

Veteran Benefits and Resources for Hospice and Palliative Care Patients

A Resource Guide for Veterans, Families and Caregivers



Provided by:





All of us at the EagleForce Warrior Foundation enthusiastically support the efforts of the National Partnership for Healthcare and Hospice Innovation and its members to provide this comprehensive guide for Veterans in need of advanced illness or hospice care.

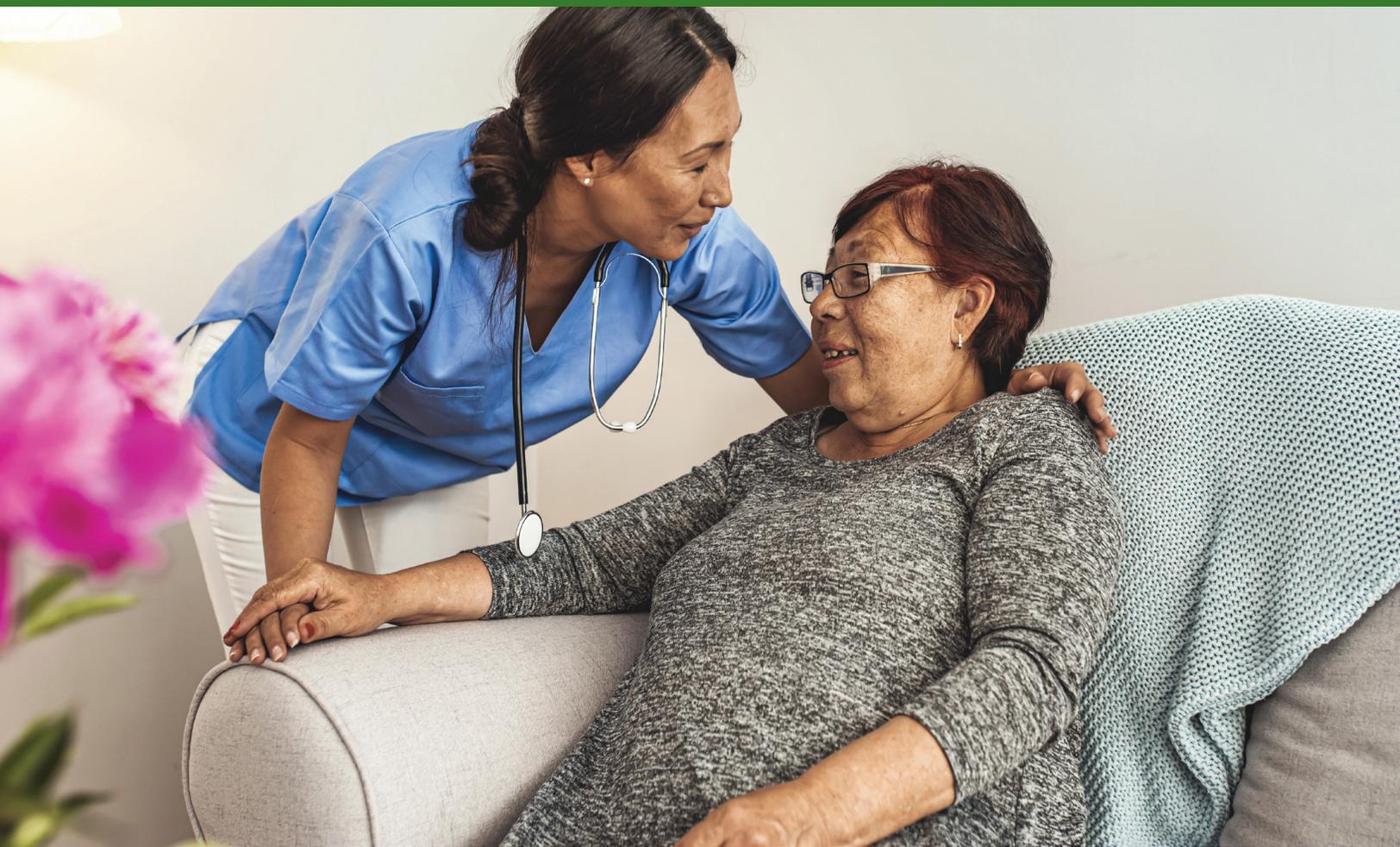
Our Veterans and their families deserve accessible benefit education and support to help ensure quality, stress-free care in their homes or wherever they wish to reside.

We are proud to play our part.

Cynthia Dinkins

Cynthia Dinkins
Executive Director
EagleForce Warrior Foundation





About National Partnership for Healthcare and Hospice Innovation

The National Partnership for Healthcare and Hospice Innovation (NPHI) is an organization comprised of 80 not-for-profit hospice organizations, driven by passion and integrity to help people live fully through the end-of-life. Our most important ideas are learned at the bedside, not in the board room. Our members are patient, family and community-focused hospice, palliative care, and advanced illness providers across the country made up of like-minded leaders with expertise and passion for the highest quality, person and family-centered, mission-oriented end-of-life care. For the location of the nearest NPHI member hospice organization outside of the Lightways Hospice and Serious Illness Care service area, call 1-844-GET NPHI (1- 844-438-6744).

About Lightways Hospice and Serious Illness Care-Founded in 1982 as Joliet Area Community Hospice, Lightways Hospice and Serious Illness Care is an independent, nonprofit healthcare provider licensed in 11 counties in Illinois. We provide exceptional serious illness care, hospice care and grief support for adults and children.

Introduction

This reference guide was compiled and reviewed by NPHI's Innovation Lab to provide member organizations a tool to assist staff, patients and families in identifying, understanding and acquiring appropriate Veteran benefits through the Veterans Administration.

While U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides a wide range of commonly-known benefits and services for its Veterans – like health care, education support through the GI Bill, and home loans – they also provide a bevy of lesser-known benefits that were specifically created to help Veterans and their family members, as well as their survivors. The Veteran must provide proof of discharge from the military under conditions other than dishonorable. Also, many of the programs are dependent upon the Veteran meeting certain financial eligibility requirements.

The guide also provides resource information for the Veteran and survivor regarding military pay, retirement pay and survivor benefits through the Defense Finance and Accounting Services.

- After reviewing this guide to determine if you may qualify for any of the listed benefits but are unsure, or find the information confusing, or think the task of applying may be too difficult, let your hospice or palliative care team know as they can either assist you in understanding the process or can direct you to someone that can help you navigate the process.
- **Appendix B of this document contains a military history checklist** you can use to talk to your loved one and document their military service for your family history and provide information that will be useful should you choose to apply for VA benefits.
- **Disclaimer:** NPHI and its member organizations are not responsible for the accuracy of the content in this guide; however, the content was extracted directly from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs and the Defense Finance and Accounting Service.

Who is considered a Veteran?

Active Duty: Federal Law states that a VETERAN is any person, who served honorably on active duty in the armed forces of the United States. (Discharges marked GENERAL AND UNDER HONORABLE CONDITIONS also qualify.) Title 38 of the U.S. Code states: that there is no minimum time of service required to be considered a “veteran” so long as you served on active duty.

National Guard and Reserve: Generally, all Reserve and National Guard members discharged or released under conditions that are not dishonorable are eligible for some VA benefits. The length of your service, service commitment and/or your duty status may determine your eligibility for specific benefits. Eligibility requirements for several VA benefits may include a certain length of active service. Legislation signed in 2016 now states that any Guard and Reserve member that has successfully completed a 20 year commitment – even without any Active Duty time – is considered a Veteran.

Note: The above definitions appear relatively simple; however, like most things there are some instances where it may not be simple depending on the individual situation and benefits being considered.

The following links are to official U.S. Government resources that provide more detailed information:

www.va.gov/opa/publications/benefits_book/benefits_chap09.asp

Chapter 9 Reserve and National Guard - Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs - Veterans Affairs

www.ecfr.gov/current/title-38/chapter-I/part-3#3.1
(Veteran specific definitions)

eCFR :: 38 CFR Part 3 -- Adjudication

The Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) is the official legal print publication containing the codification of the general and permanent rules published in the Federal Register by the departments and agencies of the Federal Government. The Electronic Code of Federal Regulations (eCFR) is a continuously updated online version of the CFR. It is not an official legal edition of the CFR.

www.va.gov/opa/publications/benefits_book/benefits_chap09.asp

Chapter 9 Reserve and National Guard - Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs - Veterans Affairs

Training: Participants may pursue training at a college or university or take technical training at any approved facility. Training includes undergraduate, graduate, or post-graduate courses; state licensure and certification courses; courses for a certificate or diploma from business, technical or vocational schools; cooperative training; apprenticeship or on-the-job training.

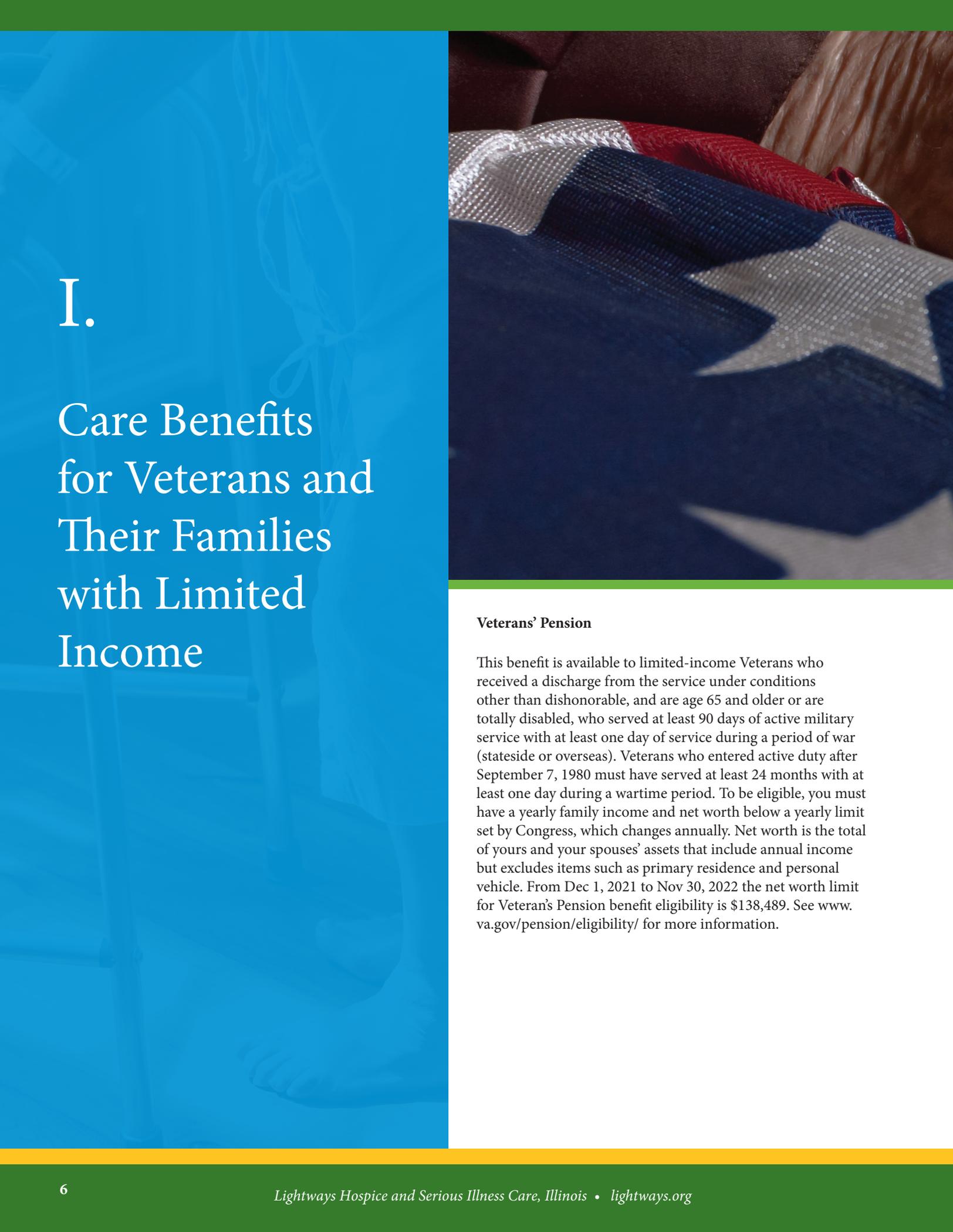
For assistance, please consider contacting your local Veterans Administration office, your state's Department of Veteran Services office or an accredited Veteran Service Officer (VSO) at your local chapters of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), the American Legion (AL), of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW).

Important Note: In order to pursue any of the benefits or assistance detailed in this guide you must possess official discharge document DD214, or equivalent official discharge document.

If you don't have a copy of your discharge papers, please see www.va.gov/records/get-military-service-records/. The following website also provides instructions to expedite a replacement DD214 www.archives.gov/Veterans/military-service-records/emergencies.

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I.

Care Benefits for Veterans and Their Families with Limited Income

Veterans' Pension

This benefit is available to limited-income Veterans who received a discharge from the service under conditions other than dishonorable, and are age 65 and older or are totally disabled, who served at least 90 days of active military service with at least one day of service during a period of war (stateside or overseas). Veterans who entered active duty after September 7, 1980 must have served at least 24 months with at least one day during a wartime period. To be eligible, you must have a yearly family income and net worth below a yearly limit set by Congress, which changes annually. Net worth is the total of yours and your spouses' assets that include annual income but excludes items such as primary residence and personal vehicle. From Dec 1, 2021 to Nov 30, 2022 the net worth limit for Veteran's Pension benefit eligibility is \$138,489. See www.va.gov/pension/eligibility/ for more information.



Aid and Attendance Allowance

This little-known benefit can help Veterans and their spouses pay towards in-home care, an assisted living facility, or nursing home care. This allowance is in addition to the Veteran's Pension. To qualify, the Veteran must be 65 or older (or permanently disabled), have served during wartime and meet certain medical and financial requirements. Spouses also qualify for this benefit if they are currently married to the Veteran or were married to the Veteran at the time of the Veteran's death. To qualify medically, the Veteran or their spouse would need assistance with basic everyday living tasks like eating, bathing, or dressing. Blindness or residence at a nursing home or assisted living facility also qualifies. To qualify financially, annual income/net worth limit is the same as the Veteran's Pension congressionally set limits. These income limits, along with Aid and Attendance allowance rates, can be found at www.va.gov/pension/Veterans-pension-rates/. For further information on the Aid and Attendance allowance see [myarmybenefits.us.army.mil/Benefit-Library/Federal-Benefits/Veterans-Affairs-Aid-and-Attendance-\(AandA\)-and-Housebound-Pension-Benefits?serv=126](http://myarmybenefits.us.army.mil/Benefit-Library/Federal-Benefits/Veterans-Affairs-Aid-and-Attendance-(AandA)-and-Housebound-Pension-Benefits?serv=126)

Survivors Pension

Survivors' Pension is a tax-free, needs-based benefit paid to an un-remarried surviving spouse and/or qualifying dependent children of a deceased wartime Veteran. Ex-spouses are not authorized this benefit. You must have a yearly family income/net worth below the yearly limit set by Congress to be eligible for Survivor's Pension benefits. This annual income and net worth limit is the same as the Veteran's Pension congressionally set limits (\$138,489 through Nov 30, 2022). See www.va.gov/pension/survivors-pension-rates/ for further details. You may be eligible if you are the surviving spouse or dependent child of a Veteran who received a discharge from service under conditions other than dishonorable, had a service-connected disability, or served at least 90 days of active military service with at least one day during a wartime period prior to September 7, 1980. Veterans who entered active duty after September 7, 1980 must have served at least 24 months with at least one day during a wartime period. Dependent children may be eligible for Survivors' Pension if they are younger than 18 (or between ages 18 and 23 if attending school) or permanently incapable of self-support due to a disability incurred before age 18 and are not married. See www.va.gov/pension/survivors-pension/ for more information.

II.

Care Benefits for Veterans and Their Families for all Income Levels

Disability Benefits for Presumptively
Associated Diseases and Conditions

What is “Presumptive” Service Connection?

VA assumes that certain disabilities were caused by military service. This is because of the unique circumstances of a specific Veteran’s military service. If a presumed condition is diagnosed in a Veteran from a specific group experience, he or she may be awarded disability compensation. For a list of specific presumed conditions, please see Appendix A.

Veterans in the following groups may qualify for presumptive disability benefits:

- Former prisoners of war who have a condition that is at least 10% disabling
- Vietnam Veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange or served in the Republic of Vietnam between January 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975
- Atomic Veterans exposed to ionizing radiation who experienced one of the following:
 - Participated in atmospheric nuclear testing
 - Occupied or were prisoners of war in Hiroshima or Nagasaki
 - Served before February 1, 1992 at a diffusion plant in Paducah, Kentucky; Portsmouth, Ohio; or Oak Ridge Tennessee
 - Served before January 1, 1974 at Amchitka Island, Alaska
- Gulf War Veterans who served in the Southwest Asia Theater of Operations and have a condition that is at least 10% disabling by December 31, 2026

Patients in Hospice, or their representative with a Power of Attorney (POA), can expedite registration for Presumptive Disability benefits by:

- Gathering the appropriate documentation (DD 214 discharge paper), official diagnosis with a doctor's authentication, and a hardship letter. Proof of hospice admission satisfies the hardship requirement.
- Calling the National VA Benefits office at 1-800-827-1000 and explaining your situation.
- Faxing requested/required documents to fax number provided by the representative.

Survivor and Dependent Compensation (DIC)

If you're the surviving spouse, child, or parent of a service member who meets one of the criteria listed below, you may be able to get a tax-free monetary benefit paid monthly called the VA Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (VA DIC). Find out more at www.va.gov/disability/dependency-indemnity-compensation/.

- Died in the line of duty
- Died from a service-related injury or illness (see the above section and Appendix A for presumptively associated diseases and conditions)
- Did not die from a service-related injury or illness but was eligible to receive VA compensation for a service-connected disability rated as totally disabling (meaning the disability made it impossible for the service member to work) for a certain period of time

Note: If you were denied a Blue Water Navy Veteran's service-connected disability claim in the past, you may be eligible for DIC benefits based on the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019. As a result of this recent law, Veterans who served on a Blue Water Navy vessel offshore of the Republic of Vietnam, or on another U.S. Navy or Coast Guard ship operating in the coastal waterways of Vietnam between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975, are now entitled to a presumption of service connection for illnesses related to Agent Orange exposure.

Eligibility

To determine eligibility for VA DIC as a surviving spouse, child or parent, see eligibility requirements listed on the VA website at www.va.gov/disability/dependency-indemnity-compensation/.

How do I apply for compensation?

- If you are the surviving spouse or child of a Veteran, fill out an Application for DIC, Death Pension, and/or Accrued Benefits, VA Form 21P-534EZ, found at www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/VBA-21P-534EZ-ARE.pdf
- If you're a surviving parent, fill out an Application for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation by Parent(s), VA Form 21P-535, found at www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/VBA-21P-534EZ-ARE.pdf

Homemaker/Home Health Aid Program (H/HHA)

H/HHA services enable the Veteran to remain at home with a higher quality of life. These services provide assistance with Activities of Daily Living, which includes bathing, dressing, feeding, ambulation, transfers, and exercises; and assistance with Instrumental Activities of Daily Living, which may include light housekeeping, laundry, meal preparation, and grocery shopping. This program is also for Veterans who are isolated, or their caregivers are experiencing a burden. HHA services do not include authorization of payment for skilled home health services or adult sitter services. H/HHA services are provided by licensed and accredited private agencies. **H/HHA is available to all Veterans if they are enrolled in the VA standard health medical benefits program and they meet the clinical need for services.** To contact the program, call your local VA and ask for a Homemaker/Home Health Aid Program representative. For more information see www.va.gov/GERIATRICAL/pages/Homemaker_and_Home_Health_Aide_Care.asp.

Hospice Benefit

Hospice is a covered benefit for all medically enrolled Veterans. National Hospice policy and standards for VA medical centers include: provision of hospice services in all settings; inpatient hospice beds or access to them in the local community; referral assistance to area community hospices; and an interdisciplinary palliative care consult team. Veterans with Medicare, Medicaid, or other forms of health insurance can use the VA benefit in addition to a private/community hospice. You should discuss this option with your hospice social worker regarding whether there is an advantage to using dual services.

Veteran's Care Centers

Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital-5000 S. 5th Ave., Hines, IL
Joliet VA Clinic -1201 Eagle St., Joliet, IL
North Aurora VA Clinic -161 S. Lincolnway, Ste. 120 North Aurora, IL
DuPage County Vet Center -750 Shoreline Dr., Aurora, IL
Orland Park Vet Center-8651 W. 159th St., Orland Park, IL

VA Caregiver Support Program

The Caregiver Program offers a number of services to eligible Veterans and caregivers. One such program is the General Caregiver Support Services (PGCSS) that provides peer support mentoring, skills training, coaching, telephone support, online programs, and referrals to available resources to caregivers of Veterans. The Veteran must be enrolled in Veterans Affairs (VA) health care and be receiving care from a caregiver in order for the caregiver to participate. Caregivers who participate in PGCSS are called General Caregivers. General Caregivers do not need to be a relative or live with the Veteran.

Also available is the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC). PCAFC is for eligible Veterans who have incurred or aggravated a serious injury in the line of duty on or before May 7, 1975 or on or after September 11, 2001. This program provides resources, education, support, a financial stipend, and health insurance (if eligible), beneficiary travel (if eligible), to caregivers of eligible Veterans.

To identify your specific Caregiver Program Coordinator please use the following link:
www.caregiver.va.gov/support/New_CSC_Page.asp



III.

Veteran's Burial Benefits

Burial Benefits

Regardless of income and assets, these benefits provide eligible Veterans, spouses and qualified dependents (minor children and, in some cases, unmarried adult dependent children) a free burial at a national or state cemetery, free grave marker, and burial with military honors, which includes presentation of an American flag and playing of taps at funerals/memorials. The VA created Planning Your Legacy: VA Survivors and Burial Benefits Kit to assist Veterans and their family members in pre-need planning. See www.cem.va.gov/cem/docs/factsheets/Planning_Legacy_Booklet.pdf

Burial and Grave Marker Provided at No Cost

National and State Cemeteries:

Regardless of income and assets, the U.S. Department of VA provides all honorably discharged Veterans, spouses, and qualified dependents a free burial and grave marker in any of 142 national cemeteries.

- VA National cemeteries located in Illinois
Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery - 0953 Hoff Rd., Elwood, IL 815-423-9958. <https://cem.va.gov/cems/nchp/abrahamlincoln.asp>
- Arlington National Cemetery: This cemetery is run by the U.S. Army. Veterans who won top awards, died on duty, retired from service, and others who qualify are buried here. See www.arlingtoncemetery.mil for further information. Arlington is administered by the Department of the Army.

Veterans and families can apply for pre-approval for national and state VA cemetery admission. Other U.S. military service members and civilians may be eligible for these benefits. For eligibility requirements see www.va.gov/burials-memorials/eligibility/. Unfortunately, funeral or cremation costs are not covered.

Burial at Sea

Burial at Sea is a means of final disposition of remains that is performed on United States Navy vessels. The committal ceremony is performed while the ship is deployed. Therefore, family members are not allowed to be present. The commanding officer of the ship assigned to perform the ceremony will notify the family of the date, time, and longitude and latitude once the committal service has been completed. The average amount of wait time for burial at sea, is **12 to 18 months**, once the remains/cremains are received at the port of embarkation. Individuals eligible for this program are:

- Active duty members of the uniformed services
- Retirees and Veterans who were honorably discharged
- U.S. civilian marine personnel of the Military Sealift Command
- Dependent family members of active duty personnel, retirees, and Veterans

Grave Markers and Medallions

The VA provides a headstone, columbarium niche cover, or a flat marker for a Veteran's final resting place, whether it is a private or a state/national cemetery, for qualifying Veterans. If a private grave marker is purchased, a medallion for placement on the grave marker can be obtained from the VA. The funeral home can arrange to obtain the grave marker or medallion, or the grave marker and medallion can be requested directly from the VA. See www.va.gov/burials-memorials/memorial-items/headstones-markers-medallions/ for Veteran eligibility requirements and more information.

Funeral Allowance and Private Cemetery Burial Allowance

Some Veterans may qualify for a \$300 funeral allowance as well as \$796 for a plot if they choose to be buried in a private cemetery. This allowance is limited to individuals who died as a result of a service-connected disability, died while in VA care, or died while receiving a VA pension or military retirement. See www.va.gov/burials-memorials/veterans-burial-allowance/ for a full description of allowance qualifications.

See www.mynavyhr.navy.mil/Support-Services/Casualty/Mortuary-Services/Burial-at-Sea/ for further information on this program, or call the U.S. Navy Mortuary Affairs office at 866-787-0081.



*“To care for him who shall
have borne the battle and for
his widow and his orphan”*

- Abraham Lincoln

Military Honors

The following military honors are provided to all qualified Veterans:

- The Department of Defense, through the “Honoring Those Who Have Served” program, provides funeral service Honor Teams to include the folding and presentation of the United States burial flag and playing of taps. These are generally scheduled for the Veteran by the funeral home on behalf of the Veteran’s family. If the burial is at a VA cemetery, funeral honors can be requested from the VA using VA Form 10-2065.
- One United States Flag is provided through the national VA to drape the casket or accompany the urn; this generally is obtained by the funeral home for the funeral service but can be obtained directly through the VA with a VA Form 27-2008 and copy of the DD214.
- The national VA can provide a Presidential Memorial Certificate (PMC) to the family of a deceased Veteran. A PMC is an engraved paper certificate signed by the current President. As with other honors, this can be arranged for by the funeral home on behalf of the Veteran’s family, or directly through the VA with a VA Form 40-0247 and a copy of the DD214.

What information do I need to apply for burial benefits?

- Social Security number
- Date and place of birth
- Military status and service history (like service dates, discharge character, and rank—commonly found on the DD214 or other separation documents)
- Discharge papers (DD214 or other separation documents)
Note: If you don’t have a copy of discharge papers, see www.va.gov/records/get-military-service-records/. The following website also provides instructions to expedite a replacement DD214 www.archives.gov/Veterans/military-service-records/emergencies. Your *Lightways Hospice* team may be able to help with this.
- If the Veteran has already passed away, and you are making immediate burial arrangements and do not have a copy of discharge papers, call the National Cemetery Scheduling Office at 800-535-1117. They can help you get your loved one’s DD214 or other discharge documents you may need.



IV.

Arrears of Pay and Survivor Benefit Plan Annuity for Spouses/Families of Retired Military Members

If your loved one retired from the military and receives retirement pay, the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) is who you will work with to stop retiree pay and start your Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) annuity payments as well as obtaining any other compensation owed from retirement services. The DFAS website at www.dfas.mil/RetiredMilitary/ has a tab on its homepage to report a retiree's death, or you can call the DFAS customer care center at 800-321-1080. Upon notification, DFAS will stop monthly retirement payments to prevent overpayment.

After reporting the death to DFAS, you should receive a letter containing the following documents:

- SF1174 Claim for Unpaid Compensation of Deceased Member of the Uniformed Service and instructions
- Annuity account forms DD2656-7 and instructions if the deceased retiree was enrolled in the SBP

What is Arrears of Pay?

Arrears of Pay is a one-time payment made to a beneficiary that includes the pro-rated amount of the deceased retiree's final month's pay and any other money owned you at the time of the retiree's passing. Please see the *How to Claim a Retiree's Arrears of Pay Using the SF1174* fact sheet located at www.dfas.mil/RetiredMilitary/survivors/1174RetireeAOP/ for more detailed information.

Filing for Arrears of Pay

The completed SF1174 form and death certificate are required to receive the Arrears of Pay (a direct deposit form is optional). Where to send the SF1174 form and supporting documents? You have three options:

1. Upload a PDF of your completed/signed SF1174 and supporting documents via the AskDFAS online upload tool specifically for the SF1174 on DFAS.mil at <https://corpweb1.dfas.mil/askDFAS/ticketInput.action?subCategoryID=19124>
2. OR, you can fax your forms to: 800-469-6559
3. OR, you can mail your forms to:
Defense Finance and Accounting Service
U.S. Military Retired Pay
8899 E 56th Street
Indianapolis IN 46249-1200

Survivor's Benefit Plan

If you are the designated beneficiary of a deceased military service member's SBP, there are several documents you will need to fill out to start your SBP payments.

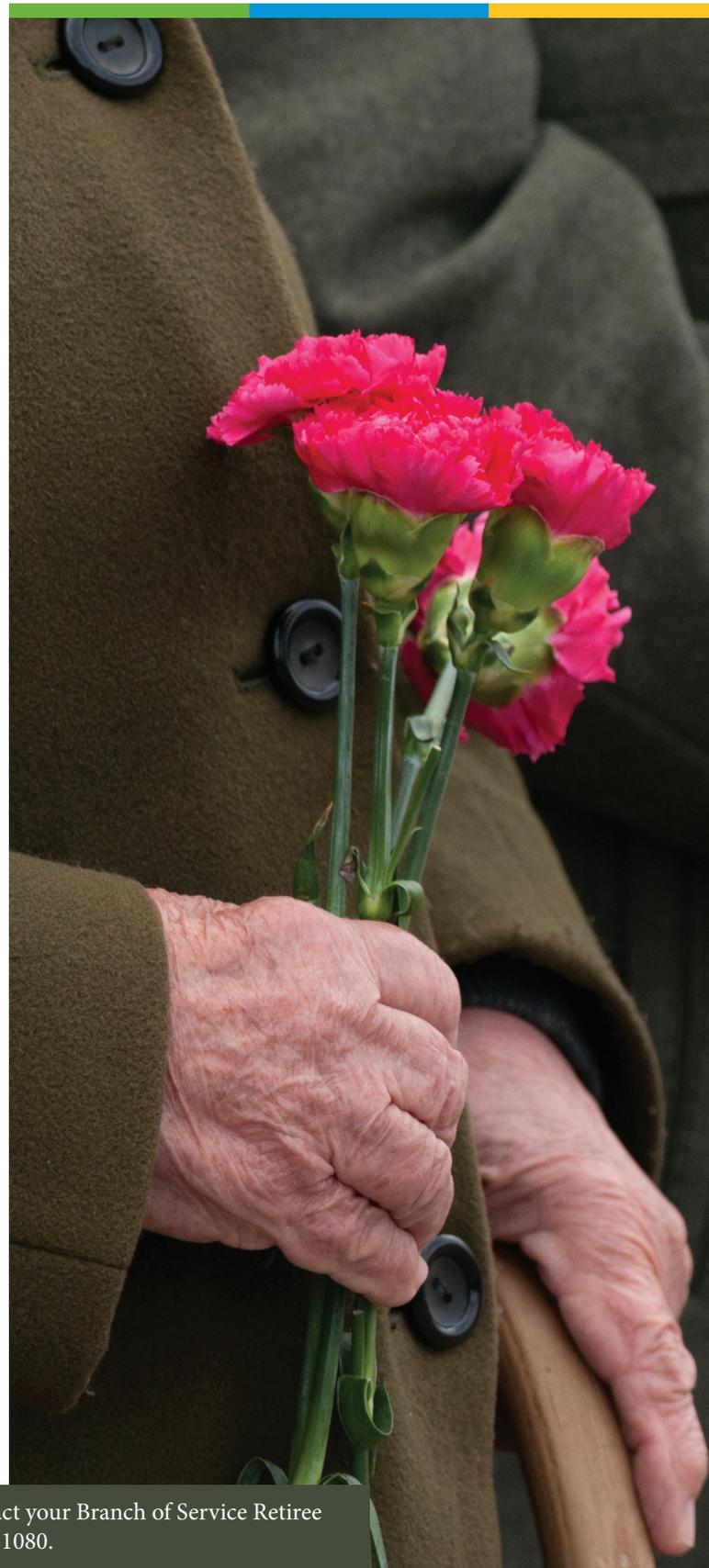
- The DD Form 2656-7 is the Verification of Survivor Annuity form, which, once received by DFAS, starts SBP payments. It can be found at www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/forms/dd/dd2656-7.pdf
- The IRS W-4P is the Withholding Certificate for Pension or Annuity form to have federal taxes withheld from the annuity, found at www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/fw4.pdf
- Direct Deposit forms: either the Fast Start Direct Deposit Form (FMS 2231), OR Direct Deposit Enrollment Form (SF 1199A), OR International Direct Deposit Enrollment Form (SF1199-I).

Please see the *Start a Survivor Benefit Plan Annuity* fact sheet located at www.dfas.mil/RetiredMilitary/survivors/ApplySBP/ for more detailed information.

Filing for SBP

You have three options for submitting your SBP documents:

1. Upload a PDF of your completed/signed DD and supporting documents via the AskDFAS online upload tool specifically for the DD Form 2656-7 on DFAS. mil at <https://corpweb1.dfas.mil/askDFAS/ticketInput.action?subCategoryID=19125>
2. OR, you can fax your forms to: 800-982-8459
3. OR, you can mail your forms to:
U.S. Military Annuitant Pay
8899 E 56th Street
Indianapolis IN 46249-1300



If you have questions about starting your SBP annuity, please contact your Branch of Service Retiree Service Organization or call the Customer Care Center at 800-321-1080.

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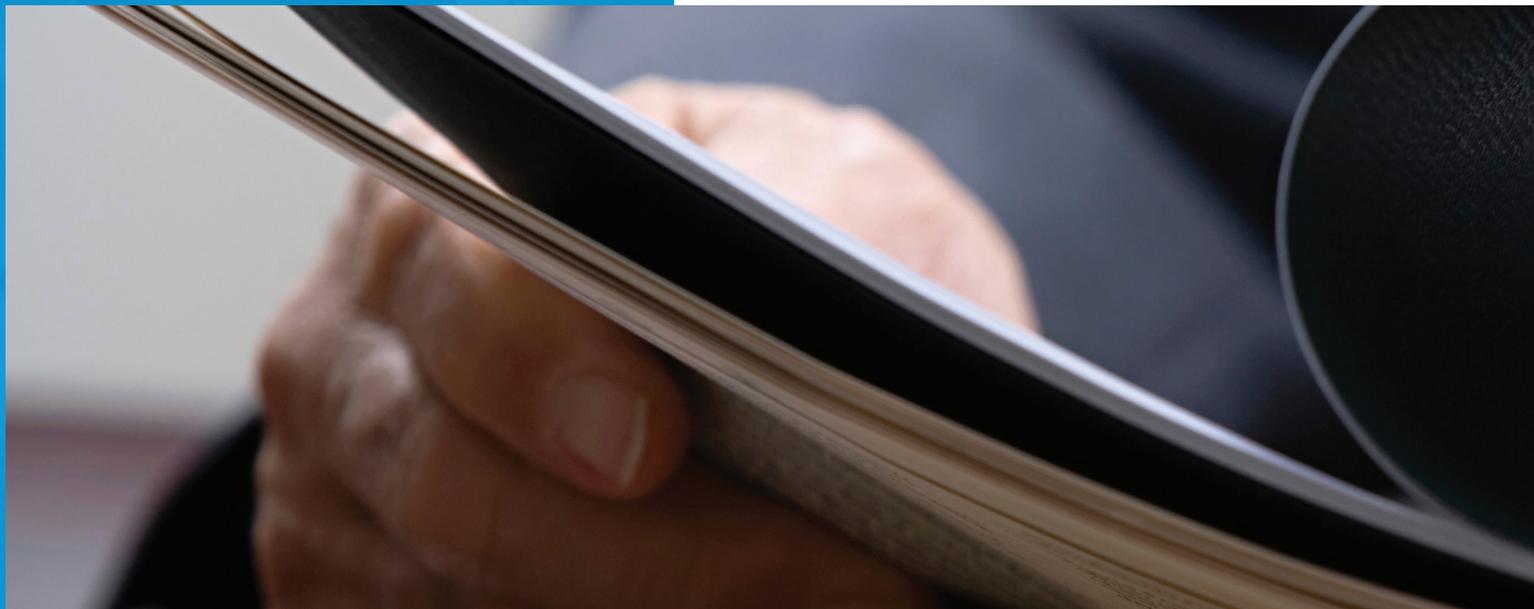
Filing Claims

Proof of Military Service

For benefits application, a copy of discharge papers (form DD214, or other separation documents) and military status and service history (like service dates, discharge character, and rank—commonly found on the DD214 or other separation documents), are required. If you do not have a copy of yours or your spouses'/parents' DD214/discharge papers, see www.va.gov/records/get-military-service-records/ to obtain a copy. The following website also provides instructions to expedite a replacement DD214 www.archives.gov/Veterans/military-service-records/emergencies. Your hospice team may be able to help with this.

If You Need Assistance in Filing Claims with the VA

There are a lot of benefits for Veterans, and figuring out which forms are required for a VA claim, how to fill them out, and where to send them can be confusing; however, there are agencies ready to assist you. Your hospice team can help connect you to information and agencies that can assist. If you feel you cannot complete the application process on your own, you can appoint an accredited representative to act on your behalf in the preparation, presentation, and prosecution of claims for VA benefits (38 U.S.C. 5902, 5903, and 5904).



Accredited Representative

An Accredited Representative is an individual who has undergone a formal application and training process, and is recognized by VA as being capable of assisting claimants with their affairs before VA. Most accredited representatives work for Veteran service organizations (VSOs) such as the American Legion, the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), or the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW). Accredited representatives may also work for state or county government entities, or may be lawyers or individuals called claims agents, who have completed a certification process with the VA. Recognized organizations and individuals, whether congressionally chartered VSOs, Veteran Service Officers, or VA accredited attorneys or claims agents, can legally represent a Veteran, service member, dependent, or survivor before the VA. Non-recognized organizations and individuals can provide information but cannot be a representative. Further information on types of claims agents is listed as follows:

- **Veterans Service Organizations (VSO):** Most accredited representatives work for VSOs, which are private non-profit groups that advocate on behalf of Veterans and their families. Most VSOs provide their services free of charge, but they may request reimbursement for unusual expenses or ask that you join the organization. VA-recognized VSOs can be named as legal agent for a Veteran or the Veteran's family. Your VSO can help you gather any evidence needed and submit a fully developed claim on your behalf. In addition to assisting Veterans and their families with VA claims, VSOs also sponsor a range of Veteran-centric services such as providing transportation to and from VA medical center appointments. **See Appendix C of this document for a list of local accredited VSOs in your service area.**
- **Veteran Service Officers:** Veteran service officers are agents who work for the state. They are trained to help Veterans file claims. Their services are free. **A list of local officers can be found in Appendix C of this Guide.**
- **Attorneys and Claims Agents:** Attorneys and claims agents must be VA approved to legally represent and file claims for Veterans or their families. They must pass a test and take classes every 1-2 years to keep their license. Unlike VSOs, claims agents and attorneys typically charge a fee for their services.
Refer to www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/vso-search to find a VA approved attorney or claims agent.

If you are seeking representation from a VSO, you can download a blank copy of the 21-22 form at www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/VBA-21-22-ARE.pdf (*Appointment of Veterans Service Organization as Claimant's Representative*). Fill out and mail or hand deliver it to the VSO that you selected. If the VSO agrees to assist you with your claim, that organization will then submit it to the VA regional office on your behalf.

If you are seeking representation from an attorney or claim's agent, you can download a blank copy of the 21-22a form at www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/VBA-21-22A-ARE.pdf. Fill out a copy of the VA Form 21-22a and mail or hand deliver it to the attorney or claims agent that you selected. That individual will then submit the form to the VA regional office on your behalf.

APPENDIX A:

Diseases and/ or Conditions Presumptively Qualifying for Disability Benefits

What is “Presumptive” Service Connection?

VA presumes that certain disabilities were caused by military service. This is because of the unique circumstances of a specific Veteran’s military service. If a presumed condition is diagnosed in a Veteran in a certain group, they can be awarded disability compensation.

What are “Presumptive” Conditions?

If you are diagnosed with a chronic disease within one year of active duty release, you should apply for disability compensation. Examples of chronic disease include: arthritis, diabetes or hypertension.

Or, if you served continuously for at least 90 days and are diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) after discharge, you can establish service connection for the disease.

Veterans in the following groups may qualify for “presumptive” disability benefits:

- Former prisoners of war who have a condition that is at least 10 percent disabling
- Vietnam Veterans who were:
 - Exposed to Agent Orange
 - Served in the Republic of Vietnam between Jan. 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975
- Atomic Veterans exposed to ionizing radiation and who experienced one of the following:
 - Participated in atmospheric nuclear testing
 - Occupied or were prisoners of war in Hiroshima or Nagasaki
 - Served before Jan. 1, 1974, at Amchitka Island, Alaska
 - Served before Feb. 1, 1992, at a diffusion plant in Paducah, Kentucky, Portsmouth, Ohio or Oak Ridge, Tennessee
- Gulf War Veterans who:
 - Served in the Southwest Asia Theater of Operations
 - Have a condition that is at least 10 percent disabling by Dec. 31, 2026



See the table below for specific presumed conditions for these groups:

Former Prisoners of War	Vietnam Veterans	Atomic Veterans	Gulf War Veterans
<p>Imprisoned for any length of time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychosis • Any anxiety state • Dysthymic disorder • Organic residuals of frostbite • Post-traumatic osteoarthritis • Heart disease or hypertensive vascular disease • Stroke and the residual effects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AL amyloidosis • B-cell leukemia • Chronic lymphocytic leukemia • Type 2 diabetes • Hodgkin's disease • Ischemic heart disease • Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma • Parkinson's disease • Prostate cancer • Respiratory cancers • Soft-tissue sarcoma (not including osteosarcoma, chondrosarcoma, Kaposi's sarcoma or mesothelioma) • Bladder Cancer • Hypothyroidism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All forms of leukemia, except chronic lymphocytic leukemia • Cancer of the thyroid, breast, pharynx, esophagus, stomach, small intestine, pancreas, bile ducts, gall bladder, salivary gland, urinary tract, brain, bone, lung, colon or ovary • Bronchioloalveolar carcinoma • Multiple myeloma • Lymphomas, other than Hodgkin's disease • Primary liver cancer, except if there are indications of cirrhosis or hepatitis B 	<p>Medically-unexplained chronic multi-symptom illnesses that exist for six months or more, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chronic fatigue syndrome • Fibromyalgia • Irritable bowel syndrome <p>Any diagnosed or undiagnosed illness that warrants a presumption of service connection, as determined by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs</p> <p>Signs or symptoms of an undiagnosed illness include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fatigue • Skin symptoms • Headaches • Muscle pain • Joint pain • Neurological symptoms • Sleep disturbance • GI symptoms • Cardiovascular symptoms • Weight loss • Menstrual disorders
<p>Imprisoned-for-at- least 30 days:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beriberi • Chronic dysentery • Helminthiasis • Malnutrition (including optic atrophy) • Pellagra • Other nutrition deficiencies • Irritable bowel syndrome • Peptic ulcer • Peripheral neuropathy • Liver cirrhosis Avitaminosis • Osteoporosis 	<p>The following conditions, if they become greater than 10 percent debilitating within a year of exposure to an herbicide agent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acute and subacute peripheral neuropathy • Chloracne or other similar acneform disease • Porphyria cutanea tarda 		

APPENDIX B:

Military History Checklist

General Information

Full name (last, first, middle):

.....
.....
.....

Did the vet serve under a maiden name or other name (alias)?
If Yes, list the other name(s) here:

.....
.....

Do you have a copy of Veteran's DD214 discharge papers?

Yes No

Does the Veteran have any immediate family members that served or are serving in the military?

Yes No

If Yes, please list here:

.....
.....
.....

Would you like to talk with someone about VA benefits you or your family might be eligible to receive?

Yes No

If yes, please notify your Hospice Team. Is there a specific benefit where more information/help is desired?

Military Background

In which branch of the military did the Veteran serve?

- Army
 - Navy
 - Air Force
 - Marines
 - Coast Guard
 - Reservist or National Guard member
 - Merchant Marines during WWII
 - Other
-

What are the Veteran's dates of service (date entered and date left service):

.....
.....

What is the highest rank the Veteran attained:

.....
.....

In which war era or period of service did the Veteran serve?

- WWII (12/7/41 to 12/31/46)
- Korea (6/27/50 to 1/31/55)
- Cold War
- Vietnam (8/5/64 to 5/7/75 and 2/28/61 for Veterans who served "in country" (in Vietnam)

Did you actually serve In-Country?

.....

- Gulf War (8/2/90 through a date to be set by law or presidential proclamation)
- Peace Time
- Afghanistan/Iraq (OEF/OIF)

Other:.....
.....

Did the Veteran serve on active duty?

- Yes No

Did the Veteran's service include combat, dangerous or traumatic assignments?

- Yes No

Comments:.....
.....
.....

Was the Veteran a prisoner of war?

- Yes No

Comments:.....
.....
.....

What was the Veteran's job in the service (e.g. engineering, infantry, communications, maintenance, construction, medical field, other)?

.....
.....
.....

What military bases and/or places did the Veteran serve?

.....
.....

List any specific missions, operations or projects that the Veteran served in:

.....
.....

Did the Veteran earn a military award? If yes, mark the award(s) below:

- Medal of honor
- Distinguished Service Cross
- Navy Cross
- Air Force Cross
- Silver Star
- Purple Heart
- Bronze Star *(note if the Bronze Star include "V" device for valour)*

List other awards here:.....
.....
.....

Overall, how does the Veteran view their experience in the military?

.....
.....

Do any memories particularly stand out?

.....
.....

VA Benefits Information

Is the Veteran enrolled in VA?

- Yes No

Does the Veteran receive any VA benefits?

- Yes No

If yes, which benefits?

.....
.....

Does the Veteran have a service-connected condition (see Appendix A for a list of presumptive service-connected conditions)?

- Yes No

If yes, what is the condition?

.....
.....

Does the Veteran get his/her medications from the VA?

- Yes No

Does the Veteran go to a VA hospital or clinic for services? If so, what is the hospital and/or clinic's name?

.....
.....

What is the name and contact information of the Veteran's VA physician or Primary Care Provider?

.....
.....

APPENDIX C:

Additional Resources for Veterans and Caregivers

General: A good place to learn about all types of Veterans' benefits is at the online at www.ebenefits.va.gov or www.vba.va.gov or, contact your regional Department of Veterans Services office or local Veterans' service organization where you can get personalized help and assistance in filing claims.

Department of Veterans Services

Regional Services Offices in the *Lightways Service area*-
VA regional office 2122 W. Taylor Street, Chicago, IL 60612

Veteran and Family Support (Joliet area)

Veterans Affairs Department 2900 W. Jefferson, Joliet, IL

Veteran Services Organizations

American Legion Posts 1019 2625 Ingalls Ave., Joliet, IL

Stone City Post 2199 124 Stone City Dr., Joliet, IL

Veterans of Foreign Wars Cantigny Post 367 826 Horseshoe Dr., Joliet, IL

1. Veteran Crisis Line: 800-273-8255
2. VA benefits helpline: 800-827-1000
3. General VA Benefits
www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets.asp
4. Requesting DD-214
www.archives.gov/Veterans/military-service-records/
5. Military Personnel Records Request
www.archives.gov/Veterans/military-service-records/standard-form-180.html
6. Health Benefits/Means Test/Income Threshold
www.va.gov/healthbenefits/cost/financial_assessment.asp
7. Application for VA Health Benefits
www.1010ez.med.va.gov/

