

VA FISHER HOUSE PROGRAM

1. REASON FOR ISSUE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook provides procedures for the provision of temporary lodging in Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Fisher Houses. **AUTHORITY:** Title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) 1708, title 38 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) part 60.

2. SUMMARY OF CHANGES: This revised VHA Handbook:

a. Defines the VA Fisher House Program to provide temporary lodging in VA Fisher Houses to accompanying individuals of Veterans and active duty Servicemembers who are undergoing an episode of care. Veterans and active duty Servicemembers may be accommodated in VA Fisher Houses with their accompanying individuals only in limited circumstances of immediate need when there is no alternative temporary lodging.

b. Provides for VA Fisher House Support staffing excluding the 24-hour supervision of minor children by a family member during a VA Fisher House stay.

c. Clarifies VA Fisher House eligibility criteria for Veterans and active duty Servicemembers who have a Behavioral Flag or a Suicide Risk Flag in the Computerized Patient Record System, who are requesting VA Fisher House accommodations.

3. RELATED ISSUES: VHA Directive 1107.

4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE: The Chief Consultant, Care Management and Social Work Services (10P4C), is responsible for the contents of this VHA Handbook. Questions may be referred to 202-461-6780.

5. RESCISSIONS: VHA Handbook 1110.1, dated April 10, 2003 is rescinded.

6. RECERTIFICATION: This VHA Handbook is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working day of January 31, 2019.

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VA FISHER HOUSE PROGRAM

1. PURPOSE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook provides guidance for the provision of temporary lodging in Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Fisher Houses. Temporary lodging in VA Fisher Houses may be provided to accompanying individuals of Veterans or active duty Servicemembers who are undergoing an episode of care. Veterans or active duty Servicemembers may be accommodated in VA Fisher Houses with their accompanying individuals only in limited circumstances of immediate need when no alternative temporary lodging is available. **AUTHORITY:** 38 U.S.C. 1708, 38 CFR part 60.

2. BACKGROUND:

a. The Fisher House Foundation, a 38 U.S.C. 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, was created in 1990 by Zachary and Elizabeth Fisher. The Foundation constructs and donates Fisher Houses to the Department of Defense (DOD) and VA for use by families of patients hospitalized in military and VA medical facilities. The Fisher House Foundation requires that all Fisher Houses be used to provide temporary accommodations to the accompanying individuals of Veterans and active duty Servicemembers, who require accommodations due to Veterans or active duty Servicemembers receiving health care from VA or DOD. The Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs are responsible for the operation and maintenance of the Fisher Houses once they are donated by the Foundation. There are currently 62 Fisher Houses located on 23 military bases and at 23 VA medical centers. Each House is professionally decorated and furnished and has a common kitchen, laundry facility, dining room, and living room.

b. Section 221(a) of the Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-419) gave VA legislative authority to accept Fisher Houses constructed and donated by the Fisher House Foundation and to use appropriated funds to operate and maintain Fisher Houses.

c. The Fisher House Foundation has committed to constructing approximately one new VA Fisher House each year. Financial support from the VA medical facility (fund raising of donations from local sponsors, endorsements, etc.) for construction costs will favor selection of a site for construction. Fisher Houses range from 5,000 to 16,800 square feet and are designed to complement the aesthetics in their proposed neighborhood surroundings. The total construction costs average \$4-6 million (estimated in year 2012 dollars). **NOTE:** *Once the Fisher House Foundation has selected a site and breaks ground, construction usually takes 6 to 15 months.*

d. The VA Fisher House Program is coordinated by the National Fisher House and Family Hospitality Program Manager, and Care Management and Social Work Services. Coordination includes oversight of the operation of all VA Fisher Houses and regular communication with Fisher House Managers, liaison with the Fisher House Foundation, DoD Fisher House Program, and community stakeholders.

e. VHA has developed a selection process and criteria for new VA Fisher Houses (see paragraphs 8 and 9 of this Handbook). Periodically, the Office of the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management solicits applications from VA medical facilities, through

Veterans Integrated Services Network (VISN) offices for new VA Fisher Houses.

3. SCOPE: Lodging in VA Fisher Houses may be provided to accompanying individuals of Veterans or active duty Servicemembers who are undergoing an episode of care. An accompanying individual means an individual seeking VA Fisher House lodging, who provides familial support or the equivalent of familial support, to a Veteran or active duty Servicemember while the Veteran or active duty Servicemember is experiencing an episode of care. This term is defined broadly to include relatives, close friends, and caregivers. Veterans or active duty Servicemembers may be accommodated in VA Fisher Houses with their accompanying individuals only in limited circumstances of immediate need when no alternative temporary lodging is available.

4. OPERATION OF VA FISHER HOUSES:

a. Once the Fisher House Foundation donates a Fisher House to VA, the VA medical facility is responsible for the operation and maintenance of the Fisher House. Funding of operation and maintenance is a line item in the facility budget. Centralized funding is established by VA Central Office for major costs of refurbishing and redecorating VA Fisher Houses and for replacing major appliances. *NOTE: VA medical facilities with VA Fisher Houses are encouraged to work through Voluntary Service in requesting donations from community and Veterans' groups for such things as comfort items, non-perishable food items, linens, and housewares to support the VA Fisher House.*

b. Each VA Fisher House is staffed with a full-time Fisher House Manager who is a VA employee and has an office located in the Fisher House. Additional VA Fisher House staff may include an Assistant Fisher House Manager, Housekeeping staff, and Program support staff.

c. No fees may be charged to Veterans, active duty Servicemembers, or their accompanying individuals for accommodations in VA Fisher Houses. However, the VA medical facility may accept donations.

5. APPLICATION FOR VA FISHER HOUSE ACCOMMODATIONS:

a. In order to receive temporary lodging, a Veteran, active duty Servicemember, or accompanying individual must complete and submit VA Form 10-0408A. VA Form 10-0408A is available from any VA health care facility or on the VA Forms Web site at <http://www.va.gov/vaforms/>. For VA Fisher House lodging, the completed application must be submitted to the Fisher House Manager at the VA medical facility of jurisdiction.

b. Applications for VA Fisher House accommodations are processed in the order that they are received by VA, and VA Fisher House accommodations are granted on a first-come, first-serve basis; however, in extraordinary circumstances, such as imminent death, critical injury, or organ donation, applications may be processed out of order.

6. CRITERIA FOR ACCOMMODATIONS IN A VA FISHER HOUSE:

a. In order to receive accommodations in a VA Fisher House, the accompanying individual, active duty Servicemember or Veteran (if also staying at the VA Fisher House) must:

(1) Be medically stable and capable of self-care or be accompanied by an individual able to provide the necessary care. VA does not provide nursing or other medical care in VA Fisher Houses.

(2) Be required to travel 50 or more miles or at least 2 hours from their home to the VA medical facility. Exceptions to these distance or time provisions may be made based on exceptional circumstances, such as inclement weather, road conditions, or the mode of transportation used.

(3) Be able to stay in an unsupervised setting.

b. Decisions concerning VA Fisher House accommodations are to be made by the VA medical facility's Fisher House Manager. If space is unavailable, referrals for temporary accommodations may be made to the Veteran or active duty Servicemember's social worker or case manager.

c. VA Fisher Houses are not used to accommodate unaccompanied Veterans or active duty Servicemembers, or individuals in need of transitional or permanent housing.

d. Veterans or active duty Servicemembers with a Category I Behavioral Patient Record Flag (BPRF) in Computerized Patient Record System (CPRS) may be considered for VA Fisher House accommodations. The Fisher House Manager is to consult with the local Disruptive Behavior Committee (DBC) who assessed the Veteran or active duty Servicemember, and to request their re-evaluation to determine if VA Fisher House accommodations are appropriate.

e. Veterans or active duty Servicemembers with a Suicide Risk Flag may be considered for VA Fisher House accommodations just as they would be otherwise. The Fisher House Manager may consult with the facility Suicide Prevention Coordinator to determine if there are any current follow-up requirements or a need for continued re-evaluation during the VA Fisher House stay.

f. VA does not impose a general limit on the number of persons who may accompany a Veteran or active duty Servicemember, but may in specific cases provide accommodations to only a specific number of persons due to space or resource limitations.

g. VA Fisher House accommodations for accompanying individuals of Veterans in a Polytrauma Transitional Rehabilitation Program (PTRP) will be based upon the need for continued active participation in the patient's episode of care.

(1) Once a rehabilitation patient successfully transfers from acute rehabilitation to the Polytrauma Transitional Rehabilitation Program (PTRP), goals are focused on gaining additional independence and autonomy in functioning. As a result, the need for the

accompanying individual's continuous involvement and presence at the bedside may change, as will their need for continued VA Fisher House accommodations.

(2) Return visits by accompanying individuals during the patient's PTRP stay may be needed. Accommodation in the VA Fisher House for accompanying individuals should be on a first-come, first-serve basis.

7. RESPONSIBILITIES:

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

- (1) Providing temporary lodging in the VA Fisher House as space and funding allow.
- (2) Overseeing the operation and maintenance of the VA Fisher House.

(3) Staffing the VA Fisher House with a full-time manager and adequate support staff to ensure daily VA Fisher House operations run smoothly. Support staff includes a full-time Assistant Manager, full-time Program Support Assistant, and full-time dedicated housekeeping staff. *NOTE: Fisher House Support Staff requirements are contingent upon the size and occupancy rates of the Fisher House.*

(4) Ensuring routine upkeep of the VA Fisher House, including 24-hour availability for repairs and housekeeping.

(5) Funding daily operation costs of the VA Fisher House.

(6) Funding travel for the VA Fisher House Manager or local VA Fisher House Staff designee, to attend the annual VA-DOD Fisher House Manager's Training, sponsored by the Fisher House Foundation.

b. **VA Fisher House Manager.** VA Fisher House Managers are responsible for:

(1) Overseeing daily operations, including accepting and processing applications for accommodations, arranging for lodging stays, orientation of Fisher House guests, tracking utilization, budgeting and operating costs, preparing reports for the VA Fisher House Program and for the Fisher House Foundation, and supervising employees, volunteers, and students working in the VA Fisher House.

(2) Managing and operating the VA Fisher House in a fiscally responsible manner, ensuring that the needs of Fisher House guests are met.

(3) Ensuring the VA Fisher House is safe, clean, and free from hazards, including adequate housekeeping and maintenance of the facility.

(4) Ensuring individuals accommodated in VA Fisher Houses receive orientation to the House, including fire and safety information and who to call in an emergency.

(5) Completing reports on costs, utilization, and operation of the VA Fisher House to the Fisher House Foundation and to the National VA Fisher House Program Manager in a timely manner.

c. **VA Fisher House Guests.** VA Fisher House guests are responsible for abiding by the rules of the Fisher House and all medical facility rules and policies, including the following:

- (1) No medical or nursing services will be provided in the VA Fisher House.
- (2) Individuals with a communicable disease (i.e. influenza) which may be transmitted through common contact may not be accommodated in a VA Fisher House.
- (3) No overnight guests other than VA Fisher House guests are allowed in VA Fisher Houses unless approved by the Fisher House Manager.
- (4) All children under the age of 18 must be supervised by a family member at all times.
- (5) No animals, except service dogs, are allowed in VA Fisher Houses. Dogs that facilitate therapy, provide companionship, emotional support, or are considered pets are not service dogs.
- (6) No alcoholic beverages or illegal drugs are allowed on VA grounds.
- (7) No weapons or explosives may be brought onto VA grounds.
- (8) Gambling is prohibited on VA grounds.
- (9) Soliciting, vending, and selling merchandise are prohibited on VA grounds.
- (10) Sexual misconduct, destroying property, and creating a disturbance are prohibited on VA grounds.
- (11) Smoking is not allowed in VA Fisher Houses. *NOTE: Guests must use designated smoking areas.*
- (12) Failure to abide by the VA medical facility and VA Fisher House rules may result in guests being asked to leave the VA Fisher House.

8. SITE SELECTION FOR A VA FISHER HOUSE:

a. Periodically, VHA office of Care Management and Social Work Services solicits applications from VA medical facilities through the VISN offices. VA medical facilities applies the selection criteria to the applications received and prioritizes them, and provides the Fisher House Foundation with a list of proposed sites for new VA Fisher Houses. The final determination for new sites is made by the Fisher House Foundation.

b. Information needed before Consideration.

(1) The availability of vacant land on which to build, preferably about 1 acre. **NOTE:** *All site preparation is the responsibility of the VA medical facility.*

(2) A full description of the proposed location, including lot size and location in relation to the VA medical facility and the approximate walking time from the proposed site to patient treatment buildings. **NOTE:** *Ideally, the proposed site is easily accessible to patient treatment buildings.*

(3) A statement of commitment to provide for the operational costs, including all utilities and maintenance of the structure is required from each medical facility.

(4) A statement of commitment to provide one full-time equivalent (FTE) employee to supervise the facility (the Fisher House Manager), and additional staff to support Fisher House operations (Assistant Manager, Program Support Assistant, and housekeeping staff).

(5) A brief statement describing patient treatment programs offered at the VA medical facility that are expected to be the primary sources of patients supported by the Fisher House. This statement is to include workload information (number of unique Veterans, number of outpatient visits, and the number of inpatient admissions, etc.).

(6) Any special construction issues, planned construction projects that may impact Fisher House construction, or needs for the proposed site need to be identified.

(7) Any other significant information that would assist VA in the site selection process.

(8) Letters of endorsement from Veteran Service Organizations and the Chief of Voluntary Service.

(9) Letters of endorsement from community stakeholders, state, and Federal officials.

(10) Any state grants or local financial and/or volunteer support for initial funding, as well as for continued operational support need to be described.

9. APPLICATION FOR A VA FISHER HOUSE: To apply for a VA Fisher House, the VA medical facility must complete the attached application VA Form 10-0408 (see Appendix A) and send it through the respective VISN Office to the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management.

a. When available, all applications for VA Fisher Houses need to include:

(1) Letters of endorsement from Veteran Service Organizations and the facility Chief of Voluntary Service.

(2) Letters of endorsement from community leaders and state and Federal officials.

(3) The application must include signature approvals of the VA medical facility and VISN Directors.

b. **The Process.**

(1) The Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management and Care Management and Social Work Services conduct a joint review of VA Fisher House applications, applying the selection criteria described. A list of recommended sites is provided to the Under Secretary of Health for concurrence and forwarded to the Secretary of Veterans' Affairs for approval.

(2) Upon the Secretary's approval, the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management provides the list of recommended sites to the Fisher House Foundation.

NOTE: The final decision on sites for new VA Fisher Houses rests with the Fisher House Foundation.

(3) When a facility is selected by the Fisher House Foundation for a new VA Fisher House, the Foundation confirms its interest in building a Fisher House to the National VA Fisher House Program Manager and the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management.

(4) The Fisher House Foundation provides an offer with the anticipated time schedule for the construction project.

(5) The National VA Fisher House Program Manager notifies the facility and requests identification of a facility coordinator to serve as the point of contact for development of the project.

(6) The individual designated by the Medical Center Director provides routine updates to the National VA Fisher House Program Manager describing progress and/or issues for the project. Near completion of the project, the facility coordinator notifies the National VA Fisher House Program Manager of the projected completion date and of the proposed dedication ceremony plans. *NOTE: The selection and coordination of dedication ceremony participants is determined by the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management, in collaboration with the National VA Fisher House Program Manager.*

10. REFERENCES:

- a. Title 38 U.S.C. 1708.
- b. Title 38 CFR part 60.

VA FORM 10-0408

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Form 10-0408 can be found on the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Forms <http://www.va.gov/vaforms> or at <http://vaww.va.gov/vaforms>. This is to be used for local reproduction. Since this is a low use form, it is not stocked by the Hines Service and Distribution Center (formerly known as the Forms and Publications Depot).

VHA Form 10-0408, VHA Fisher House Application can be accessed directly using the following link: <http://www.va.gov/vaforms/medical/pdf/vha-10-0408-fill.pdf>.

VA FORM 10-0408A

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Form 10-0408A can be found on the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Forms <http://www.va.gov/vaforms> or at <http://vaww.va.gov/vaforms>. This is to be used for local reproduction. Since this is a low use form, it is not stocked by the Hines Service and Distribution Center (formerly known as the Forms and Publications Depot).

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