

PRESCRIPTION OPTICS AND LOW VISION DEVICES

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook updates Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) procedures for providing optics and low vision devices to veteran beneficiaries.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CHANGES:** This VHA Handbook updates current procedures.
- 3. RELATED ISSUES:** VHA Directive 1173, and VHA Handbooks 1173.1 through 1173.15.
- 4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Chief Consultant, Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service Strategic Healthcare Group (113), is responsible for the contents of this VHA Handbook. Questions may be referred to 202-273-8515.
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** VHA Manual M-2, Part IX, Chapter 14 is rescinded.
- 6. RECERTIFICATION:** This document is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working day of July 2005.

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Under Secretary for Health

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PREScription OPTICS AND LOW VISION DEVICES

1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook establishes uniform and consistent national procedures for providing prescription optics and low vision devices to veteran beneficiaries.

2. SCOPE

a. Prescriptions for eyeglasses shall be filled in accordance with Title 38 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 17.149 and with policies and guidelines established by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the local facility.

b. Eligible beneficiaries may be furnished an initial pair of corrective eyeglasses when prescribed by a VA or fee-basis ophthalmologist or optometrist. Two pairs of single-vision eyeglasses, one for reading and one for distance vision, will be provided if prescribed by the ophthalmologist or optometrist, in cases where bifocal lenses are contraindicated. Post-surgical cataract patients may also be provided two pair of eyeglasses (in addition to contact lenses): a pair of cataract eyeglasses (aspheric lenticular) and a pair of single-vision eyeglasses (for use over contact lenses) when prescribed by ophthalmology or optometry staff.

c. When a beneficiary is found to need an ophthalmic prescription but is not eligible to receive prescription optics at VA expense, the beneficiary may request and obtain a copy of the prescription from the examining ophthalmologist or optometrist. These prescriptions will be issued and stamped with a disclaimer reading, "Not to be filled at VA expense," to indicate that the beneficiary must spend personal funds to obtain the prescribed item(s).

d. Ophthalmic prescriptions will be filled for beneficiaries receiving medical care when determined medically necessary for the beneficiary's care by a physician or optometrist.

e. Beneficiaries with a service connected disability for the loss of vision in an eye (or the enucleation of one eye) are eligible for eyeglasses for defective vision in the remaining eye and/or to protect the vision in the remaining eye (safety eyeglasses or polycarbonate lenses as appropriate).

3. DEFINITIONS

- a. **Single Vision Lens.** A lens which contains one prescription either for reading or distance.
- b. **Bifocal Lens.** A lens which contains two prescriptions, each for a different distance.
- c. **Trifocal Lens.** A lens which contains three prescriptions, each for a different distance.
- d. **Tints.** A coloring of lenses, e.g., green, photogrey, for the purpose of eye protection from ultraviolet (UV) radiation, sun and bright light.

- e. **Coating.** A treatment applied to the surface of a lens that gives it color, absorption ability, or scratch resistance.
- f. **Prism.** A lens that is thicker on one edge causing any image through the lens to be displaced.
- g. **Lenticular.** A lens whose special curves are designed to reduce lens thickness and weight.
- h. **Aspheric.** A lens whose special curves are designed to reduce optical distortions.
- i. **Balance Lens.** A lens that mimics the appearance and weight of the other lens in the frame.
- j. **Bridge.** A part of the frame that rests on the nose.
- k. **Temples.** A part of the frame that rests around the ears.
- l. **Low vision Device.** An aid or appliance used to improve the vision or functional ability of a beneficiary with subnormal vision.
- m. **Safety Eyeglasses.** Frames and lenses that meet safety standards, usually prescribed or provided for special conditions.
- n. **Enucleation.** The procedure of surgically removing an eye.

4. ELIGIBILITY

NOTE: Beneficiaries' eligibility for prescription optics will be determined using criteria and guidelines set forth in 38 CFR 17.149.

a. Prescription optics may be provided in those instances where visual impairment results from existence of another medical condition for which the beneficiary is receiving VA care, or which results from treatment of that medical condition, e.g., stroke, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, vascular disease, geriatric chronic illnesses, ototoxic drugs, cataract surgery, and/or other surgeries performed on the eye resulting in visual impairment. Prescription optics will not be provided to those beneficiaries with normally occurring visual impairments, such as near-sightedness or far-sightedness.

b. Beneficiaries who are visually impaired to the degree that the provision of corrective optics or other similar devices is necessary to permit active participation in their own medical treatment/care may be provided prescription optics.

5. SPECIAL EYEGLASSES, LENSES, OR FRAMES

a. Lenses, tints, prisms, and other ophthalmic aids and low vision devices may be procured upon approval of the Chief of Ophthalmology or Chief of Optometry on a per-beneficiary basis provided a medical need exists and justification is given for the prescription.

b. Special frames, prescribed for medical reasons and not for cosmetic purposes, will be procured upon prescription by a staff ophthalmologist or optometrist.

c. Special eyeglasses or frames required with cosmetic facial restorations may be procured upon the recommendation of the Chief, Plastic Eye and Restoration Clinic, and the approval of a staff ophthalmologist or optometrist. In such cases, corrective lenses are authorized for any refractive error present.

d. Prescriptions for eyeglasses with tinted lenses will be filled for beneficiaries with post-cataract surgery, chronic uveitis, severe corneal disease, etc. Tinted lenses will not be provided solely for comfort; medical need must be documented by a staff ophthalmologist or optometrist.

6. REPLACEMENT EYEGLASSES

a. Replacement of corrective eyeglasses necessitated by fair wear and tear, loss or breakage due to circumstances beyond the control of the beneficiary, or due to required change of prescription, may be made at any time for VA beneficiaries who are enrolled. When replacement eyeglasses are prescribed because of a change in refractive error, the change must require an increase in sphere, cylinder and/or power as follows:

Sphere Power of	+ or - .50 diopter	
Cylinder Power of	+ or - .50 diopter	
Axis change of	+ or - .25 to .75 diopters	5 degrees
	+ or - 1.00 to 2.00 diopters	3 degrees
	+ or - 2.25 or more	2 degrees

NOTE: Appropriate prescriptions and resultant sphere, cylinder and/or axis changes will be determined by the examining ophthalmologist or optometrist. Replacement eyeglasses will be procured and issued in the same manner as the initial prescription when above criteria are met.

7. SECOND PAIR OF EYEGLASSES

a. A second pair of corrective eyeglasses will not be issued to any beneficiary unless there are compelling medical circumstances requiring a second pair.

b. When providing spare eyeglasses from any existing prescription, the prescription must be current and appropriate for the visual needs of the beneficiary.

8. CONTACT LENSES

Contact lenses may be provided to eligible beneficiaries with monocular aphakia, binocular aphakia, severe astigmatism, pathologic myopia, keratinosis, aniseikonia, or other ocular and vision conditions, when prescribed by a VA or fee-basis ophthalmologist or optometrist and only when contact lenses are superior to eyeglasses in improving or protecting the beneficiary's visual or medical function.

9. REPLACEMENT CONTACT LENSES

a. Replacement contact lenses will be provided to eligible beneficiaries upon approval of a staff ophthalmologist or optometrist.

b. Replacement contact lenses will not normally be provided to beneficiaries unless medically necessary for the continuation of post-hospital care treatment for a condition which requires contact lenses.

10. SECOND PAIR OF CONTACT LENSES

Beneficiaries who are enrolled and who have an eye or vision condition requiring contact lenses may be provided a second lens or pair of lenses when loss or destruction of the beneficiary's contact lens(es) creates a severe hardship or a compelling medical need.

11. PROCEDURES FOR FURNISHING PRESCRIPTION OPTICS

a. Medical care facilities will develop local procedures to ensure that a beneficiary's eligibility for ophthalmic prescriptions (eyeglasses and contact lenses) are established prior to issuance of prescription optics.

b. When beneficiaries undergo an eye examination in conjunction with an examination for medical reasons other than the sole purpose of obtaining prescription optics, and are not eligible for VA-furnished optics, the beneficiary may, upon request, secure a copy of the prescription from the examiner. When providing this prescription, copy four of VA Form 10-2914, Prescription and Authorization for Eyeglasses, VA Form 10-2577f, Security Prescription Form, or any other form developed for this purpose, will be used and annotated "not to be filled at VA expense." An appropriate disclaimer should also be stamped on the VA Form 10-2914 to avoid difficulties should the beneficiary find the prescription inadequate after spending personal funds to purchase optics based on a refraction provided by VA.

12. PROCURING EYEGLASSES USING VA FORM 10-2914 (ADP), AND VA FORM 10-2421 (ADP), PROSTHETIC AUTHORIZATION FOR ITEMS OR SERVICES

a. Each facility shall develop a policy outlining procedures for procurement of prescription optics from a local licensed optometric and/or ophthalmic vendor for those beneficiaries authorized to use fee-basis optometrists or ophthalmologists.

(1) Delivery of eyeglasses directly to the beneficiary's home address should be authorized only when direct delivery is in the best interest of the beneficiary. The Prosthetic activity will contact at least 10 percent of the home delivery patients in order to assure prescriptions were filled correctly within tolerance.

(2) The facility should maintain one copy of either VA Form 10-2421 (ADP) or VA Form 10-2914 in a pending order file until delivery is completed.

(3) After completion, route one copy of the 10-2421 or the 10-2914 and the shipping document for filing in the beneficiary's Consolidated Health Record (CHR): attach the invoice to the copy of the 10-2421 or the 10-2914.

b. **Receipt and Payment Procedures.** Local policy is to be developed to verify receipt of eyeglasses and payment procedures using the appropriate ADP or VA forms.

c. In the event eyeglasses are not within tolerance, the Prosthetic activity will return them to the vendor for correction. While this may result in eventual receipt of two pairs of eyeglasses, this is acceptable under the circumstances.

d. Upon receipt of a bill/invoice, the Prosthetic activity will verify that amounts are correct and certify appropriate documents for payment.

13. REPAIRS TO EYEGLASSES

Whenever practical, repairs to eyeglasses will be procured from the optical company that furnished the glasses. In the event this is not possible or is not feasible, the glasses will be forwarded to the nearest local optical dispenser or ophthalmic laboratory for repair.

14. PROCEDURES FOR FURNISHING REPAIRS

a. When repairs to eyeglasses are to be obtained from the optical vendor who provided them initially, the following procedures will apply:

(1) If one or both lenses are broken and there is any indication that the beneficiary's vision has changed, or if it has been more than 1 year since the beneficiary's eyes were last examined, the beneficiary will be referred to an ophthalmologist or optometrist before new lenses are ordered.

(2) If one or both lenses are broken, the prescription is less than a year old and there is no indication of a change in the beneficiary's vision, the Prosthetic activity will prepare appropriate procurement documentation, copying the lens instructions from the previous prescription in the beneficiary's CHR. A description of the necessary repairs will be given.

(3) If no lens is broken, but repair of the frame or a new frame is required, appropriate procurement documentation will be prepared in the usual manner.

b. To ensure the appropriate level of care for beneficiaries, local procurement is preferred to contracts.