

## **Benefits Available to the Non-Service-Connected Veteran**

The circumstances under which the VA will provide wheelchair lifts and other automobile adaptive equipment to non-service-connected veterans has been open to interpretation over the years. Unlike the automobile adaptive equipment provided to certain service-connected veterans based on the rating of their specific service-connected disabilities, only limited adaptive equipment considered medical can be given to non-service-connected veterans.

[VHA HANDBOOK 1173.4](#) states, "Certain items, i.e., van lifts, raised doors, raised roofs, air-conditioning, and wheelchair tie-downs for passenger use may be furnished as part of medical services VA is providing under 38 U.S.C. 1701 as a follow-up to VA hospitalization, provided the equipment is medically necessary for the care and treatment of the veteran. Vehicle modifications, such as raised doors or van lifts, may be furnished to eligible veterans who are wheelchair-bound, when necessary to allow such person to enter and exit." This may include air conditioning when necessary for the health and safety of the person, and interior space modifications needed because of the veteran's size or physical condition. Only non-operational equipment is provided. Items such as hand controls, low-effort steering and automatic transmissions that are necessary for operating the vehicle are not provided. Items such as electric door openers will not be provided as veterans transported as passengers will be accompanied by an able-bodied driver. Equipment will be provided for only one vehicle at a time and VA will pay for pre-authorized repairs to the VA-purchased equipment.

The key phrase in the handbook is "as a follow-up to VA hospitalization, provided the equipment is medically necessary for the care and treatment of the veteran." Veterans must be receiving post-hospitalization or medical treatment, at a VA or out-sourced facility, and must be wheelchair users to be eligible. This adaptive equipment is normally granted to qualified veterans in power chairs and scooters. Veterans in manual wheelchairs are considered on a case-by-case basis, based on their disabilities and capability of transporting their chair without the adaptive equipment. In effect, automobile adaptive equipment is an extension of the wheelchair, and it is provided for the purpose of getting wheelchair-using veterans to their medical treatment.

VA policy requires that automotive adaptive equipment is medically necessary, and a doctor's prescription must be present. A VA representative will review the prescription and forward it to the prosthetics department. There, the Major Medical and Special Equipment Committee (MMSEC) will review it to determine if the prescription is supported by medical findings and if the requested items are necessary for treatment or rehabilitation.

This board includes a physician knowledgeable about prosthetics, and other specialists as required. They may consider prescriptions written by VA or private physicians. If they deny the equipment, they will notify the veteran as to why, and include advisement in writing regarding appellate and reconsideration rights.

To apply, or for more information, or to find a VA regional office near you, call 1-800-827-1000.