

Beneficiary Travel (BT) Program Special Mode Transportation (SMT) Clinical Determinations:

Clinical Authority & Documentation Processes

38 U.S.C. § 111, authorizes VA to provide payments or allowance for BT. This benefit is available for those persons who meet certain eligibility criteria when traveling to or from a VA or VA authorized healthcare appointment. The BT program has been designed to be adaptable to meet the transportation needs of the eligible Veterans and includes special mode (ambulance, wheelchair van) transports when medically necessary. The regulatory authority contained in 38 C.F.R. Part 70, requires a clinician to determine if special mode is a medically necessary means of transport. This guidance is provided to assist the medical centers in establishing processes and internal controls for applying clinical determinations for SMT within the BT program.

Authority to make a SMT clinical determination

- Scope
 - A clinician for the purposes of the BT Program is provided in 38 C.F.R. 70.2.
 - *“Clinician means a Physician, Physician Assistant (PA), Nurse Practitioner (NP), Psychologist, or other independent licensed practitioner.”*
 - Clinical determinations may not be delegated to VA staff members who do not meet the BT definition of a clinician.
- Limits to the Clinicians authority
 - The clinicians must have current credentialing and privileging with a VAMC, be current VA staff member and be subject to ongoing professional practice evaluation and review.
 - Clinical determinations do not supersede the administrative eligibility criteria established in regulatory authority.
 - Clinicians are not to be compelled to make clinical decisions which are not covered within their licensure, credentials, privileges or scope of practice.
- Psychologist or other independent licensed practitioner(s):
 - Psychologists and LIPs such as, social workers and professional counselors possess advanced practice clinical licensure in a state as required by the VA, and have within their local privilege(s) the skills and authority to diagnose and provide therapy for mental disorders can make SMT determinations for BT.
 - However, psychologists and LIPs professionals are employed and organized in various capacities across the VA system of care. The following is required to meet compliance and oversight standards:
 - Clearly document the role of clinicians as it relates to SMT determinations in privileges, scopes of practice, Medical Center Memoranda and Standard Operating Procedures.
 - Issue Justification and Delegation of Authority letter(s) from the Medical Center Chief of Staff to appropriate psychologists and LIPs, to make clinical determinations for SMT and under what circumstances those decisions maybe made. (**Attachment A**)
 - Ensure BT program office maintenance of a listing of Psychologists and LIPs clinicians who have authority to make and/or approve SMT

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Considerations for clinicians

- Special Mode (SMT)
 - Mode of transport for Veterans should be medically appropriate and is the most economical to the government.
 - More economical Common Carrier (taxi, hired car, bus, transit system, train, or plane) options should be considered **if** medically appropriate prior to approval of SMT.
 - SMT **should not** be used for convenience of the patient and/or family or because the claimant has “no other way to get in”.
 - SMT means an ambulance, ambulette, air ambulance, wheelchair van, or other mode of transportation specially designed to transport disabled persons
 - Medical criteria for SMT can broadly be defined as the clinical reason why a claimant can only be safely transported using SMT:
 - The justification should be centered on the claimant's:
 - Safety
 - Confirm the claimant **cannot** safely be transported by private vehicle, hired car (taxi), bus, train, airplane or other common carrier (public transportation).
 - Example: SMT is provided to claimants who cannot transfer into a common carrier or POV without assistance or who require restraints during transport or who require medical care during transport that could not otherwise be provided by an attendant.
 - The clinical justification must be consistent with how the claimant is transported in daily life.
 - SMT **does not** include a mode of transportation not specifically designed to transport disabled persons, such as a bus, subway, taxi, train, or airplane.
 - A modified, privately-owned vehicle (POV), with special adaptive equipment and/or capable of transporting disabled persons **is not** a special mode of transportation.

Documenting clinical determinations

- Process
 - The clinical necessity of the SMT should be documented in the Veteran's electronic medical records
 - Beneficiary Travel Consult
 - CPRS Documentation
 - Progress Notes
 - Facilities are encouraged to have a consistent method for clinicians to provide SMT clinical determinations to the BT program office for action.
 - The process should provide an easy way for providers to communicate the medical necessity of SMT for to travel. Specifically, keeping in mind the clinician's day-to-day workflow as to not interrupt patient care.
 - Where a progress note, clinical consult or other medical documentation can be use it is expected to be considered an acceptable form of clinical documentation for BT. However, a typical progress note may not contain the necessary information as to the necessity for SMT.
 - In collaboration with the VA Center for Applied Systems Engineering (VA-CASE), the Veteran Transportation Program a Special Mode Transportation Medical

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Transport Certification Reminder Dialog, which is currently available for facility use. Point of Contact: William B. Patterson William.Patterson7@va.gov or (202) 382-2593

- Best Practices:
 - VA Medical Centers utilize a process wherein a second medical provider reviews BT clinical determinations, similar to the NNVC consult process.
 - Utilization of a time limit for the approvals provided in the clinical determination. VAMCs have created systems to prompt a new review of the claimants' condition when the clinical determination expires. This reduces the burden on the clinician to attest to the medical necessity for SMT each trip.

Department of Veterans Affairs

Memorandum

Date:

From: Chief of Staff

Subj: **EXAMPLE:** Justification and Delegation of Authority for Beneficiary Travel Medical Determinations

To: Mobility Manager, Veteran Transportation Service

Thru:

Justification and Authority

1. In order to meet regulatory and procedural requirements of the Beneficiary Travel Program the identified Clinicians have been reviewed and determined to possess the appropriate licensure and scope of practice to make clinical determinations for Special Mode Transports.
2. Clinical Determinations are limited to:
 - a. Mental Health or Behavioral Health conditions
 - b. Determinations of Functional abilities
3. This authority is subject to review and has been predetermined to expire on January 1, 20XX or 365 days from the date of this memo, whichever comes first.

Process:

1. The delegate will review the beneficiaries clinical record and/or request examination if necessary
2. If the delegate enters the consult, and approves by electronic signature
3. The Beneficiary Travel staff processes the consult and submits it for authorization to Special Mode Transportation.

Delegate(s):

1. First M. Last, Psychologist, Ph.D. C/SL
2. First M. Last, Psychologist, Ph.D., C/SL
3. First M. Last, Psychologist, Ph.D., C/SL
4. First M. Last, Social Worker LCSW, C/SL
5. First M. Last, Social Worker LCSW, C/SL
6. First M. Last, Social Worker LCSW, C/SL
7. First M. Last, Social Worker LCSW, C/SL
8. First M. Last, Social Worker LCSW, C/SL
9. First M. Last, Social Worker LCSW, C/SL

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10. First M. Last, Social Worker LCSW, C/SL

First M. Last, MD
Chief of Staff