



## Scholarship & Clinical Education



Visual Impairment  
and Orientation and  
Mobility Professional  
Scholarship Program  
(VIOMPSP)



Health Professional  
Scholarship Program  
(HPSP)



# Student Handbook 2018

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## Background

- Congress established **HPSP** on August 26, 1980, under Public Law (P. L.) 46-330. The original authority for HPSP expired on December 31, 1998. HPSP was re-authorized through December 31, 2014, by Section 603 of P.L. 111-163, The Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Service Act of 2010, and extended through December 31, 2019, by Section 302 of P.L. 113-146, Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014. It is codified in 38 U.S.C. 7601 through 7619, 7633, 7634, and 7636. **VIOMPSP** was established on May 5, 2010, by Section 302 of Public Law 111-163, The Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Service Act of 2010.
- **Privacy Act Notification Statement** The information in this Program Guide is provided pursuant to the Privacy Act of 1974 (Public Law 93-579), as amended, for individuals supplying information for inclusion in a system of records.
- **Purposes and Uses**
  - The purpose of **HPSP** is to award scholarships to students receiving education or training in a direct or indirect health-care services discipline, and to assist in providing an adequate supply of such personnel for VA and the United States. HPSP helps VA meet its need for qualified health care professionals for which recruitment or retention is difficult.
  - The purpose of **VIOMPSP** is to award scholarships to students seeking a degree or certificate in visual impairment or orientation and mobility in order to increase the supply of qualified blind rehabilitation specialists for VA and the United States. VIOMPSP helps VA meet its need for qualified blind rehabilitation specialists for which recruitment or retention is difficult.
  - A participant's agreement, application, required supplemental forms, supporting documentation, correspondences and related data are maintained in a system of records to be used within VHA to monitor HPSP and VIOMPSP related activities. This information may also be disclosed outside VHA, as permitted by the Privacy Act and Freedom of Information Act, to the Congress, the National Archives, the Government Accountability Office, and pursuant to court order and various routine uses.
- **Effects of Nondisclosure** Disclosure of the information sought is voluntary; however, if not submitted, an application is considered incomplete and, therefore, will not be considered for an award under this announcement.
- **Discrimination Prohibited**
  - Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 states: "No person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from

participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination, under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”

- Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and its implementing regulations
- (Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 86) provide that no person in the United States will, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, provides that no otherwise qualified handicapped individual in the United States shall, solely by reason of the individual’s disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.
- Section 301 of the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 provides that no person in the United States shall, on the basis of age, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.

- **Paperwork Reduction Act Public Burden Statement** An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a current Office of Management and Budget (OMB) control number. **NOTE:** *The current OMB control number for information collected through this application process is 2900-0793 and expires May 2019.* The public reporting burden for this collection is estimated to average 3 hours per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to the Scholarships and Clinical Education Program Office, Department of Veterans Affairs, 1250 Poydras St, Suite 1000, New Orleans, LA 70113.

➤ **Department of Veterans Affairs**

- VA was established in 1930 to administer Federal programs that provide assistance to the Nation’s Veterans. In 1989, through enactment of Public Law 100-527, VA was elevated to cabinet status with a change of name to the Department of Veterans Affairs. Veteran’s benefits are administered through a nationwide network of health care facilities, Veteran’s benefits offices, data processing centers, and national cemeteries.
- VA operates the Nation’s largest health care delivery system. Facilities range in size from 100 to 2,000 beds and include medical centers, outpatient clinics, Community Living Centers (CLC), and domiciliaries located throughout the United States.

- The VA health care system and VHA has established extensive programs in education and research to accomplish its objective of providing Veterans with high quality health care. These programs usually are conducted in affiliation with academic institutions. All VA medical facilities are affiliated with at least one institution of higher learning and provide all, or part, of the supervised experiences required in the training of various health care professionals.

## Welcoming Remarks

Welcome to the Health Professional Scholarship and Visual Impairment and Orientation and Mobility Professional Scholarship Programs. Your scholarship award begins your commitment to aiding the Veteran population — while working at one of our more than 150 facilities throughout the United States.

This handbook will give you the tools and information you need to ensure that you remain on the right path throughout your application and educational journey. You will also want to attend all town hall meetings and just-in-time training provided by the staff at Scholarship and Clinical Education. You are not alone on this remarkable adventure. Although it is your responsibility to adhere to the program's policies, our staff is available should you have any questions. Turn to this handbook to reference any situations that may arise over the course of applying for this scholarship, completing your education program, or completing your service obligation.

Your reward will be a career as a VA health professional, where your career path will be culturally rich and professionally challenging, and you will enjoy competitive pay, comprehensive health care coverage, opportunities for advancement and much more.

The VA provides you with the mission. How you meet the challenges within that mission is up to you. Along the way, you will be changing lives — including your own.

## Application Processing

**Application Period:** February through April (these dates may be changed to meet program requirements)

**Scholarship Program Purpose:** The purpose of **HPSP** is to award scholarships to students receiving education or training in a direct or indirect health-care services discipline, and to assist in providing an adequate supply of such personnel for VA and the United States. HPSP helps VA meet its need for qualified health care professionals for which recruitment or retention is difficult. The purpose of **VIOMPSP** is to award scholarships to students seeking a degree or certificate in visual impairment or orientation and mobility in order to increase the supply of qualified blind rehabilitation specialists for VA and the United States. VIOMPSP helps VA meet its need for qualified blind rehabilitation specialists for which recruitment or retention is difficult.

**Scholarship Eligibility:** All requirements must be met.

- **Citizenship:** Applicants must be citizens of the United States by birth or naturalization at the time of application.
  
- **Enrollment:**
  - For **HPSP**, applicants must be either currently enrolled, or unconditionally accepted for enrollment, in a program of study that coincides with the application cycle's high need VA professions list on the program announcement. For **VIOMPSP**, applicants must be currently enrolled, or unconditionally accepted for enrollment, an eligible program of study leading to a degree or certification in visual impairment or orientation and mobility, or a dual degree or dual certification, as defined in VIOMPSP regulations.
  - If currently enrolled, the applicant must have a minimum Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) equivalent to 3.0 on a 4.0 grading scale.
  - All academic institutions must be located in the United States or its territories and accredited by the professional accrediting body identified in VA Qualification Standards as required for the occupation in which the participant will be appointed, assigned, or retained. VA Qualification Standards are found in VA Handbook 5005, Staffing. An electronic version of VA Handbook 5005 is maintained on the Office of Human Resources Management Web site at <http://vaww1.va.gov/ohrm>. For HPSP the accrediting organization must be recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

- **Background Check:** Applicants must pass and maintain a background investigation commensurate with the VA occupation for which the scholarship is being offered.
- **Clinical Tour:** (HPSP Only): Universities/Colleges must have an existing Academic Affiliation with the VA in the program of study for which the applicant is applying for scholarship support. Applicant must agree to perform a clinical tour, at a VA healthcare facility, while the participant is enrolled in the course of education or training for which a scholarship is awarded. VA will determine the assignment and location of the clinical tour.
- **Service Obligation:**
  - After graduation and completion of their licensure or certification, the applicant must be willing to fill a full-time VA employment obligation in the position for which HPSP or VIOMPSP was awarded. This employment obligation may require a geographic relocation, at the applicant's expense.
  - Applicants uncertain of a commitment to their current health care specialty or relocation requirements based on the needs of VA are advised not to request participation in this program.
- **Ineligible Programs/Students:**
  - Students enrolled in education programs or specialty areas other than those approved for participation in HPSP or VIOMPSP.
  - Students currently or previously delinquent on any debt to the Federal Government (e.g., Public Health Service, Federal Student Loans, or taxes).
  - Students who, at the time of application, owe a service obligation to any other entity that coincides with the requirement to perform service after completion of the HPSP or VIOMPSP funded course of study.
  - Students who were previous participants in HPSP, VIOMPSP, or other VA scholarship programs and who breached their agreement, even if they received a waiver of liability under the program. Examples of these programs are the Employee Incentive Scholarship Program, National Nursing Education Incentive, etc.
- **VA Employment Eligibility Requirements:** A pre-placement physical examination and a National Agency Check with Written Inquiries investigation will be completed prior to scholarship participant's appointment in VA. **NOTE:** *Applicants must be able to meet VA employment eligibility.*

**Required Forms:** All forms are linked in the scholarship announcement in USAJobs.

Complete all required documents and attach them to your application. Here are the purposes of the forms:

- **Application:** This form allows the HPSP and VIOMPSP National Program Office to determine eligibility and gather basic demographic information about the applicant. This form also is the source document that the selection committee uses to rank an applicant against other applicants. Failure to answer any of the questions on the form will affect the applicants overall ranking. This application will not be considered without the applicant's signature and date on the last page.
- **Academic Verification:** This form is the source document for your academic information. The accuracy of the information on this form is very important as it outlines the payments that will be made if the applicant is accepted to receive the scholarship. The applicant will not be considered if the signature and date are missing from the Consent to Release of Information section on page one or the Certification section is not signed and dated by the Dean/Program Director/Administrative Chair of Program.
- **Evaluations and Recommendations** (must be dated within 12-months of application deadline): The maximum number of evaluations and recommendation that can be considered is three. If the applicant submits more than three only the first three received will be evaluated. More emphasis is placed on Faculty and Supervisory level recommendation while less emphasis is placed on friends/co-workers. While comments are not required in each section, the comments add to the overall evaluation/recommendation. The evaluation/recommendation will not be considered if the signature and date are missing from the Consent to Release of Information section on page one or the Evaluators signature is blank on the last page.
- **Résumé:** The applicant's résumé supports information contained on all forms. Do not assume that the information on the résumé will automatically translate to information on the Application. Use the résumé to support all the information provided on the application and the answers provided on the Online Questionnaire. Include prior education, professional licenses, registrations, certifications, and detailed descriptions of volunteer and work experience, especially those that are healthcare related. The résumé must not exceed five single-sided pages and must be at least 11-point font.
- **Transcript:** An unofficial transcript is acceptable from a current program or previous courses completed.
- **Declaration for Federal Employment:** This form is required to complete the Background Investigation. If the applicant does not submit this form, the application will not be considered.

## Selection:

- **Administrative Review:** All applicant packages are administratively processed before moving forward to the selection committee. Here are some but not all administration level review elimination criteria:
  - Not enrolled or unconditionally accepted into a specific degree and/or specialty as identified in the scholarship announcement.
  - Cumulative Grade Point Average of less than 3.0 on scale of 4.0.
  - Applicant unwilling to fill a full-time position after graduation to meet service obligation.
  - Applicant unwilling to relocate at own expense (if required) after graduation to meet service obligation.
  - Not a citizen of the United States.
  - If the applicant has a delinquency on Federal debt.
  - If the applicant has a service obligation to another agency for service provided.
  - Potential Eliminating Criteria include: other than Honorable discharge from the military, convicted by a court-martial, discharge from a position within the last 5-years, resigned or retired in last 5-years after being notified of pending discipline or discharge, and/or certain types of convictions.
  
- **Selection Panel:** The panel is a team of Program Managers/Specialist who are considered subject matter experts in the career field in which the scholarship is being awarded.
  - Academic Performance: Based on transcripts and faculty evaluations. If it is a school's policy not to rank students academically, faculty members are asked to provide a personal judgment of applicant's achievement.
  - Faculty and/or Employer Recommendations: Based on faculty/employer evaluation of the applicant's potential in his or her chosen health-related profession and personal attributes.
  - Work and/or Volunteer Experience
  - Awards
  - Professional Activities
  - Organizational Memberships and/or Office Held
  - Career Goals: A description of career goals and an explanation of how these goals will help increase the supply of blind rehabilitation specialists in VA, in the United States, and meet the health needs of Veterans.
  - Veteran Status

➤ **Award Notification**

- Applicants recommended as primary and alternate selectees by the Selection Committee are notified of their award status and must complete and successfully pass a background investigation.
- It is the applicant's responsibility to keep the Scholarships and Clinical Education (S&CE) Office informed of address changes. Failure to do so could result in unsuccessful notification of award selection and subsequent reassignment of the award to an alternate selectee.
- Selectees will receive a Scholarship Offer Package from S&CE that includes a VA Scholarship Offer Response (VA Form 10-0491LK), HPSP/VIOMPSP Agreement (VA Form 10-0491L), and a Mobility Agreement. Selectees must complete, sign, and return the documents to S&CE.
- Selectees have 15 days to notify the S&CE of their acceptance or declination of an offered award.
- If selectees withdraw or decline the award offer, alternates will be promoted to full selectee status.

- **Program Agreement:** Participation in the scholarship program becomes effective when the selected applicant signs and submits the legally binding HPSP/VIOMPSP Agreement (VA Form 10-0941L), and the Under Secretary for Health, or designee, signs the agreement. Selectees approved to become participants will be provided with a Welcome Kit that includes a copy of the final agreement and instructions for setting up award payments.

## Award Payments

- All financial payments are dependent on national budgetary approvals and may be delayed during periods of national budget approval postponements.
- **Tuition and Required Fees:** The HPSP and VIOMPSP award pays a participant's school tuition and approved fees through direct payment to the school. The school is sent official notification of the selectees' participation in HPSP and VIOMPSP and will be authorized to directly bill S&CE. **Note:** It is the participant's responsibility to ensure invoices submitted for payment accurately reflect authorized curriculum, tuition, and fees.

- The total amount of assistance provided to a full-time VIOMPSP student in an academic year may not exceed \$15,000 and the total amount of assistance a participant receives from VIOMPSP may not exceed \$45,000. For HPSP, assistance includes topping off any existing grants and scholarship to ensure 100% of tuition and approved fees are paid for.
  - For VIOMPSP, if a participant is a part-time student (VA employees only), the maximum award that can be provided for each year will be a ratio to the amount that would be paid to a full-time student in the student's program of study.
  - Required fees are those determined as necessary by the Secretary and do not include the following:
    - ▶ Books or equipment
    - ▶ Course withdrawal fee
    - ▶ Health insurance
    - ▶ Licensure and/or certification fees
    - ▶ Membership dues in student societies
    - ▶ Parking fees
    - ▶ Room or board
    - ▶ Transcript fees
    - ▶ Uniforms
  - The scholarship benefits are exempt from Federal taxation.
- **Stipends** (HPSP Only) HPSP will pay a monthly stipend directly to the participants. The payment is made for each month a participant is enrolled in coursework, beginning with the first month of the school year. The 2018 stipend amount is \$1,104 per month.
- If the participant is a full-time student, the stipend continues through the summer months, provided the participant has not yet completed the participant's degree requirements and is enrolled in course work. The stipend payment is discontinued the month of a participant's degree completion.
  - For part-time students (VA employee only), the maximum stipend available is reduced in accordance with the proportion that the number of credit hours carried bears to the number of credit hours required to be carried by a full-time student in the same course of education or training. In addition, a stipend may not be paid for any month during which a participant is not actually attending the course of education or training in which the participant is enrolled.
  - The stipend is not available if the participant is a full-time Federal employee.

- The scholarship program suspends payment of the stipend if the required documentation and/or transcripts to continue eligibility in the HPSP are not submitted by the required dates. The stipend payments are not reinstated until the documents have been received and then they are re-issued the next automated stipend cycle.
  - To receive the monthly stipend, the participant must have access to a bank account so that funds can be electronically transferred into the participant's bank account. **NOTE:** *Payment of the monthly stipend does not mean that the participant is employed by VA or participates in any of the benefits available to VA employees.*
  - The scholarship benefits are exempt from Federal taxation.
- **Supplemental Funding:** A list of HPSP and VIOMPSP participants will be forwarded to Financial Aid Offices and Billing Offices at the participants' schools. Participants receiving funds from sources other than HPSP and VIOMPSP should contact their Financial Aid Officers. HPSP and VIOMPSP may be provided to supplement other educational assistance, but the total assistance received by the participant from VA cannot exceed the total tuition and fees for the academic year.
- **Continuation of Payment of HPSP and VIOMPSP Awards:** HPSP and VIOMPSP payments will continue during the agreement period, depending on the following:
- The awards will not extend the total period of HPSP and VIOMPSP support beyond 4 years for a full-time scholarship, and beyond 6 years for a part-time scholarship (VA Employees only).
  - The participant demonstrates continued enrollment and provides academic verification in the accredited program of study approved by VA at the time of selection for HPSP or VIOMPSP. This is accomplished by participants submitting:
    - ▶ a self-certification to S&CE (Instructions are provided upon acceptance); and
    - ▶ the next semester's course enrollment at the end of each semester.
  - The participant maintains an acceptable level of academic standing as defined by the school and submits their transcripts and/or grade reports demonstrating progress in their academic program.

## Responsibility of Participant

- Carefully reviewing the material contained in this Program Guide to ensure that he or she fully understands the nature of the program, its benefits, limitations, and participant responsibilities.
- Reading, understanding, signing, and satisfying all requirements specified in the HPSP or VIOMPSP agreement.
- Maintaining enrollment, attendance, and an acceptable level of academic standing as defined by the school and program for which the scholarship was awarded.
- Reporting educational progress and expenses to S&CE. The participant is responsible for ensuring invoices submitted for payment accurately reflect authorized curriculum, tuition, and itemized fees.
- Providing S&CE the grade report from the academic institution at the conclusion of each academic session (semester or quarter). Funds for the next academic session will not be disbursed to the participant until this grade report is received.
- Informing S&CE immediately of any change impacting the terms of the agreement. These changes include, but are not limited to:
  - Name
  - Mailing Address
  - E-mail Address
  - Enrollment Status
  - Curriculum Plan Revision (including course withdrawal)
  - Academic Standing (including course and/or challenge examination failure or incomplete grade)
  - Pending Graduation Date
  - Projected Costs
- Ensuring prior to any change, that the change complies with program criteria specified in this Program Guide. Changes may require approval or pre-approval from S&CE. Thus, the participant should notify S&CE in advance of the change whenever possible, but in all cases, notification should occur within 10 days of the change unless otherwise specified within this Program Guide.

- Submitting to S&CE:
  - A *Notice of Change/Annual Academic Status* (VA Form 10-0491I) and any other required form(s), as determined by S&CE, for any of the changes listed above and annually to verify academic status.
  - A *Notice of Approaching Graduation* (VA Form 10-0491H) 6 months prior to your scheduled graduation date.
  - An *Education Program Completion Notice/Service Obligation Placement* (VA Form 10-0491E) within 90 days of completing your education program and upon agreeing to accept a position within the VA to fulfill your service obligation.
- Ensuring that HPSP or 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.
- Meeting or exceeding performance requirements for current VA position if participant is a current VA employee.
- Submitting to S&CE, within 90 days of completing the academic program, the final official transcript from the academic institution attended. The transcript must include the degree or certificate conferred and date thereof.
- Obtaining applicable credentials within 180 days after degree conferral and becoming eligible for assignment or appointment to the position for which the HPSP or VIOMPSP sponsored education or training program prepared the participant.
- VIMOPSP Specific: Serving as a full-time VHA employee in position for which the VIOMPSP sponsored education or training program prepared the participant for a minimum of three years, to be served within the first six years after the participant has completed such program and in a location determined by VA.
- HPSP Specific: Serving as a full-time VHA employee in position for which the HPSP sponsored education or training program prepared the participant for a minimum of two year in a location determined by VA.
- Maintaining program eligibility requirements throughout participation in the program.

## Suspension of Award

- VA will suspend HPSP or VIOMPSP payments for any of the following reasons:
  - The school and VA have approved a leave of absence for health, personal, or other reasons.
  - The degree completion date is delayed because of course failure(s) or curriculum changes.

- Participants are required to notify S&CE, in writing, when expecting a leave of absence from the school or repeating course work. A letter from the school verifying this information must accompany the written communication. The HPSP or VIOMPSP award will resume once S&CE is notified, in writing, by the school that the participant has returned to the course of study for which the scholarship was awarded or that the participant has achieved satisfactory grades for repeated course(s) and is proceeding in the course of study for which the scholarship was awarded. VA will not pay tuition for repeated courses.

**The Service Obligation Period:** Upon completing the HPSP or VIOMPSP funded degree, participants are obligated to provide service as a VA employee in full-time VA employee in a position for which the degree program prepared you. Temporary appointments are not sufficient to fulfill this service obligation.

- Working for VA offers a comprehensive benefits package that includes, in part: paid vacation, sick leave, holidays, life insurance, health benefits, and participation in the Federal Employees Retirement System. In addition to traditional "dollars and cents" benefits, VA offers a range of benefits to help balance work and life. For more information on these benefits please visit [http://www.va.gov/jobs/job\\_benefits/benefits.asp](http://www.va.gov/jobs/job_benefits/benefits.asp).
- When engaged in placement for employment actions, the scholarship recipient will keep S&CE staff advised of all placement actions. This is to ensure collaboration between students, HR, recruiters, and hiring managers are all in the best interest of the student and the VA's veteran population.
- VA will fully employ HPSP and VIOMPSP participants as soon as possible after they graduate and meet all VA qualification requirements. Placement is based on availability and needs of the VA.
- **Fulfilling the Service Obligation Period.** A participant's service obligation will begin on the date that he or she is appointed as a full-time VA employee in a position for which the degree program prepared you.

- For HPSP:

- ▶ Full-time student participants will serve as permanent, full-time VA employees for a period that will be for 1 calendar year for each school year or part thereof for which the scholarship was awarded, but for no less than 2 years.
- ▶ For part-time student participants (VA employees only), the obligated service is reduced from that which a full-time student must serve in accordance with the proportion that the number of credit hours carried

by a part-time student in any school year bears to the number of credit hours required to be carried by a full time student, whichever is greater, but shall be a minimum of 1 year of full-time employment.

- ▶ Participants are responsible for verifying their VA employment each year by submitting an Annual VA Employment or Deferment Verification Form (VA Form 10-0491C). No period of advanced clinical training or temporary appointment will be credited toward satisfying the period of obligated service incurred under HPSP.

- For VIOMPSP:

- ▶ Participants will serve as permanent, full-time VA employees for three calendar years within six years after they have completed the program for which the scholarship was awarded and received a degree or certification.
- ▶ Participants are responsible for verifying their VA employment each year by submitting an *Annual VA Employment or Deferment Verification Form* (VA Form 10-0491C). No period of advanced clinical training or temporary appointment will be credited toward satisfying the period of obligated service incurred under VIOMPSP.

- A participant who receives a scholarship must agree as part of the participant's mobility agreement that he or she is willing to accept the location and assignment where VA assigns the obligated service. Participants must be willing to relocate to other geographic locations, at their own expense, to complete their service obligation.

- The service obligation is carried out only in VA medical facilities and cannot be served in any branch of the Armed Forces or other Federal agencies.
- Locations for obligated service will be at those VA medical facilities with the greatest need for services of visual impairment or orientation and mobility specialists. Due to the national distribution of VA medical facilities and clustering of professional schools, relocation is likely for service obligation.
- VA needs and priorities change; therefore, arrangements to determine the location of the service obligation are started approximately 3 months prior to a participant's availability for service. Participants will be involved in selecting the location for the service obligation; however, VA reserves the right to make the final decision as to location.
- Participants must notify S&CE upon agreeing to accept a position within the VA to fulfill their service obligation.

## ➤ Deferment Requirements (HPSP)

- Participants may request deferment of the period of obligated service to allow completion of an approved program of advanced clinical training. The *Request for Deferment for Advanced Education* (VA Form 10-0491J) must be completed and received by S&CE. If approved, participants are responsible for verifying their deferment status each year using the *Annual VA Employment or Deferment Verification Form* (VA Form 10-0491C).
- Request for Deferment. A participant receiving a degree from a school of medicine, osteopathy, dentistry, optometry, or podiatry, may request deferment of obligated service to complete an approved program of advanced clinical training. VA may defer the beginning date of the obligated service to allow the participant to complete the advanced clinical training program. The period of this deferment will be the time designated for the specialty training.
- Deferment Requirements. Any participant whose period of obligated service is deferred shall be required to take all or part of the advanced clinical training in an accredited program in an educational institution having an Affiliation Agreement with a VA health care facility, and such training will be undertaken in a VA health care facility.
- Additional Service Obligation. A participant who has requested and received deferment for approved advanced clinical training may, at the time of approval of such deferment, at the discretion of VA, and upon the recommendation of the Under Secretary for Health, incur an additional period of obligated service:
  - ▶ At the rate of one-half of a calendar year for each year of approved clinical training (or a proportionate ratio thereof) if the training is in a specialty determined to be necessary to meet health care requirements of VHA; or
  - ▶ At the rate of three-quarters of a calendar year for each year of approved graduate training (or a proportionate ratio thereof) if the training is in a medical specialty determined not to be necessary to meet the health care requirements of the VHA. Specialties necessary to meet the health care requirements of the VHA will be prescribed periodically by the VA when, and if, this provision for an additional period of obligated service is to be used.
- Altering Deferment. Before altering the length or type of approved advanced clinical training for which the period of obligated service was deferred under paragraphs (a) or (b) of this section, the participant must request and obtain

written approval of the alteration from the Under Secretary for Health or designee.

- Beginning of Service after Deferment. Any participant whose period of obligated service has been deferred under paragraph (a) or (b) of this section, must begin the obligated service effective on the date of appointment to a title 38 or hybrid title 38 occupations in full-time clinical practice in an assignment or location in a VA health care facility as determined by VA. The assignment will be made by the VA within 120 days prior to or no later than 30 days following the completion of the requested graduate training for which the deferment was granted.

➤ **Deferment Requirements (VIOMPSP)**

- VIOMPSP participants are required to serve as permanent, full-time VA employees for three calendar years within six years after they have completed the program for which the scholarship was awarded and received a degree or certification.
- Any participant electing to delay completion of the service obligation period is required to notify S&CE in writing. Written notification must include:
  - ▶ Participant Name
  - ▶ Address
  - ▶ Phone Number
  - ▶ E-mail Address
  - ▶ Reason for Delay
  - ▶ Anticipated Availability Date for Service Obligation
- Participants are responsible for verifying their deferment status each year using the *Annual VA Employment or Deferment Verification Form* (VA Form 10-0491C).
- Beginning of Service after Deferment. Any participant whose period of obligated service has been deferred under this section, must provide written notification to S&CE 120 days prior to the date the participant intends to start their service obligation period.

## Failure to Comply with Terms and Conditions of HPSP or VIOMPSP

### ➤ **Liquidated Damages Penalty**

- If a participant, after signing the written agreement and being approved for the HPSP or VIOMPSP award, fails to accept payment or instructs the school not to accept payment for the scholarship, that participant must pay \$1,500 in liquidated damages, in addition to any obligation incurred under the agreement.
- Payment of this amount must be made within 90 days of the date on which the participant failed to accept payment or instructed the school to not accept payment of the scholarship.

### ➤ **Failure to Complete Academic Training or Obtain Certification/Licensure**

- A participant will be liable to the United States for repayment of all awarded funds paid to the participant and/or the school on the participant's behalf if:
  - ▶ The participant fails to maintain an acceptable level of academic standing;
  - ▶ The participant is dismissed from the school for disciplinary reasons;
  - ▶ The participant voluntarily terminates, for any reason, the course of study or program for which the scholarship was awarded, including, in the case of a full-time student, a reduction of course load from full-time to part-time before completing the course of study or program; or
  - ▶ The participant fails to become certified or licensed to practice in the profession for which the degree program prepared the participant, if applicable, within 180 days from the date such person becomes eligible to apply for such certification or license.
- The participant must, instead of performing any service obligation, pay to the United States an amount equal to all the funds awarded under the HPSP or VIOMPSP agreement. Payment of this amount must be made within one year from the date academic training terminated, unless the participant submits a request to defer the payment due to hardship.

➤ **Failure to Begin or Complete the Service Obligation Period**

- Participants who breach their agreement by failing to begin or complete their service obligation for any reason, including the loss, revocation, suspension, restriction, or limitation of required certification or licensure, or by failing to comply with the terms and conditions of deferment, if applicable, are liable to repay three times the portion of all **HPSP** funds paid to or on behalf of the participant, adjusted for the service provided, as determined by the following formula below; or are liable to repay the portion of all **VIOMPSP** funds paid to or on behalf of the participant, adjusted for the service provided, as determined by the following formula:

$$\text{HPSP } A=3P((t-s)/t)$$
$$\text{VIOMPSP } A=P((t-s)/t)$$

- ▶ 'A' is the amount the United States is entitled to recover;
  - ▶ 'P' is the amounts paid to or on behalf of the participant;
  - ▶ 't' is the total number of months in the participant's period of obligated service; and
  - ▶ 's' is the number of months of the period of obligated service rendered.
- The amount that the United States is entitled to recover will be paid no later than one year after the date the applicant failed to begin or complete the period of obligated services, as determined by VA.
- **Collection of Debt:** Any amounts owed to VA as the result of participant liability described in this paragraph should be collected in accordance with the policy and procedures set forth in VA Financial Policies and Procedures, Volume XII, Chapter 1, VA Debt Collection Standards. This guidance can be found on the VA Office of Finance Web site located at <http://www.va.gov/finance/docs/VA-FinancialPolicyVolumeXIIChapter01.pdf>.

**Bankruptcy Provision:** Any payment obligation incurred under the HPSP and VIOMPSP may not be discharged in bankruptcy under title 11 U.S.C. until 5 years after the date on which the payment obligation is due.

## Waiver or Suspension of Obligation

- Any service or financial liability incurred by a participant under the program and agreement will be cancelled upon the participant's death.
- A participant may seek a waiver or suspension of the service or financial liability incurred under this program or agreement by written request to the Under Secretary for Health setting forth the basis, circumstances, and causes which support the requested action. The Under Secretary for Health, or designee, may approve an initial request for a suspension for a period of up to 1 year. **NOTE:** A renewal of this suspension may be granted.
  - Requests for waiver or suspension of payment or service obligation must be submitted to the Under Secretary for Health, or designee, within 1 year of the date the participant is determined to be in breach of his or her HPSP or VIOMPSP obligation and/or agreement.
  - A participant must comply with requests for additional information from the Under Secretary for Health, or designee, within 30 days of receiving a letter of request.
- The Under Secretary for Health, or designee, may waive or suspend any service or financial liability incurred by a participant whenever compliance by the participant is impossible, due to circumstances beyond the control of the participant, or whenever the Under Secretary for Health, or designee, concludes that a waiver or suspension of compliance is in the VA's best interest.
- Compliance by a participant with a service or financial liability will be considered impossible due to circumstances beyond the control of the participant, if the Under Secretary for Health or designee determines, on the basis of such information and documentation as may be required, that the participant suffers from a physical or mental disability resulting in permanent inability to perform the service or other activities which would be necessary to comply with the obligation. The following guidelines are applied to waivers requested for physical or mental disability:
  - A participant must comply with requests for additional information from the Under Secretary for Health, or designee, within 30 days of receiving a letter of request.
  - Should a participant submit medical evidence in support of a request for waiver that calls into question the participant's ability to perform the regular duties of the position for which the scholarship was awarded, such evidence must be provided to the Manager, S&CE for consideration in determining the participant's ability to safely perform the duties of the position.

- Waiver requests related to time-limited medical treatment or temporary disability will not meet the requirement of permanence.
  - ▶ Examples: Medical conditions requiring treatment from which the participant is expected to make full recovery; medical conditions that manifest and arise after the date on which the employee breached the HPSP or VIOMPSP agreement; and ongoing medical conditions that do not render the participant incapable of performing the duties of the position.
  - ▶ A participant's temporary inability to comply with program requirements for these and similar reasons should be addressed through change procedures noted in Responsibility of Participant paragraph above.
  - ▶ Medical evidence submitted in support of a waiver request must pertain to the participant's ability to comply with program obligations at the point in time the participant breached his or her obligation under the program.
  
- Requests for waiver of payment and/or service obligations for reasons other than noted above are considered based on the totality of documented impact on the participant's ability to comply with the services or other activities of the obligation.
  - Other than the Under Secretary for Health or the Manager, S&CE, no individual has authority to grant waivers of liability under HPSP and VIOMPSP.
  - Decisions to approve or disapprove waiver or suspension requests are final and binding determinations. They are not subject to reconsideration or appeal.
  - Approval of a participant's waiver request may not be agreed to as part of a negotiated resolution of any personnel or other type of administrative or legal action (e.g., Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) claim, disciplinary action, etc.).
  
- An obligation of a participant for payment of damages may not be released by a discharge in bankruptcy under 11 U.S.C. before the expiration of the 5-year period beginning on the first date the payment of such damages is due. In the event a participant presents evidence of bankruptcy, the fiscal officer should consult with Regional Counsel to determine the appropriate course of action.
- Participants who have breached the agreement during the period of obligated service by leaving VA employment may request suspension of their financial liability, provided:

- The participant seeks appointment to a VHA position that meets the requirements of The Service Obligation Period within 1 year of the date the participant breached the service obligation under the HPSP or VIOMPSP agreement;
  - The appropriate Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health, VISN, or facility Director determines it would be in the best interest of the program office or facility to so appoint the individual and makes such a recommendation to S&CE; and
  - S&CE agrees to such an arrangement. In these cases, collection efforts will be suspended from the date the participant is appointed to the position. If the participant successfully fulfills the period of service obligation owed originally under the program, the participant is considered to have met all program obligations, thereby extinguishing the debt owed to the U.S. Government. Additionally, all payments made by the participant prior to re-employment will be refunded to the participant. **NOTE:** Requests for suspension of financial obligation under the conditions of a breach applies in cases where a final decision was not rendered by the Under Secretary for Health. Decisions to approve or disapprove waiver or suspension requests are final and binding determinations. They are not subject to reconsideration or appeal.
- Waivers or suspensions of financial liability, when not related to circumstances beyond the control of the participant and when considered in the best interest of VA, are determined, on an individual basis, by the Under Secretary for Health or designee.
  - If a waiver is granted, then the waived amount of scholarship funds may be considered taxable income.

## Relationship to Other Programs

- HPSP and VIOMPSP applicants may not be obligated under any Federal program to perform service after completion of the course of education or training.
- HPSP and VIOMPSP participants may not simultaneously complete service obligations resulting from other awards while completing the service obligation for HPSP or VIOMPSP.
- Awards authorized to Education Debt Reduction Program (EDRP) participants may be in addition to assistance available to HPSP and VIOMPSP participants. However, if an employee is in a service obligation period associated with HPSP or VIOMPSP, they are not eligible for EDRP as a retention incentive until the HPSP or VIOMPSP service obligation has been fulfilled.

- Recruitment bonuses, relocation bonuses, and retention allowances may not be paid to those with scholarship obligations to VA resulting from education or training activities.

## Glossary of Terms

- Acceptable level of academic standing means the level at which a participant may continue to attend school under the standards and practices of the school at which a participant is enrolled in a course of study for which a **HPSP** or **VIOMPSP** scholarship was awarded.
- Acceptance agreement means a signed legal document between VA and a participant of **HPSP** or **VIOMPSP** that specifies the obligations of VA and the participant upon acceptance to **HPSP** or **VIOMPSP**.
- Affiliation agreement means a legal document that enables the clinical education of trainees at a VA or non-VA medical facility. An affiliation agreement is required for all education or training that involves direct patient contact, or contact with patient information, by trainees from a non-VA institution.
- Citizen of the United States means any person born, or lawfully naturalized, in the United States, subject to its jurisdiction and protection, and owing allegiance thereto.
- Credential means the licensure, registration, certification, required education, relevant training and experience, and current competence necessary to meet VA's qualification standards for employment in certain health care occupations.
- Degree represents the successful completion of the course of study for which a scholarship was awarded. For the purpose of **HPSP**, VA recognizes the following degrees: a doctor of medicine; doctor of osteopathy; doctor of dentistry; doctor of optometry; doctor of podiatry; or an Associate, Baccalaureate, Master's, or Doctorate degree in another health care discipline needed by VA. For the purposes of the **VIOMPSP**, VA recognizes a Bachelor's, Master's, education specialist or Doctorate that meets the core curriculum and supervised practice requirements in visual impairment and blindness.
- Full-time student means an individual who meets the requirements for full time attendance as defined by the school in which they are enrolled.
- HPSP means the VA Health Professional Scholarship Program authorized by 38 U.S.C. 7601 through 7619.
- Mobility agreement means a signed legal document between VA and a participant of **HPSP** or **VIOMPSP**, in which the participant agrees to accept assignment at a VA facility selected by VA where he or she will fulfill the obligated service requirement. A mobility agreement must be included in the participant's acceptance agreement. Relocation to another geographic location may be required.

- Obligated service means the period of time during which the **HPSP** or **VIOMPSP** participant must be employed by VA in a full-time clinical occupation for which the degree prepared the participant as a requirement of the acceptance agreement.
- Part-time student. For the purposes of the **HPSP**, part-time student means an individual who is a VA employee, and who has been accepted for enrollment or enrolled for study leading to a degree on a less than full-time basis but no less than half-time basis and for the purpose of **VIOMPSP**, part-time student means an individual who has been accepted for enrollment or enrolled for study leading to a degree on a less than full-time basis but no less than half-time basis.
- Participant or scholarship program participant means an individual whose application to **HPSP** or **VIOMPSP** has been approved, whose acceptance agreement has been consummated by VA, and who has yet to complete the period of obligated service or otherwise satisfy the obligation or financial liabilities of such agreement.
- Required fees means those fees which are charged by the school to all students pursuing a similar curriculum in the same school.
- School means an academic institution that is accredited by a body or bodies recognized for accreditation by the U.S. Department of Education or by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), and for the purposes of the **HPSP**, offers a course of study leading to a degree in a health care service discipline needed by VA; for the purpose of **VIOMPSP**, offers a course of study leading to a degree in visual impairment or orientation and mobility.
- School year means for purposes of **HPSP** and its stipend payment, all or part of the 12-month period that starts on the date the participant begins school as a full-time student. For the purpose of **VIOMPSP**, all or part of the 12-month period that starts on the date the participant begins school as a full-time student.
- Secretary means the Secretary of Veterans Affairs or designee.
- State means one of the several States, Territories and possessions of the United States, the District of Columbia and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.
- Under Secretary for Health means the Under Secretary for Health of VA or designee.
- VA means the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- VA employee means an individual permanently employed by VA. A VA employee does not include an individual who is employed temporarily or on a contractual basis.
- VA health care facility means a VA medical center, independent outpatient clinic, domiciliary, nursing home (community living center), residential treatment program, and any of a variety of community based clinics (including community based outpatient clinics, primary care telehealth clinics, and Vet Centers), consolidated mail outpatient pharmacies, and research centers.
- VIOMPSP means the Visual Impairment and Orientation and Mobility Professional Scholarship Program authorized by 38 U.S.C. 7501 through 7505.