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Military personnel may receive additional tax benefits for 2021 returns

APPLETON, Wis. (Feb. 11, 2022) – Members of the military and their families may be eligible for special tax benefits on their 2021 tax returns. For federal tax purposes, the U.S. Armed Forces includes enlisted personnel in all regular and reserve units controlled by the Secretaries of Defense — the Air Force, Army, Coast Guard and Navy.

Travel expenses can be deducted if they are unreimbursed and are incurred while traveling away from home. Homes of U.S. Armed Forces members are considered their duty station if they are on a permanent duty assignment. To be deductible, the travel expenses must be work related. Military personnel cannot deduct any expenses for personal travel, such as visits to family on leave. If part of the reserves, unreimbursed travel expenses for traveling more than 100 miles from home to perform reserve duties are eligible for deduction. They do not have to itemize deductions since eligible expenses are deducted as an adjustment to income. The standard mileage rate is 57.5 cents for 2020 and 56 cents for 2021.

Uniform purchase cost and future upkeep deductibility depend on whether the uniform can be worn when off duty. If the uniform can be worn while off duty, no costs can be deducted. However, if the uniform is prohibited from being worn when off duty, the cost associated with that uniform may be deducted. The following are deductible:

- Military battle dress uniforms and utility uniforms that cannot be worn while off-duty
- Articles not replacing regular clothing, including insignia of rank, corps devices, epaulets, aiguillettes and swords

Moving expenses have special rules that apply to active-duty members of the U.S. Armed Forces and their surviving spouses who move due to a permanent station change. Deductible expenses include unreimbursed costs of moving, travel and storing, and insuring personal items including household goods. For 2021, the standard mileage rate for moving is 16 cents per mile (2021) and 18 cents per mile (2022)

Distributions from an IRA, 401(k) or 403(b) plans made after the date of the order or call to active duty and before the close of the active-duty period have special rules and may not be subject to the 10 percent penalty tax on early distributions. Such distributions are also eligible to be repaid to the plan if paid back within two years of ending active duty.

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IRS deadline approaching for small, non-profit organizations

Deadline includes sports clubs, civic organizations and local associations

APPLETON, Wis. (Feb. 11, 2022) – Even small non-profit organizations, such as sports clubs, civic organizations and local associations, are required to file an annual information return with the IRS. The IRS then makes the forms available for public inspection, allowing information about an organization's sources of funds or project and administrative expenditures to shape donors' choices.

By law, the IRS will automatically revoke the federal tax-exempt status of organizations that fail to file annual reports for three consecutive years. However, churches and church-related organizations are not required to file annual reports unless they have unrelated business taxable income (UBTI).

The Form 990-series information returns and electronic notices are due on the 15th day of the fifth month after an organization's tax year ends. If the due date falls on a Saturday, Sunday or a legal holiday, the due date is the next business day. Many organizations use the calendar year as their tax year, making May 16, 2022, the deadline to file for 2021 since it's the next business day after May 15, 2022.

The IRS offers an online search tool called "Tax Exempt Organization Search." This helps users easily find key information about the federal tax status and filings of certain tax-exempt organizations, including whether an organization had its federal tax exemption automatically revoked.

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How to claim a donation as a tax deduction

Certain donations are not recognized by the IRS as deductible

APPLETON, Wis. (Feb. 11, 2022) –For tax years beginning in 2021 only, individuals who do not itemize can claim a deduction of up to $300 ($600 if filing a joint return) for charitable contributions made during 2021.

A qualified charitable contribution could include cash contributions to churches, nonprofit educational institutions, nonprofit medical institutions, public charities or other qualified charities. Contributions made to supporting organizations, or to a new or existing donor advised fund do not qualify.

It is important to verify the organization's charitable status. The easiest way to do this is by calling them, checking their website or using the IRS's tax-exempt organization search. A bank record supporting the donation or written receipt from the charity showing the name of the donee organization, date and amount of contribution is needed for any donation deducted, even a single dollar dropped into the red bucket.

For those who do itemize, not every donation is deductible. For example, clothing or food given directly to victims of a disaster (through a charity), political contributions and time volunteering — even if the work accomplishes something a paid position would otherwise accomplish, or if time was taken off work — are all considered nondeductible contributions.

The most common contributions are paid via cash and checks. Monetary gifts can also be made by credit card or payroll deductions. The entire amount of a monetary donation is deductible if nothing of value is received in return. If a benefit is received because of a contribution, only the part of the contribution that is greater than the value of what was received is deductible.

Other common donations are property or out-of-pocket expenses paid to do volunteer work. If transportation costs to perform volunteer work are incurred, the actual cost of gas and oil, or the standard rate of 14-cents-per-mile (2021 and 2022) can be deducted. Volunteers must keep detailed records of any out-of-pocket expenses incurred. Add parking and tolls to the amount claimed using either method. In general, clothing and household items are deductible at their current values, whereas food items are deductible at cost.

Noncash contributions require records describing the property donated and the method used to determine its value. The taxpayer is responsible for valuing the property either through appraisal or by comparison to other property. Generally, charitable organizations will only issue a receipt stating the donation was made and will not assign a value. Special rules apply for donated stock, real estate and other capital assets that would have resulted in capital gains. The applicable guidance for property contributions of more than $500, and property contributions of more than $5,000, should be consulted when applicable.

Charitable contributions are generally itemized deductions on Schedule A. For 2021 only, itemizers may now apply an increased limit of up to 100% of their AGI for qualified contributions made during calendar-year 2021.

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NATP warns taxpayers, tax pros of fake IRS scams

Scammers send fake IRS notices, lure unsuspecting victims

APPLETON, Wis. (Feb. 11, 2022) – Every year, taxpayers are bombarded with emails and letters claiming to be from the IRS and asking for personal information. The subject line on many of these emails claim the IRS is trying to contact the person because they have a refund for them. These are commonly referred to as phishing scams.

Phishing is a term used to describe emails that are "fishing for information" and "hooking" victims. The goal is to "lure" readers into believing the IRS needs information from them.

Do not reply to these phishing emails. Do not open any attachments — they might contain malicious code that could infect the computer. Also, do not click any links provided in the email. Fraudsters typically request bank information or credit card numbers so recipients can pay their tax due or receive their refunds. Unsuspecting persons then become victims of identity theft.

Ghost preparers are also on the rise, which is dangerous for taxpayers who are unaware of the repercussions of using one. A ghost preparer is someone who doesn't sign the tax returns they prepare. Not signing a return is a red flag that the paid preparer may be looking to make a quick profit by promising a big refund of charging fees based on the size of the refund, leaving the taxpayer liable for the inaccurate return and possible criminal fallout.

COVID scammers use stolen identities to file fraudulent unemployment claims then leave victims to receive the 1099-G with income not actually received. In the latest twist on a common Social Security number fraud, scammers claim they will suspend or cancel the taxpayer's Social Security number. Criminals are also faking calls from the Taxpayer Advocate Service to get frightened taxpayers to reveal personal data.

The IRS continues to issue warnings about the fraudulent use of the IRS name or logo by scammers trying to trick recipients into providing sensitive information to steal their identity and assets. The IRS will never request financial information, passwords, PINs or any other sensitive information from anyone via email. The IRS sends paper notices to discuss tax account information. Never provide banking information in response to unsolicited texts, emails or social media posts from accounts claiming to be the IRS.

The IRS will not call taxpayers threatening legal action. If you receive a call like this, hang up. Scammers now use fraudulent tax transcripts as bait to try to have documents opened containing malware or viruses. Taxpayers who suspect tax violations should report fraud to the IRS using Form 3949A or forward phishing emails to phishing@irs.gov.

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The importance of meeting with a qualified tax professional

What to bring to the appointment

APPLETON, Wis. (Feb. 11, 2022) – Although tax season is underway, it's not too late to contact a qualified tax professional to complete and file a return. Tax returns can be done more quickly if the taxpayer provides all the information during the initial appointment.

Taxpayers should prepare for the tax appointment by compiling a list of documents they received based on last year's tax return, statements, forms and this tax year's activities. This year, taxpayers should provide a copy of their IRS Letter 6475, *Your Third Economic Impact Payment,* and IRS Letter 6419, *Advance Child Tax Credit Reconciliation,* detailing the advanced child tax credit (CTC) payments received and the number of children used to calculate the advanced CTC amount. Taxpayers who cannot find Letter 6419 will need to use the online CTC portal to confirm their information.

Call a qualified tax preparer with any questions about necessary documents needed. When the documents are received (usually around the end of January), mark them off the list and put them in a tax folder to stay organized.

If employed, the taxpayer will need to include their W-2(s). If they received income from interest, dividends, pensions, self-employment, government payments (like unemployment) or the sale of property, they should receive a Form 1099. It is helpful to provide the actual statements to the preparer. Remember that not all forms look alike. Somewhere on the envelope, on the form or in the email, it must clearly state it is an important tax document. Also, the taxpayer should not forget to include any Schedule K-1s they receive from a partnership, an S corporation, trust or an estate. If the taxpayer had income not reported on the forms listed above, make note for the tax preparer to include it. Finally, if the taxpayer gifted qualified charities or individuals, either up to or over the annual exclusion amount, details should be provided to the tax preparer.

If stock was sold during the year, the taxpayer should receive Form 1099-B that notes the gross proceeds. If the stock was received as a gift or inheritance, other means of determining the cost will be necessary. For every stock sold, provide the basis and acquisition date. Likewise, the trade or disposal of virtual currency could result in capital gain or loss. If exchanges don't provide a Form 1099-B, the broker's spreadsheet of transactions and a crypto tax reporting software service might be useful to get sales prices and cost basis.

If a taxpayer owns a home, they might be able to itemize deductions. Each year, provide the property tax payment and the mortgage interest statement. Medical expenses are deductible if they exceed 7.5 percent of the adjusted gross income (AGI). Applicable medical expenses include prescription drugs, doctor, dental, hospital bills, medical insurance premiums not paid on a pre-tax basis through the taxpayer's employer, and mileage to and from the doctor's office.

Charitable contributions are a good source of deductions. Taxpayers are now allowed to apply up to 100% of their AGI for calendar-year 2021 qualified contributions. Qualified contributions include cash donations to qualifying charitable organizations. Other deductible contributions can be cash, property or out-of-pocket expenses paid to do volunteer work. If the taxpayer drove to and from the volunteer site, they can take the actual cost of gas and oil or use the standard rate of 14 cents per mile. Parking fees and tolls incurred are deductible whether the standard mileage rate or actual expense method is used. Individuals who do not itemize deductions can claim a charitable deduction of up to $300 ($600 for a joint return) for cash contributions made during 2021 to a qualified charitable organization. The taxpayer will need to substantiate any donation they claim.

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Taxpayers with dependent care expenses will notice significant changes on their 2021 returns

APPLETON, Wis. (Feb. 11, 2022) – 2021 is a big year for those claiming the child and dependent care credit because recent tax law change increased the credit amount and made it refundable for those meeting work, residency and income requirements. To be refundable, the taxpayer (either spouse on a joint return) must have a main home in the United States for more than one-half of the tax year. Special rules apply for military personnel.

The credit can be up to 50 percent of qualifying child care expenses, limited to $8,000 for one qualifying person or $16,000 for two or more qualifying persons, depending on adjusted gross income. In tax year 2021, if the credit amount exceeds the amount of income tax owed, the excess amount can be refunded on the return if residency requirements are met. The adjusted gross income level at which the reased to $125,000 for 2021. Above $125,000, the credit amount decreases as income rises.

To receive the credit for child and dependent care expenses, the person receiving care must be either a dependent child under the age of 13 or someone who is physically or mentally incapable of caring for themselves. The taxpayer must also be the custodial guardian for the qualifying person, and they must live with them more than half the year, even if they do not claim them as a dependent. A valid Social Security number, ITIN or ATIN for the qualifying person is also needed to claim the credit.

Only care provided while the taxpayer (and spouse, if applicable) is working or looking for work qualifies. Examples of care provided include nanny-share arrangements, day care, preschool and day camp. If married, taxpayers must file a joint return to claim the credit. Special rules apply for separated parents. Furthermore, they (and their spouse) must have earned income from wages, salaries, tips or net earnings from self-employment. The amount of expenses that can be used to calculate the credit cannot exceed earned income, and, if married, must be based on the lesser of the spouses' earned incomes. A spouse who is a student for at least five months of the year is deemed to have earned income of $250 (one qualifying person) or $500 (two or more) for any one month they are a full-time student.

A qualified caregiver must provide the dependent care to be eligible for the credit. Spouses, the other parent of the taxpayer's child, taxpayer's dependents and the taxpayer's children under age 19 are not qualified caregivers; however, a relative who is not the taxpayer's dependent may qualify for the credit, even if the relative resides in the taxpayer's home. At the end of the year, caregivers (including nonworking spouses if caring for someone who cannot care for themselves), should provide a statement with their federal employer ID number (EIN) or Social Security number (SSN), full name, address and amount paid.

If the taxpayer's employer provides a dependent care benefit, the benefit amount reduces the amount of credit available on the tax return. Employers may now exclude $5,250 for single filers, or $10,500 for married filing jointly taxpayers, from an employee's income through a dependent care assistance program. If they pay someone to come to their home and provide care, they may be considered a household employer, in which case additional forms need to be included with the tax return.

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Incorrect, missing Social Security numbers top list of most common tax mistakes

Rejected returns can delay refund several weeks, months

APPLETON, Wis. (Feb. 11, 2022) – At the close of each tax filing season, the IRS compiles a list of the most common errors taxpayers make when filing their tax returns. Believe it or not, incorrect mathematical calculations does not make it to top the list. A frequent culprit for the past several years is missing or incorrect Social Security numbers on individual income tax returns.

When an incorrect return is filed, the IRS first rejects it, then often sends a notice requesting additional information. This can delay a refund by several weeks, or even months. In other instances, the IRS may issue a refund, but for a lesser amount than what the taxpayer was expecting. This may occur when, for example, more withholding is reported on the tax return than what is stated on the W-2.,

Another common filing mistake is omitting the Social Security number or taxpayer identification number of the caregiver in the child and dependent care credit input. This costly error causes the IRS to issue the refund, less the amount of the credit. Filing an amended return to correct the error will add weeks to the refund's receipt. Likewise, omitting the Social Security number, ITIN or ATIN of a qualifying child for any of the child-related credits will slow or disqualify the credit claim.

Other common mistakes to avoid when filing taxes this year include:

- Filing too early. Filing before all relevant tax documents are available risks mistakes that lead to processing delays. Jan. 31 is the deadline for issuers to mail W-2s and 1099-NEC, so waiting until February could eliminate a processing delay.
- Missing Letters 6419 and 6475 (if applicable). The IRS-provided Letters 6419 and 6475 for the advanced child tax credit and economic impact payments. These letters list the exact amount and date the IRS issued funds for these payments. Use these amounts in the tax return. Any variation from the printed amounts may result in a refund delay.
- Entering information inaccurately. Misspelled names, math errors and wrong bank account numbers slow down processing. Double check input and use direct deposit for refunds.
- Using an incorrect filing status. The Interactive Tax Assistant on IRS.gov helps taxpayers choose the correct status.
- Forgetting to sign forms. An unsigned tax return isn't valid. In most cases, both spouses must sign a joint return. Exceptions apply for some members of the armed forces or taxpayers with a valid power of attorney.

The IRS compiles income, payment and other information in each taxpayer's account. Differences between what taxpayers report and what is in the account lead to processing delays. Taxpayers can create an IRS online personal account to access the data the IRS has on file. Use interactive assistant tools on the IRS website to calculate eligibility. Save IRS notifications received in the mail. The IRS encourages taxpayers to e-file and use direct deposit for refunds.

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Gig economy workers may face tax implications for 2021 returns

NATP advises opening separate business bank account to track deductible expenses

APPLETON, Wis. (Feb. 11, 2022) – Picking up a second job to supplement household income is common – especially as many Americans deal with the fallout of COVID-19. Many choose to become gig economy workers who deliver on-demand food and groceries, or packages from online retailers. Others chose to become freelance writers and designers, media or content marketers and Instagram influencers. Some may not realize, depending on their activities, they may face tax implications of becoming a gig worker because they could be considered a sole proprietor of a business.

Conducting business as a sole proprietor is one of the simplest forms of operation. It's easy to start a business operated as a sole proprietorship, and equally as easy to discontinue. The first step when starting a business is to open a separate business checking account. It will be easier to track the deductible expenses if they are not co-mingled with personal expenses. If the taxpayer incurred expenses prior to opening their business, they should keep them separate from their other expenses. Special tax treatment applies to startup expenses.

It is important to track the business mileage of a personal vehicle, as it may be deductible. If a self-employed taxpayer maintains an eligible office in their home, they can deduct the mileage to and from their client's place of business, trips between jobs and trips out for supplies and shipping.

After tracking the business mileage, the deduction is calculated using one of two methods: the standard mileage rate or actual expenses. The standard mileage rate can be calculated by multiplying total business mileage by the IRS issued rate of 56 cents for 2021 (58.5 cents for 2022). The actual expense method tracks the actual expenses, such as the cost of gas, oil, insurance, repairs, maintenance, tires and depreciation. This method requires the taxpayer to keep very detailed expense records and allocate only the business portion of the costs to the business use of auto deduction

The IRS allows self-employed taxpayers to claim a deduction for business use of the home if they meet certain requirements. They must use the home office regularly and exclusively:

- As the principal place of business for their trade or business
- As a place to meet with customers in the normal course of their trade or business
- In connection with their trade or business, if the location is in a separate structure that's not attached to the dwelling unit

Similar to the auto deduction, compute the home office deduction using one of two methods: the simplified method or the traditional method. The simplified method allows taxpayers to deduct $5 per square foot, up to a maximum of 300 square feet or $1,500 total, for their home office. The traditional method allows taxpayers to deduct a portion of the indirect costs such as mortgage interest, and all the direct costs, like painting or decorating the office walls.

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