **Veterans Integrated Service Network Director.** The VISN Director is responsible for:

(1) Ensuring that all VA medical facilities within the VISN comply with this directive and informing leadership when barriers to compliance are identified.

(2) Ensuring that all VA medical facilities caring for FPOWs have a VA medical facility FPOW CBT and that all VA medical facilities not caring for FPOWs have

identified clinicians to serve as members of the VA medical facility CBT, once established, to provide care for FPOWs that may enroll.

(3) Appointing a VISN Lead FPOW Advocate to collaborate with VA medical facilities within the VISN on issues related to FPOWs. **NOTE:** *This may be a collateral duty.*

g. **Veterans Integrated Service Network Lead Former Prisoner of War Advocate.** The VISN Lead FPOW Advocate is responsible for collaborating with and assisting VA medical facilities within the VISN on issues related to FPOWs as they arise.

h. **VA Medical Facility Director.** The VA medical facility Director is responsible for:

(1) Ensuring overall VA medical facility compliance with this directive and that appropriate corrective action is taken if non-compliance is identified.

(2) Designating VA health care providers as members of the FPOW CBT, including one member to serve as the FPOW CBT Lead. **NOTE:** *A FPOW CBT must be comprised of at least one clinician providing treatment, one clinician conducting C&P evaluations and a VA medical facility FPOW Advocate, typically a clinical social worker. The clinician C&P evaluator must be certified through the Office of Disability and Medical Assessment as qualified to perform C&P examinations (see VHA Directive 1603, Training and Certification of VHA Examiners Completing VA Compensation and Pension (C&P) Disability Examinations, dated March 1, 2019). In addition, VBA has agreed to appoint a VBA FPOW Coordinator from the appropriate VBA regional office to serve as a member of each FPOW CBT. FPOW CBT membership may be expanded to include other professions based on the needs of the Veteran population being served. Health professions trainees may not serve as members of the FPOW CBT.*

(3) Ensuring participation and tracking of training (see paragraph 3) related to working with the FPOW population, including training related to FPOW presumptive conditions, for all FPOW CBT members. For a complete list of presumptive conditions, please refer to Disability Compensation for FPOWs at:

<http://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/claims-postservice-pow.asp>.

(4) Ensuring a photograph of the VA medical facility FPOW Advocate, with contact information, is placed near the main entrance of the VA medical facility.

i. **VA Medical Facility Former Prisoner of War Advocate.** **NOTE:** *This position may be aligned under different service/care lines at VA medical facilities and differs from the VA medical facility Patient Advocate, whose responsibilities are outlined in VHA Directive 1003.04, VHA Patient Advocacy, dated February 7, 2018. The VA medical facility FPOW Advocate is responsible for:*

(1) Informing FPOWs about resources and benefits available, advocating for the FPOWs by liaising with VA regional offices, coordinating health care services within VA, and supporting community groups as appropriate.

(2) Identifying interventions and VA and community-based programs and resources that may be useful in working with FPOWs, their families and caregivers, and coordinating these resources to connect FPOWs with appropriate services.

(3) Maintaining contact with the local VBA FPOW Coordinator on a quarterly basis, to review any joint FPOW concerns, and to coordinate outreach to FPOWs who may not be utilizing either VHA or VBA services to educate them about benefits or services available.

(4) Planning activities for FPOW celebrations and including Missing In Action family members.

(5) Acting as the VA medical facility point of contact for VA and other service providers for FPOWs and their families.

(6) Managing administration of the VA medical facility FPOW services.

**j. VA Medical Facility Former Prisoner of War Care and Benefits Team Lead.**

The VA medical facility FPOW CBT Lead is a VA health care provider who is responsible for ensuring the FPOW CBT:

(1) Identifies FPOWs and coordinates the provision of care and issues related to benefits to ensure that FPOWs receive the highest quality care and benefit services.

(2) Facilitates communication between VHA, VBA and FPOWs to provide personalized services for this unique population.

(3) Includes the appointed FPOW Coordinator from the VBA regional office within the VA medical facility's catchment area to serve as a member of the FPOW CBT.

(4) Is available to provide care for FPOWs who require expert evaluation based on their FPOW experiences.

### **3. TRAINING**

The following training is **required** for all members of the FPOW CBT and **recommended** for all VA health care providers who are providing treatment for FPOWs: Former Prisoners of War (Talent Management System Courses # 39113, 39114 and 39115). **NOTE:** *Members of the FPOW CBT are encouraged to participate in refresher training as needed.*

### **4. RECORDS MANAGEMENT**

All records regardless of format (e.g., paper, electronic, electronic systems) created by this directive must be managed as required by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) approved records schedules found in VHA Records Control Schedule 10-1. Questions regarding any aspect of records management should be addressed to the appropriate Records Officer.

## 5. BACKGROUND

Regulations related to health care for FPOWs include:

a. 38 C.F.R. § 17.52 provides for outpatient dental services and treatment in non-VA facilities.

b. 38 C.F.R. §§ 17.108 and 17.110 exempt FPOWs from copayment requirements for inpatient hospital care or outpatient medical care and medications, respectively.

c. 38 C.F.R. § 17.149 provides that VA will furnish sensorineural aids to Veterans who meet criteria outlined in the regulation.

d. 38 C.F.R. § 17.161 authorizes outpatient dental treatment by VA.

## 6. DEFINITIONS

**Former Prisoner of War.** An FPOW is a person who, while serving in the active military, naval or air service, was forcibly detained or interned in the line of duty by:

a. An enemy government or its agents, or a hostile force, during a period of war; or

b. A foreign government, its agents, or a hostile force, under circumstances which the Secretary of VA finds to have been comparable to the circumstances under which persons have generally been forcibly detained or interned by enemy governments during periods of war (see 38 U.S.C. § 101(32); 38 C.F.R. § 3.1(y)). **NOTE:** *In defining FPOW status, VHA accepts VBA's determination of whether an individual was in fact a FPOW.*

## 7. REFERENCES

a. 38 U.S.C. §§ 101(32), 541, 1705, 1710, 1712B, 7301(b).

b. 38 C.F.R. §§ 3.1(y), 17.36, 17.52, 17.108, 17.110, 17.149, 17.61.

c. VHA Directive 1003.04, VHA Patient Advocacy, dated February 7, 2018.

d. VHA Directive 1603, Training and Certification of VHA Examiners Completing VA Compensation and Pension (C&P) Disability Examinations, dated March 1, 2019.

e. VHA FPOW SharePoint site.

<https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/vhaswp/SitePages/AFPOWP.aspx>. **NOTE:** *This is an internal VA website that is not available to the public.*

f. VHA FPOW Advocate Directory.

<https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/vhaswp/Lists/Former%20Prisoner%20of%20War%20Advocate%20Directory/AllItems.aspx>. **NOTE:** *This is an internal VA website that is not available to the public.*

g. VBA. Disability Compensation for FPOWs.  
<http://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/claims-postservice-pow.asp>.