

## HERO MILES FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

- Q. What is the difference between the Hero Miles program at [www.heromiles.org](http://www.heromiles.org) and the Fisher House Hero Miles program?
- A. None. The Hero Miles program at [www.heromiles.org](http://www.heromiles.org) was started by Congressman “Dutch” Ruppensburger (D-MD) in late 2003 to provide free airline tickets to service men and women returning to the U. S. from Iraq or Afghanistan on R & R (rest and recuperation) leave. Initially, Fisher House Foundation partnered with Congressman Ruppensburger so a portion of the tickets donated by airline frequent flyers could be used for hospitalized service members and their families. In early 2004, Congress and the military authorized all R & R travel at government expense, so there was no longer a need for the donation of frequent flyer miles for R & R. travel. The original Hero Miles program evolved into a program to support hospitalized service members and their families. Most of the links at [www.heromiles.org](http://www.heromiles.org) are to the [www.fisherhouse.org](http://www.fisherhouse.org) web site.
- Q. Who is Fisher House? How did Fisher House become involved in the Hero Miles program?
- A. Fisher House is the nonprofit Fisher House Foundation, an IRS approved 501(c)(3) public charity. Fisher House Foundation builds and donates to the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Department of Veterans Affairs fully furnished homes on the grounds of major medical centers for the families of patients receiving care at the medical centers where the homes are located. There are presently 43 Fisher Houses, and more will be built. The idea to assist the families of service members hospitalized as a result of their service in Iraq and Afghanistan came from the spouses of two senior Defense Department officials: Mrs. Pride Winkenwerder, spouse of Assistant Secretary of Defense (Health Affairs) Dr. William Winkenwerder, and Mrs. Mary Jo Myers, wife of then Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff General Richard B. Myers. The two ladies approached Fisher House Foundation, asking if the private foundation could establish partnerships with the major airlines to assist the families of hospitalized service members. Fisher House Foundation, with the support from the flying public, has been successful in partnering with the major U. S. air carriers.
- Q. How successful?
- A. As of December 31, 2008, the program is five years old. In the first five years, the public has donated enough frequent flyer miles for the Foundation to provide more than 16,000 free airline tickets to service members and their families. Each ticket represents a cost savings of at least \$1,300 over the cost of a comparable commercial ticket, so Fisher House Foundation has saved service members and their families at least \$22 million.

The 16,000 tickets are the equivalent of approx. 750 million frequent flyer miles.

Q. Who is eligible to receive free tickets?

A. Fisher House Foundation has two general categories of eligibles:

- a. hospitalized service members can be provided with free airline tickets to leave a military or VA hospital for a visit home and return (if approved by a physician) if they don't qualify for convalescent leave or other government funded travel; and
- b. if unable to leave the hospital, tickets are provided to their families and close friends to enable them to be at the bedside of their loved one.

The Hero Miles program, to include the acceptance of free airline tickets and the participation of a private foundation to administer the program was authorized by the Congress in the fiscal year 2005 Department of Defense Authorization Act. The program is very specific in that only service members whose hospitalization is the result of service in an area of contingency operations (notably Iraq and Afghanistan) and their families are eligible. One exception to this is the provision of free airline tickets to family members attending the funeral of a service member killed in Iraq or Afghanistan, when coordinated with the casualty assistance officer.

Q. How do airline passengers donate their miles?

A. Frequent flyer miles are donated through each participating airline to accounts established for use by Fisher House Foundation. The current list of participating airlines and those accepting donations of miles is at the web site <http://www.fisherhouse.org/programs/heroMiles.shtml>. Each airline is different in the minimum number of miles it will accept, and how the donation is made.

Q. Can I get a receipt from the airline or Fisher House, and can I deduct the donation when I prepare my tax return?

A. Fisher House Foundation can not provide a receipt or even an acknowledgement as the airlines do not share the donor information with us. The airlines do not provide

receipts, but generally, the transfer of miles from an individual account to Fisher House Foundation is reflected in the next regularly scheduled frequent flyer statement from the airline, whether that be on paper or on the internet. The IRS does not permit tax payers to deduct the donation of their frequent flyer miles as a charitable donation. The rationale is that the IRS did not require the airlines to collect any taxes when the miles were awarded to the individual flyer, so there can be no benefit when they are given away. The one exception to this is if the airline passenger purchased the miles rather than having earned them.

Q. Can I donate my miles to a specific individual or specify they only be used for travel by service members of a specific service branch or state?

A. Unfortunately, no. The miles are accumulated into a pool that Fisher House Foundation uses, and it would be impossible to match a specific donation to a specific passenger.

Q. How do I know that the airline actually transferred my miles to Fisher House?

A. Fisher House Foundation can not verify individual donations. You would have to contact an individual airline for verification or wait for your next frequent flyer mileage statement.

Q. How do I request a Hero Miles ticket?

A. The Hero Miles program is administered for service members, so if a family member requests a ticket, Fisher House Foundation must verify that the service member is eligible for the program and that the service member agrees to the travel by his or her relative(s) or friend(s). The Foundation normally uses the social work staff or service casualty offices to verify eligibility. At some medical centers, there are established offices to assist families, such as the Medical Family Assistance Center at Walter Reed Army Medical Center; the Solider Family Assistance Center at Brooke Army Medical Center, or Marine Liaisons at Naval medical centers. If the hospitalized service member is not able to complete the request forms, the Foundation will accept that the guardian or close family member is making the request on behalf of the service member.

Q. How is the program administered?

A. Fisher House Foundation requires that a form (available at most military or VA medical centers, case workers, or the Hero Miles section of the Fisher House Foundation web site) be completed for each request. The form must be validated by a health care professional to ensure eligibility, and the Foundation must be certain that the name on each ticket requested exactly matches the name on the identification that will be presented to airport security on the day of the flight.

Q. Who are your airline partners?

- A. The current list of airline partners is at the Hero Miles section of the Fisher House Foundation web site, [www.fisherhouse.org](http://www.fisherhouse.org).
- Q. Do I get a paper ticket? What if I have to make a change to my itinerary once I receive my ticket?
- A. All ticketing is done by e-tickets, so passengers need only show a government issued photo ID at the airport to receive their ticket. It is important that travelers know the record locator or confirmation number for their ticket in case they encounter any difficulty at the airport. The airlines vary in what they permit travelers to do in regards to itinerary changes. Generally, Fisher House Foundation does not permit any changes that would result in the Foundation paying a change fee unless the reason is medical necessity, and beyond the ability of the passenger to anticipate. Seats set aside for award tickets are carefully controlled by the airlines and it is not always possible to make last minute changes.
- Q. Can a child (unaccompanied minor) travel on a Hero Miles ticket?
- A. Yes, but such travel is the exception rather than the rule and each airline has different criteria and costs associated with such travel.
- Q. How many Hero Miles tickets can a family have? How often?
- A. There are no specific answers to these questions as each case is based on the medical condition of the patient, but in general, Fisher House Foundation does not place limits on the number or frequency of the travel as long as it is reasonable and in the best interests of the hospitalized service member.
- Q. Can we get Hero Miles tickets to attend an award ceremony for our loved one? Can the patient fly home on a Hero Miles ticket to attend a ceremony in his or her honor?
- A. The Hero Miles program was established to reunite families. It is not a program for leisure travel or to reward a service member who has been wounded or injured.
- Q. Some service members will be hospitalized for extensive periods. When does the program terminate?
- A. As a general rule, when the service member is permanently assigned to a location where his or her family lives, they no longer need airline tickets to be reunited with loved ones.
- Q. Can I donate an airline coupon good for a free flight, or a coupon that can be used to reduce the cost of a purchased ticket?

A. Yes, if the coupon, ticket or voucher can be used by another individual. You may have to call the specific airline to determine it can be transferred to another passenger, and please do not wait until the coupon is about to expire to donate it. You can mail the coupon or ticket to Fisher House Foundation, 1401 Rockville Pike, Suite 600, Rockville, Maryland 20852.

Q. Not all airlines are partners and some of the partner airlines do not permit the donation of miles. Why?

A. The decision to participate is made by each airline. During the life of the program, several airlines have curtailed the donation of frequent flyer miles, normally because Fisher House Foundation agreed that it had more than enough miles on a particular airline to meet the needs. Other airlines have decided not to renew their contract with Fisher House Foundation. So, for example, Continental Airlines does not permit donations of OnePass Miles; and Delta Air Lines is no longer a participating airline. In the case of Delta, Fisher House Foundation continues to provide Delta tickets to service members and their families, and will do so as long as the Foundation has Delta SkyMiles.

Q, Who can I contact if I have a question not covered above?

A. You can call Fisher House Foundation toll-free at (888) 294-8560 or send an email to [info@fisherhouse.org](mailto:info@fisherhouse.org).