

Phony telephone number scam targets veterans

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There's a new scam out there, preying on veterans who are making decisions about their medical care. The Veterans Choice Program (VCP) is an initiative of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The program allows certain eligible vets to use approved health care providers who are outside of the VA system. Veterans or families can call the VCP's toll-free number to verify their eligibility for the program.

Here's the problem: Scammers have set up a phony telephone line that very closely resembles the VCP's real telephone number. Con artists often use names, seals, and logos that look or sound like those of respected, legitimate organizations. This time they're using a phone number that's almost identical to the real thing, counting on creating confusion. You call and think you've reached the VCP. The fake line's message says you're entitled to a rebate if you provide a credit card number. But if you give up your account information, they'll debit your account and you'll get nothing in return. There is no rebate and you'll need to cancel your credit card.

If you're a veteran – or you're helping one with health care – remember these tips to avoid a scammer's tricks.

- Be sure you're calling the real number for the Veterans Choice Program: 866-606-8198. If you're not sure you've reached the VCP, hang up. Check the VCP's site for the real number and try again.
- The VA – or any government agency – will not ask for your financial account information.

Visit VCP's site to learn more about the Veterans Choice Program – or call 866-606-8198. Check out the VA's identity theft prevention program, More Than a Number. Report identity theft to the FTC – and get a personalized recovery plan – at  IdentityTheft.gov.