

# Military Spouse Career Advancement Account

## New Program Guidance/FAQs for Spouses and Schools

As of September 10, 2010

### OSD ANNOUNCEMENT:

**DoD will resume the MyCAA program.** The Department Of Defense has completed the program review and will be making the necessary adjustments to resume the MyCAA program beginning in October 2010.

**Starting 8 a.m. (EDT) Monday October 25, 2010,** Military OneSource career and education counselors will have a much more active role in supporting military spouses. In addition to understanding resources available via DoD's financial aid support, they will provide support and assistance to identify and gain access to other federal, state and local programs. All military spouses of active duty service members will be eligible for career counseling and support.

**New financial assistance guidelines.** With a focus on the original intent of the program, the Defense Department's financial assistance program will:

- Be available to spouses of active duty service members in pay grades E1-E5, W1-W2, and O1-O2
- Offer a maximum financial benefit of \$4,000 with a fiscal year cap of \$2,000. Waivers will be available for spouses pursuing licensure or certification up to the total maximum assistance of \$4,000
- Require military spouses to finish their program of study within three years from the start date of the first course
- Be limited to associate degrees, certification and licensures

These new guidelines reflect a return to the original purpose of the program – to assist spouses of service members achieve portable careers. These changes also align the program with responsible fiscal planning by the Defense Department to help sustain the program. Additional program details will be posted on this Web site when they become available. We encourage you to check the site often.

**Spouses who currently have an active account** as of the date of this announcement (20 July 2010), must request approval of a career plan not later than August 31, 2010. Beginning September 1, 2010 through October 21, 2010, spouses with active accounts may request financial assistance for classes with a start date up to (but not beyond) January 31, 2011. All currently approved financial assistance documents will be honored.

Additionally, the review revealed that National Guard and Reserve members must be on active duty for their spouses to receive the MyCAA benefit. Spouses may no longer use the MyCAA benefit when the service member is in an alert or demobilization period. The new eligibility rule takes effect immediately.

The program will be closed from Friday, October 22 to Monday, October 25, 2010, so that we may ensure the infrastructure is in place to implement the new program.

Military spouses are the backbone for military families, displaying strength of character to be admired by this nation. The Department of Defense remains committed to investing in military families, and appreciates the sacrifice of those who also serve.

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***NOTE:** This document contains the new MyCAA Program Guidance and general FAQs. The specifics of how these policies will be implemented are under development and will be defined prior to the re-start of the program.*

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

**When will the MyCAA Program open up?** Phase one of the military spouse career advancement program was resumed March 13, 2010, for the 136,853 spouses who were already enrolled in the program. The second phase, for all military spouses not previously enrolled, will begin on October 25, 2010. The program will be closed from Midnight Thursday, October 21 to Monday, October 25, 2010, so that we may ensure the infrastructure is in place to implement the new program.

**Why was October 25, 2010 chosen to reinstate the program for all military spouses?** This date was chosen to allow enough time to implement the new staffing and software infrastructure.

**What drove the decision to change eligibility and include the annual cap, reduced benefit, etc.?** The Department of Defense had to make changes in light of current and future fiscal realities – so DoD adjusted the program to assist those spouses who need it most.

**Under the new guidelines, some spouses will no longer be eligible for MyCAA funding who currently have a MyCAA account and are going to school. Can they take classes in the fall?** Spouses who currently have an account will be allowed to request financial assistance until Thursday, October 21, 2010. And beginning September 1, 2010, spouses may request classes that have a start date up to January 31, 2011. To ensure adequate time to plan for courses, no new career plans will be accepted after August 31, 2010. After October 21, 2010, spouses outside of the eligibility categories will no longer be able to request financial assistance.

**The spouses currently with MyCAA accounts have been approved for \$6,000. What happens to her money now and after October 25?** Spouses with current career plans may continue to use up to the \$6,000 maximum. On October 25<sup>th</sup>, all of the current MyCAA accounts will be reduced \$6,000 to \$4,000. If a spouse has used more than \$4,000 then she will have no remaining MyCAA funds. If she has used less than \$4,000 then she may use the remaining funds up to \$4,000.

**What specifically is the eligibility for spouses of Guard and Reserve on title 10 orders?** Effective immediately, only those spouses whose service members are executing Title 10 orders will be eligible. This includes spouses of deployed National Guard and Reserve members who are activated on Title 10 orders. This change in practice is to better comply with the program's authorizing legislation. Guard and Reserve Spouses are no longer eligible from date of alert to 180 days past deployment. In addition, all spouse participants must be able to start and complete their courses while their military sponsor is on Title 10 orders.

**What is the status of Spouses of Guard and Reserve that are no longer on title 10 orders that have approved financial assistance requests?** The change in eligibility will not affect an approved FA request. DoD will honor all approved FAs. The spouse's school will need to invoice via the MyCAA portal for payment for all approved FAs. However, effective immediately, spouses of Guard and Reserve who are no longer on title 10 orders will not be able to request FA.

**Some spouses who are still eligible for MyCAA funding have already spent more than \$4,000; will they be able to finish out the remainder of the initial \$6,000?** Spouses can request financial

assistance for courses under the current program until Thursday, October 21, 2010. Spouses who have exceeded \$4,000 on October 25 will no longer be eligible for MyCAA funding.

**Can spouses who are no longer be eligible for MyCAA funding still get career counseling?** Yes. All military spouses, to include spouse of Guard and Reserve, may receive educational counseling and career guidance from a Military One Source Spouse Education and Career Consultant. Military One Source consultants can provide education and training, career exploration, assessment, employment readiness and career search assistance.

**Will the program be cut in the future?** Not in FY 2011. However, in coming years, with a reduced defense budget a reality, every program will be closely scrutinized for its contribution to military family readiness.

**Some spouses are currently using MyCAA funding for a bachelor's (or masters) degree. Will they be allowed to continue using MyCAA funding?** Beginning on October 25, 2010, MyCAA funding is restricted to associates degrees, and programs of study and tests leading directly to licensures and certifications. For spouses who have MyCAA funds remaining, beginning on October 25, 2010, they will need to use their MyCAA funds for completion of an associate's degree, license or certification. MYCAA will continue to work with particular programs within a college or university that provide certificates which directly support a portable career and associates degrees. Additional guidance is still being worked on exact parameters.

**What if a spouse is planning on getting a certification that is going to cost more that \$2000 up front? Can the \$2000 per year cap be exceeded?** Yes, there will be a waiver process built into the MyCAA program for licenses and certifications that require up-front tuition that is greater than \$2,000 with a total expenditure limit of \$4,000.

**When does the \$2,000 per fiscal year cap begin?** The fiscal year for 2010 is October 25, 2010 ending on September 30, 2011. Each year after that it will be October 1 through September 30 the following year.

**Will the three year time limit to use MyCAA funding begin from the new guidelines or be retroactive to the beginning of the program?** The time limit of 3 years from the start date of the first class will be a new requirement that will begin with the new program guidance implementation starting on October 25, 2010.

**What happens when a spouse fails or withdraws from a course?** Spouses will have to demonstrate successful completion of their courses in order to continue using MyCAA funding. If a spouse fails or withdraws from a course, their MyCAA account will be locked. The spouse will need to contact a consultant for education counseling regarding how the spouse can successfully continue onto their portable career. Schools need to upload grades to the AI Portal in a correct and timely manner. Not doing so will affect the spouses ability to access funds in their MYCAA accounts.

**How will the change in eligibility affect an already approved financial assistance (FA) request?** The change in eligibility will not affect an approved FA request. DoD will honor all approved FAs that contain

correct information. The spouse's school will need to invoice via the MyCAA portal for payment for all approved FAs.

**If there is a pending FA that was approved prior to October 21, 2010 but is not paid yet, will MyCAA still pay?** Yes. The spouse's school will need to invoice via the MyCAA portal for payment for all approved FAs.

**Will the school get paid for courses a spouse is in right now?** If the spouse is in a course which has an approved FA, yes, DoD will pay this FA.

**Will spouses have to pay money back if they do not qualify for the program due to the change in eligibility?** No. Spouses who used MyCAA funding who are no longer eligible under the new program guidelines will not be required to pay any money back. The MyCAA funding they received under the initial eligibility rules was allocated appropriately.

**If a spouse has funds remaining but no longer qualifies for MyCAA will her account be locked?** Yes. Spouses who currently have a MyCAA account but under the new program guidelines are no longer eligible will have their accounts locked on October 25 2010, the date the new MyCAA program policies go into effect. However, they are eligible to receive education and career counseling from Military OneSource indefinitely while their military sponsor is on active duty.

**Will spouses who have used more than \$4,000 already have to pay any money back?** No. The MyCAA funding they received under the initial eligibility rules was allocated appropriately and does not have to be paid back.

**Who can spouses contact if they want to make a complaint?** Military Spouses can request to speak to a manager for any service delivery issue. If spouses have a concern regarding the policy, the SCC and MOS staffs do not have the authority to make those changes. Spouses can e-mail [MyCAAFEEDBACK@militaryonesource.com](mailto:MyCAAFEEDBACK@militaryonesource.com) to provide feedback to Department of Defense. Schools officials may can contact their School Liaison for questions and issues.

**How will a spouse know if her license or certification qualifies as a portable career?** The Department of Labor and Department of Defense define a portable career as one that is high growth; high demand; largest employment; and most likely to have job openings in military duty locations. These types of careers are plentiful in many locations where the Armed Forces stations military families. MYCAA will provide further guidance when it is available.

**Can a spouse's AA be in any subject?** Spouses must pursue an AA, license or certification in a portable career field. For example, Associate Degrees in general education would not be considered a good or acceptable career choice. MYCAA will provide further guidance when it is available.

**Are there any restrictions in an AA degree as to what MyCAA will pay for? Will MyCAA pay for general course requirements as well as career specific requirements (e.g. some AA degrees**

**require physical education or orientation seminar or Eng 100)?** Courses that are required by the school as part of the AA degree will be paid for. Specific guidance on this topic will developed.

**Why no more BA or MA degrees? Some careers require a BA?** The original intent of the MyCAA program was to assist spouses married to Service members in junior ranks, in other words, spouses who needed educational assistance resources the most as they begin pursuing portable careers in a mobile military lifestyle. DoD is re-focusing MyCAA on this original intent.

**What other benefits are available to me once my funding is spent?** Military OneSource has prepared a comprehensive list of additional sources of financial assistance that can be used by spouses who are seeking education and training for portable careers.

**How do I get assistance to find other financial resources? What other resources are available to me?** Military OneSource career counselors can assist you in finding additional financial resource options. There are numerous federal, state and grant opportunities available to military spouses.

**How long can spouses under the current program use their \$6,000 MyCAA financial assistance?** Spouses can continue using up to the \$6,000 maximum until 21 October 2010. Starting on 1 September 2010 they may apply the financial assistance to courses or programs starting up to 31 January 2011. These applications must be approved by 21 October 2010.