



## **Veteran Directed Care Program Participant Guidebook**

A program of

**WESTERN MONTANA AREA VI AGENCY ON AGING**

**SERVING MONTANA COUNTIES OF  
LAKE, LINCOLN, MINERAL AND SANDERS INCLUDING  
THE FLATHEAD RESERVATION**

**SERVING NORTHERN IDAHO COUNTIES OF  
BENEWAH, BOUNDARY, BONNER, KOOTENAI, LATAH AND SHOSHONE**

**Aging & Disability Resource Center**

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## **How can this guidebook help you?**

This guidebook will help you to understand the benefits available to you through the Veteran Directed Care (VDC) program. This program is a partnership between Western Montana Area VI Agency on Aging and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

Within these pages are ideas and tips to help you develop your service and support plan. It also explains your rights and responsibilities in the VDC program. Please consider carefully the information in this guidebook. With the VDC program, choice and flexibility come with responsibilities.

## Important Phone Numbers

**Western Montana Area VI Agency on Aging  
110 Main Street, Suite 5  
Polson, MT 59860**

**T: 406-883-7284/800-266-4188 F: 406-883-7363**

**PO Box 3577**

**Oldtown, ID 83822**

**T: 208-610-8000/800-266-4188 F: 208-447-1737**

Service Coordinator: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Fiscal/Employer Agent: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Other Numbers:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Western Montana Area VI Agency on Aging and your Service Coordinator are committed to providing excellent service. When you call the office at 406-883-7284 between the hours of 8 AM & 5 PM Monday through Friday, your call will be answered by a friendly staff member who will connect you with your Service Coordinator. Once you have set up services, if you prefer to communicate by e-mail, we are happy to accommodate your request.

## **What Is the Veteran Directed Care Program?**

The VDC program is a new veteran-directed approach to providing services and supports in the home and community. It is designed to assist you in self-directing your care.

## **What Does Self-Direction Mean?**

**In the VDC program self-direction means you decide:**

- What services, supports and goods you need?
- Who provides the services and supports?
- When the services and supports are provided?
- Where the services and supports are provided?
- How the services and supports are provided?

**Self-direction means you have more:**

- Choice
- Control
- Flexibility
- Freedom

**With self-direction, you:**

- Maintain control of your life and how you live it.
- Get support with what you need in the way you need it.
- Make choices about your services and supports.

**Self-direction also means:**

- A budget is approved for you to use to pay workers and buy supports and goods according to the plan you design.
- You are responsible for following the Veteran Directed Care Services rules.

## **Your Responsibilities:**

**As a VDC Participant some of your responsibilities will be to:**

- Assist with establishing your VDC eligibility through your local VA Medical Center.
- Complete the required paperwork to become the employer of record.
- Develop a Service & Support plan based on the approved budget.
- Follow your plan and stay within budget.
- Let someone know if you need help.
- Collaborate with your Service Coordinator.
- Arrange to get the services, supports and goods you need
- Hire and manage the people who will provide services and supports, which

may include replacing them if they are not working out for you.

- Keep records.
- Follow the VDC guidelines.
- Be accountable for the use of VDC funds.

### **Do I Have to Do This by Myself?**

You are not alone. The Service Coordinator and Financial Management Services (FMS) are here to help you. You may also ask people in your life to help you. Choose people you trust, such as your family, friends or people who have helped you before.

### **Western Montana Area VI Agency on Aging-Veteran Service Coordinator**

Everyone who participates in the VDC program will have a Service Coordinator, who is employed by the Western Montana Area VI Agency on Aging. In your service area the VDC program is managed by Western Montana Area VI Agency on Aging. The Veteran Service Coordinator:

- Helps you understand the VDC program.
- Helps you develop and budget your service and support plan.
- Helps you evaluate your service and support plan, and how the VDC program is working for you. This is completed at our quarterly home visits.
- Helps you understand and complete the paperwork.
- Helps you problem solve.
- Helps you with hiring, if needed.
- Reviews and submits reports to the VAMC, prepared by the FMS.

The Service Coordinator will also be the one who will complete the in-home assessment to help you determine your level of need.

In working with your Service Coordinator you are responsible for sharing what is important to you and deciding what direction you want your life to go.

### **Western Montana Area VI Agency on Aging/Accounting Department**

- Provides oversight of the VDC program.
- Evaluates program for quality assurance.
- Will coordinate with the Service Coordinator and FMS.
- Provides oversight of the financials of the VDC program.
- Reviews and approves billing invoices from FMS, 406 Financial Services LLC.
- Reviews and submits reports prepared by the FMS to the VAMC.

## **406 Financial Services LLC Fiscal/Employer Agent**

Everyone who self-directs in the Montana or Idaho VDC program must work with a Fiscal/Employer Agent. The F/EA will:

- Assist you with obtaining an individual tax identification number and the submitting of other required Federal and State paperwork.
- Act as your payroll agent for Personal Care Attendants (PCAs) including taxes and other employer-related requirements.
- Provide data on VDC Participant services needed to meet local and federal reporting requirements including billing report and monthly expense/saving fund report for Participant.
- Issue payment to vendors for service providers hired by the participant.
- Communicate with the Service Coordinator immediately about any concerns regarding the Participants' budget.
- Provide Criminal background checks for Potential PCAs.
- Bill the VAMC Monthly for approved services and goods.
- Will contact your Service Coordinator if you request something not approved in your Service and Support Plan budget.
- Coordinates with Service Coordinator to purchase approved goods.

### **Creating My Service and Support Plan**

#### **Why do I need a Service and Support Plan (SSP)?**

The VA requires that you plan how your service and support dollars will be spent. The SSP outlines in detail who will provide the services and supports and how much they will cost. Before the SSP can be implemented, it is forwarded to the Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) for approval. Once your Service Coordinator receives notice of approval, you will be contacted to let your service providers know they may begin the planned contracted services.

Here are some questions to think about asking your Service Coordinator:

- What days and times are you available to meet with me?
- Can you come to me when and where I need you?
- Is your location accessible?
- How soon could we meet to get started?
- Can you help me do the paperwork?
- How familiar are you with community resources?

## **How much money will be available for services, supports and goods?**

The amount of funding available for you will be determined by your level of care needs. The VAMC uses a case mix budgeting tool to determine this.

## **How do I begin?**

Spend some time thinking about what is most important to you. This will help you when you meet with your Service Coordinator to develop your SSP.

## **Things to Consider:**

- The purpose of the SSP is to assist you to establish and maintain a safe and healthy home environment.
- Think about the services and supports you need each week. Don't forget services that are used seasonally or annually.
- Look at the way your home is set up. Are there areas that pose safety hazards? How can these hazards be turned in to safe areas?
- Include people you trust to help you think of services and supports that would improve your life. Think Big! Don't presume something won't work...explore all options.

## **Are there specific guidelines for creating a Service and Support Plan?**

Yes...

The services and supports that you choose must:

- Help you meet your functional, medical and/or social needs;
- Increase your safety at home and in the community;
- Help you reach personal goals;
- Not be prohibited by federal and state laws and regulations;
- Not be available through another VA source; and
- Decrease your need for other publicly funded services.

In the event of a change in your health status that causes a change in your health baseline, your Service Coordinator may do another assessment. We want to ensure that you are always assigned to the proper level of care.

If you are hospitalized for more than 15 days, you may be either suspended or dis-enrolled from VDC program. The Service Coordinator will consult with the VAMC on each case. If dis-enrolled, in order to be re-enrolled, you will need to meet Geriatric and Extended Care (GEC) eligibility and be reassessed by a Service Coordinator.

## **Special Purchases**

You must plan and budget for special, higher-cost items, as well as services you will need on a regular basis.

## **Services, supports and goods NOT COVERED in VD-HCBS**

- Services already being provided to a Veteran or their family caregiver(s) by or through the Department of Veterans Affairs;
- Services, supports or goods provided to or benefiting persons other than you;
- Room and board, including rent and mortgage payments;
- Personal items and services not related to maintaining your health and safety;
- Experimental treatments;
- Vacation expenses (except for the cost of the services you may need while you are on vacation).

## **Submitting my SSP for approval**

Your SSP must be approved before services under VDC begin. Once you have prepared your SSP, your Service Coordinator will submit your SSP to the VAMC for approval.

## **How to make sure the VDC program is working the way I want**

Once you begin using the services and supports in your plan, how can you tell whether they are really helping you? Ask yourself questions like:

- Does the person I hired do what we agreed he/she would do?
- Am I happier now?
- Do I spend more time doing the things I am good at and enjoy?
- Do I spend time with the people I care about and like?
- How could my life be better?

If you want to talk with someone about these questions, think about asking your family, friends or others you trust. You may also contact your Service Coordinator to talk these things over.

## **How to change my approved plan and budget**

If you want to make changes to your SSP, first contact your Service Coordinator to discuss the change and, if necessary, get approval. Depending on the change(s) you want to make, your SSP may need to be amended, which requires approval from the VAMC.



## **Six month eligibility review**

Every six months from your enrollment month, you will be screened by the VAMC to renew your VDC eligibility.

## **Health and safety**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Western Montana Area VI Agency on Aging ensure that you receive the qualifying services and supports you need to live successfully at home and in the community. The VA monitors the program to guarantee that VDC policies and directives are followed and that the participants receive the services and supports they need.

Older adults and people with disabilities are vulnerable to abuse. Therefore, all persons employed by any agency participating in direct services to adults and persons with disabilities are required by law to report any actual or suspected instances of abuse, neglect and exploitation to Adult Protective Services (APS).

### Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation Definitions:

As an informed Participant, you should understand what these words mean. Be aware that professionals, friends, and relatives can commit abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

Physical abuse: the infliction of any physical injury, or the deprivation of food, shelter, clothing, or services necessary to maintain the physical or mental health of a minor, an older person or a person with a disability.

Sexual abuse: nonconsensual sexual contact, of any kind, with an elderly person, a disabled adult, or a minor.

Emotional abuse: the infliction of anguish, pain, or distress through verbal or nonverbal acts.

Neglect: the failure of a parent of a minor child, a guardian, or an employee responsible for caring for a child, an elderly person, or a person with a disability, to provide, to the extent of legal responsibility, food, shelter, clothing, or services necessary to maintain the physical or mental health of the person needing care.

Self-Neglect: when an elderly or disabled person is unable or unwilling to care for themselves.

Exploitation: the unreasonable use of someone’s money or personal property to the advantage of another person by means of duress, menace, fraud, or undue influence.

### **What If VDC Isn’t Working For Me?**

If you decide that the VDC program is not working for you, you may dis-enroll and return to services through other VA programs. Contact your Service Coordinator to arrange for the transition.



## **Frequently Asked Questions**

**Q. How do Veterans qualify for VDC?**

A. All Veterans enrolled in the VA Health System are eligible to be screened to participate in the VDC program. The Veteran must state an interest in self-directed care and be determined to be “in need of nursing home care” as defined by the VAMC.

**Q. Who is the leader in VDC?**

A. The Veteran participant is the leader. He/she decides if family members or any other persons will be involved.

**Q. Who can help the Veteran Participant develop a service and support plan?**

A. The Veteran participant decides what services he/she needs and develops a Service and Support Plan and budget with the assistance of the Service Coordinator and anyone else the Veteran participant wants to be involved, such as a family member or trusted friend.

**Q. Who can help the Veteran Participant with implementing the approved plan and budget?**

A. The Veteran participant’s Service Coordinator implements the approved Service and Support Plan.

**Q. How much flexibility and control will the Veteran Participant have about services?**

A. The Veteran participant directs his/her services. The Veteran will have flexibility and control over the types of services and supports they purchase, who will provide the services, where and when those services and supports will be received, and how much the workers are paid. All purchases will relate to the Veteran participant's goals.

**Q. Who can I hire?**

A. The Veteran participant can hire family and friends if they choose and pay them a fair wage. To be considered for employment the individual would need to be at least 18 years of age and have a legal work status in the US. Criminal background checks are required on all potential candidates. Prohibited offenses include: Assault, Homicide, Kidnapping, Sexual Crimes, Offenses against the family, Weapons Crimes, Offenses involving dangerous drugs and Pre-Release Workers. If the Service Coordinator has concerns about the hire, due to non-prohibitive offenses, the Veteran participant will be asked to complete the Risk Negotiation Agreement form and sign a waiver.

## **INFORMATION SHEET - Training Workers**

Training your workers is very important. You must make sure your employees or Personal Care Attendants have the proper training, in order to meet your needs and give you quality support. There are many ways to train. Here are some suggestions:

### **All Workers Will Need Some Training**

Even if your new employee has performed this kind of work before, he/she does not know how you like things done. Train your worker to do tasks the way you want them done.

#### **Prepare**

Before you start training, have all the equipment and supplies you will need for the training. If possible, schedule training when you will not be disturbed. You and your worker need time to focus on the training.

### **Explain Your Disability or Your Medical Condition**

Tell your worker **everything** about your disability or medical condition and how it affects your daily life. Do not leave anything out. Does your disability or condition have symptoms that could be alarming to a new employee? If so, talk about it. If your disability or condition has symptoms that could be alarming to the uninformed public, prepare your worker to deal with this also. Use many examples. The more your worker knows of your disability, the better support s/he can give you.

### **Review Your Hiring Agreement for this Worker**

You talked about your expectations in the interview. Make sure your worker understands they are important. Explain anything that is unclear. Let him/her ask questions. If your hiring agreement causes problems, deal with it right then. If you cannot resolve the problem, you may not want him or her to continue working for you. If this is the case, do not do any further training.

### **Have a Training Plan**

Begin each training lesson with an overview of what you will cover. At the end of the lesson, sum up what you have taught. If you need more than one lesson to cover a topic, review what you have taught in earlier lessons first. Answer any questions, and then move on to new material.

### **Explain Tasks**

When explaining a task that must be done a certain way, tell the worker(s) he/she must do it in a certain way and explain why. If the task must be done at a certain time, explain why. Describe each step carefully. The worker must understand all parts of a task and how they fit together.

### **Demonstrating New Tasks**

A good way for your worker to learn a new task is to have him/her watch someone else do it first. Have a friend, family member, or another skilled worker show him/her how to do the new task. Make sure he/she sees several times how the task is to be done. Then, let the worker practice it and tell him how he/she is doing.

### **Cover the Steps in the Task**

If you are using a checklist, have your worker review the checklist on the task as you work through each step. Or, you could have your worker write down each of the steps as you explain them. Review what your worker writes to be sure that he/she understood all steps correctly.

### **Stress Safety**

Stressing safety is critical. If you have life support or medical equipment, make sure the worker knows how and when to use it. Train the worker to understand and use “universal precautions” whenever needed. Make sure the worker knows what to do in case of an emergency.

### **Be Patient**

Your worker may not get all your directions right the first or even the second time. Making mistakes is part of learning. Ask for feedback and give the worker plenty of chances to ask questions. ***Be Patient!***

### **Be Sensitive to Your Worker**

Some people may be able to learn a whole task at once. Others may need a slower pace. Pay attention to your worker's feelings and reactions as you train. Give thought to how much new knowledge your worker is able learn at one time.

### **Respect Your Worker**

Respect your worker's ability to learn and how much he/she already knows.

### **Give Your Worker Feedback**

Giving your worker feedback during training as well as on the job is very important. Talk about what is working and, more importantly, what is not working. Like most people, your worker needs both positive and corrective feedback.

### **Correct Mistakes**

When your worker performs a task differently than the way you wanted it done, point it out. Patiently remind your worker how you want it done. Remember, you are trying to fix the mistake, not the person.

### **Praise Good Work**

When your worker performs tasks the way you want them done, point this out. Praise your worker for good work, and do not forget to say, "Thank you." This is a powerful motivator for workers.

## **INFORMATION SHEET: Dismissing (Firing) Workers**

Most people do not like having to dismiss or fire someone. However, sometimes that "perfect" person you hired does not work out. People and situations change. If you find at some point that your worker is not meeting your needs, you may have to fire that person. Keeping a hiring agreement up-to-date and keeping a regular schedule for reviewing your employee's job performance can help you decide if you have grounds for firing.

### **Some Grounds for Firing**

The reasons to fire someone will vary. Here are some of the most common reasons:

- The employee's work does not meet agreed upon expectations.
- The employee does not learn fast enough to meet your changing needs.
- The employee is late or fails to show up too many times.
- The employee's personal habits bother you.

- The employee does not pay attention to your instructions.
- You find you are having too many arguments.
- You do not feel safe and comfortable with the employee.
- The employee has a schedule that is not flexible enough for you.
- The employee violates your employment conditions, seriously or often.

### **Grounds for Immediate Firing**

Some actions by a worker may be grounds for firing him/her right away. You should have put these in your hiring agreement, as discussed earlier. Hopefully you covered these with your worker when he/she started working for you.

These grounds include actions such as:

- Drinking on the job.
- Using illegal drugs on the job.
- Coming to work impaired by alcohol or drugs.
- Being caught stealing from you.
- Abusing you in any way.
- Violating your confidentiality.

### **How to Dismiss or Fire Workers**

Weigh all your options before you fire a worker. Maybe trying to work things out with the employee might be better. Trying to hire a new one will take time and effort and there is no guarantee your new employee will be a better worker.

How you decide to handle firing a worker will depend upon your personality, your employee's personality, and the situation. You might want to get advice from your Service Coordinator, and make sure your back-up plan is available before you fire your worker. However, if firing is your decision, consider the following questions.

- How should you tell the employee you are firing him/her? Doing it by phone or letter may feel safer and/or easier, but doing it "in person" is more respectful. Having a third person, such as your designated representative, tell the employee he/she is fired is also an option.
- What reasons should you give the employee for firing him/her? If you have been giving plenty of feedback and doing regular evaluations, the worker should not be surprised. He/she should also know what you have said are grounds for firing. In some cases, something may happen or some very

serious problem may arise that you have not addressed in your guidelines or evaluations. In most cases, give the employee some idea of why you are firing him/her, but you do not have to go into great detail.

- How will the worker react? Have a neighbor, friend, relative, or Service Coordinator in the room with you and your worker if you feel there may be a problem when you bring up the subject of firing.
- How much notice should you give your worker? Be fair, but remember that if you give the worker advance notice, you may risk even more problems with his or her work and behavior.
- Who will provide your support once you fire the worker? Before you fire your present employee, have at least one backup worker ready to step in right away.
- Are you safe and secure? If the worker you fired had access to the keys to your residence or car, get them back on the same day that you fire the individual.
- Learn from the experience. After you have had some time to consider the situation, think about what you have learned from it. Would you deal with the situation in a different way? Was there a question you would have asked in the interview process that would have helped you realize that this was not the person for you?

**Once you fire an employee, contact your Service Coordinator and your Fiscal/Employer Agent as soon as possible.**

**Receipt of Guidebook**

**I have received the VDC Guidebook and the Service Coordinator has explained the program and has answered all of my questions to my satisfaction. I understand my responsibilities as the Participant and a copy of the handbook was given to me for a resource to reference, as needed.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Service Coordinator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

A copy of this signed page will be filed in the Participant's file.