



2008 Benefits for Veterans & Dependents Handbook

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Contents

| | | |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| | Introduction | 6 |
| 1. | VA Health Care | 7 |
| | Enrollment | 7 |
| | Priority Groups | 7 |
| | Special Access to Care | 8 |
| | Service Disabled Veterans | 8 |
| | Combat Veterans | 8 |
| | Financial Information | 8 |
| | Financial Assessment | 8 |
| | Services Requiring Co-pays | 8 |
| | Outpatient Visits Not Requiring Co-pays | 9 |
| | Billing Insurance Companies | 9 |
| | Travel Costs | 9 |
| | VA Medical Programs | 10 |
| | Veteran Health Registries | 10 |
| | Readjustment Counseling | 10 |
| | Prosthetic and Sensory Aids | 11 |
| | Home Improvements and Structural Alterations | 11 |
| | Services for Blind Veterans | 11 |
| | Mental Health Care | 11 |
| | Work Restoration Programs | 11 |
| | Domiciliary Care | 12 |
| | Outpatient Dental Treatment | 12 |
| | Outpatient Pharmacy Services | 13 |
| | Nursing-Home Care | 13 |
| | Emergency Medical Care in Non-VA Facilities | 14 |
| 2. | Veterans with Service-Connected Disabilities | 15 |
| | Disability Compensation | 15 |
| | Disability Compensation Rates | 15 |
| | Receiving Payments | 15 |
| | Presumptive Conditions for Disability Compensation | 15 |
| | Prisoners of War | 16 |
| | Veterans Exposed to Agent Orange & other Herbicides | 16 |
| | Veterans Exposed to Radiation | 16 |
| | Gulf War Veterans | 16 |
| | Programs for Veterans with Service-Connected Disabilities | 17 |
| | Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment | 17 |
| | Vocational Rehabilitation Rates | 17 |
| | Specially Adapted Housing | 18 |
| | Automobile Assistance | 19 |
| | Clothing Allowance | 19 |
| | Aid and Attendance or Housebound | 19 |
| | Concurrent Retirement and Disability Payments..... | 19 |
| | Combat-Related Special Compensation | 20 |
| 3. | VA Pensions | 21 |
| | Eligibility | 21 |
| | Improved Disability Pension | 21 |
| | Improved Disability Pension Rates | 21 |
| | Protected Pension Programs | 21 |

| | | |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------|----|
| | Medal of Honor Pension | 21 |
| 4. | Education and Training | 22 |
| | Montgomery GI Bill | 22 |
| | Eligibility | 22 |
| | Service after June 30, 1985 | 22 |
| | Early Separation | 22 |
| | Vietnam Era GI Bill Conversion | 23 |
| | Involuntary Separation/Special Separation | 23 |
| | Veterans' Educational Assistance Program | 23 |
| | Payments | 24 |
| | Training, Work-Study, Counseling | 24 |
| 5. | Home Loan Guaranty | 25 |
| | Eligibility | 25 |
| | Periods of Eligibility | 25 |
| | Guaranty Amount | 26 |
| | Loan Guaranty Entitlement | 26 |
| | VA Appraisal | 27 |
| | Closing Costs | 27 |
| | Funding Fees | 27 |
| | Required Occupancy | 27 |
| | Financing, Interest Rates and Terms | 27 |
| | Loan Assumption Requirements and Liability | 28 |
| | Repossessed Homes | 28 |
| | Loans for Native American Veterans | 28 |
| | Safeguards for Veterans | 29 |
| 6. | VA Life Insurance | 30 |
| | Service Members' Group Life Insurance | 30 |
| | Traumatic Service Members' Group Life Insurance | 30 |
| | Family Service Members' Group Life Insurance | 31 |
| | Veterans' Group Life Insurance | 31 |
| | Accelerated Death Benefits | 31 |
| | Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance | 31 |
| | Veterans' Mortgage Life Insurance | 32 |
| | Insurance Dividends | 32 |
| | Other Insurance Information | 32 |
| | Reinstating Lapsed Insurance | 32 |
| | Converting Term Policies | 32 |
| | Paid-up Insurance | 32 |
| | Disability Provisions | 32 |
| | Borrowing on Policies | 33 |
| 7. | Burial and Memorial Benefits | 34 |
| | Eligibility | 34 |
| | VA National Cemeteries | 34 |
| | Headstones and Markers | 35 |
| | Inscription | 35 |
| | Private Cemeteries | 35 |
| | "In Memory Of" Markers | 35 |
| | Presidential Memorial Certificates | 35 |
| | Burial Flags | 36 |
| | Reimbursement of Burial Expenses | 36 |
| | Burial, Plot Allowance | 36 |
| | Military Funeral Honors | 36 |
| | Veterans Cemeteries Administered by Other Agencies | 36 |

| | | |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------------|----|
| | Arlington National Cemetery | 36 |
| | State Veterans Cemeteries | 36 |
| | Department of the Interior | 37 |
| 8. | Reserve and National Guard | 38 |
| | Eligibility | 38 |
| | Health Care | 38 |
| | Disability Benefits | 38 |
| | Montgomery GI Bill – Selected Reserve | 38 |
| | Period of Eligibility..... | 38 |
| | Payments | 39 |
| | Training, Work-Study, Counseling | 39 |
| | Reserve Educational Assistance Program | 39 |
| | Eligibility..... | 39 |
| | Payments | 39 |
| | Training | 39 |
| | Period of Eligibility | 40 |
| | Home Loan Guaranty | 40 |
| | Life Insurance | 40 |
| | Burial and Memorial Benefits | 40 |
| | Re-employment Rights | 40 |
| 9. | Special Groups of Veterans | 41 |
| | Women Veterans | 41 |
| | Homeless Veterans | 41 |
| | Filipino Veterans | 41 |
| | Veterans Living or Traveling Overseas | 42 |
| | Merchant Marine Seamen | 42 |
| | Allied Veterans | 42 |
| | World War Service | 42 |
| | Incarcerated Veterans | 44 |
| 10. | Transition Assistance | 45 |
| | VA Seamless Transition | 45 |
| | Transition Assistance Program | 45 |
| | Pre-separation Counseling | 45 |
| | Verification of Military Experience and Training | 45 |
| | Transition Bulletin Board | 45 |
| | DoD Transportal | 45 |
| | Educational and Vocational Counseling..... | 46 |
| | Veterans’ Workforce Investment Program | 46 |
| | State Employment Services | 46 |
| | Unemployment Compensation | 46 |
| | Federal Jobs for Veterans | 47 |
| | Starting a Business | 48 |
| | Small Business Contracts | 48 |
| 11. | Dependents & Survivors | 49 |
| | Bereavement Counseling | 49 |
| | Death Pension | 49 |
| | Eligibility | 49 |
| | Payment Rates | 49 |
| | Military Death Gratuity Payment | 50 |
| | Dependency and Indemnity Compensation | 50 |
| | Eligibility | 50 |
| | Payments for Deaths after Jan. 1, 1993 | 50 |
| | Special Allowances | 50 |

| | | |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| | Payments for Deaths Prior to Jan. 1, 1993 | 51 |
| | Payments to Parents | 51 |
| | Restored Entitlement for Survivors | 51 |
| | Education and Training | 51 |
| | Eligibility | 51 |
| | Period of Eligibility | 52 |
| | Payments | 52 |
| | Training Available | 52 |
| | Work-Study | 52 |
| | Counseling | 52 |
| | Montgomery GI Bill Death Benefit | 52 |
| | VA Medical Care | 52 |
| | Children with Birth Defects | 53 |
| | Children of Vietnam or Korean Veterans Born with Spina Bifida | 53 |
| | Children of Women Vietnam Veterans Born with Birth Defects | 53 |
| | Vocational Training | 54 |
| | Home Loan Guaranty | 54 |
| | Visiting Overseas Cemeteries | 54 |
| 12. | Appeals of VA Claims Decisions | 55 |
| | Board of Veterans' Appeals | 55 |
| | U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims | 55 |
| 13. | Military Medals/Records | 56 |
| | Replacing Military Medals | 56 |
| | Replacing Military Records | 56 |
| | Correction of Military Records | 56 |
| | Review of Discharges | 57 |
| 14. | Benefits Provided by Other Federal Agencies | 58 |
| | Loans for Farms and Homes | 58 |
| | Housing and Urban Development | 58 |
| | Naturalization Preferences | 58 |
| | Small Business Administration | 59 |
| | Social Security | 59 |
| | Supplemental Security Income | 59 |
| | Armed Forces Retirement Home | 60 |
| | Commissary and Exchange Privileges | 60 |

Introduction

For more than two centuries, Americans in uniform have set aside their personal aspirations and safety to procure and protect the freedoms established by the Founders of our great nation. Through their service, and, all too often, through their sacrifices, these brave men and women have earned the gratitude and respect of the entire nation.

During the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln affirmed our nation's commitment "...to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan." His eloquent words endured from his century to ours. We salute America's veterans, and we honor your patriotism, love of country, and willingness to serve and sacrifice for the common good. Thank you for the legacy of freedom and peace you have given us.

From the World Wars of the 20th Century to the 21st Century's war on terror, VA benefits have evolved to meet the changing needs of veterans, because, while wars have beginnings and ends, caring for those who fought them never ends.

This handbook is intended to serve as a reference guide for veterans, their families, and those who help veterans access information about VA benefits and services.

Veterans of the United States Armed Forces may be eligible for a broad range of programs and services provided by the federal Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). These benefits are legislated in Title 38 of the United States Code.

General Eligibility

Eligibility for most VA benefits is based upon discharge from active military service under other than dishonorable conditions. Active service means full-time service, other than active duty for training, as a member of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, or as a commissioned officer of the Public Health Service, Environmental Science Services Administration or National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or its predecessor, the Coast and Geodetic Survey. Generally, men and women veterans with similar service may be entitled to the same VA benefits.

Dishonorable and bad conduct discharges issued by general courts-martial may bar VA benefits. Veterans in prison and parolees must contact a VA regional office to determine eligibility. VA benefits will not be provided to any veteran or dependent wanted for an outstanding felony warrant.

Important Documents

Those seeking a VA benefit for the first time must submit a copy of their service discharge form (DD-214, DD-215, or for WWII veterans, a WD form), which documents service dates and type of discharge, or give their full name, military service number, and branch and dates of service. The veteran's service discharge form should be kept in a safe location accessible to the veteran and next of kin or designated representative.

The following documents will be needed for claims processing related to a veteran's death:

1. Veteran's marriage certificate for claims of a surviving spouse or children.
2. Veteran's death certificate if the veteran did not die in a VA health care facility.
3. Children's birth certificates or adoption papers to determine children's benefits.
4. Veteran's birth certificate to determine parents' benefits.

VA Health Care

VA operates the nation's largest integrated health care system with more than 1,400 sites of care, including hospitals, community clinics, nursing homes, domiciliaries, readjustment counseling centers, and various other facilities.

Enrollment

For most veterans, entry into the VA health care system begins by applying for enrollment. To apply, complete VA Form 10-10EZ, Application for Health Benefits, which may be obtained from any VA health care facility or regional benefits office, online at <http://www.va.gov/1010ez.htm> or by calling 1-877-222-VETS (8387). Once enrolled, veterans can receive services at VA facilities anywhere in the country.

Veterans who are enrolled for VA health care are afforded privacy rights under federal law. VA's Notice of Privacy Practices is available at the VA health care Web site listed above.

The following three categories of veterans are not required to enroll, but are urged to do so to permit better planning of health resources:

1. Veterans with a service-connected disability of 50 percent or more.
2. Veterans seeking care for a disability the military determined was incurred or aggravated in the line of duty, but which VA has not yet rated, within 12 months of discharge.
3. Veterans seeking care for a service-connected disability only.

Priority Groups

During enrollment, veterans are assigned to priority groups VA uses to balance demand with resources. Changes in available resources may reduce the number of priority groups VA can enroll. If this occurs, VA will publicize the changes and notify affected enrollees. If this occurs, VA will publicize the changes and notify affected enrollees. Below are descriptions of the VA priority groups:

Group 1: Veterans with service-connected disabilities rated 50 percent or more and/or veterans determined by VA to be unemployable due to service-connected conditions.

Group 2: Veterans with service-connected disabilities rated 30 or 40 percent.

Group 3: Veterans with service-connected disabilities rated 10 and 20 percent, veterans who are former Prisoners of War (POW) or were awarded a Purple Heart, veterans awarded special eligibility for disabilities incurred in treatment or participation in a VA Vocational Rehabilitation program, and veterans whose discharge was for a disability incurred or aggravated in the line of duty.

Group 4: Veterans receiving aid and attendance or housebound benefits and/or veterans determined by VA to be catastrophically disabled. Some veterans in this group may be responsible for co-pays.

Group 5: Veterans receiving VA pension benefits or eligible for Medicaid programs, and non service-connected veterans and non compensable, zero percent service-connected veterans whose gross annual household income and net worth are below the established VA means test thresholds.

Group 6: Veterans of the Mexican border period or World War I; veterans seeking care solely for certain conditions associated with exposure to radiation or exposure to herbicides while serving in Vietnam; for any illness associated with combat service in a war after the Gulf War or during a period of hostility after Nov. 11, 1998; for any illness associated with participation in tests conducted by the Defense Department as part of Project 112/Project SHAD; and veterans with zero percent service-connected disabilities who are receiving disability compensation benefits.

Group 7: Non service-connected veterans and non-compensable, zero percent service-connected veterans with gross annual household income above VA's national means test threshold and below VA's geographic means test threshold, or with income below both the VA national threshold and the VA geographically based threshold, but whose net worth exceeds VA's ceiling (currently \$80,000) who agree to pay co-pays.

Group 8: All other non service-connected veterans and zero percent, non-compensable service-connected veterans who agree to pay co-pays. (Note: Effective Jan. 17, 2003, VA no longer enrolls new veterans in priority group 8).

Special Access to Care

Service Disabled Veterans: Veterans who are 50 percent or more disabled from service-connected conditions, unemployable due to service-connected conditions, or receiving care for a service-connected disability receive priority in scheduling of hospital or outpatient medical appointments.

Combat Veterans: Veterans who served in combat locations during active military service after Nov. 11, 1998, are eligible for free health care services for conditions potentially related to combat service for two years following separation from active duty. For additional information call 1-877-222-VETS (8387).

Financial Information

Financial Assessment

Most veterans not receiving VA disability compensation or pension payments must provide information on their gross annual household income and net worth to determine whether they are below the annually adjusted financial thresholds.

This financial assessment includes all household income and net worth, including Social Security, retirement pay, unemployment insurance, interest and dividends, workers' compensation, black lung benefits and any other income. Also considered are assets such as the market value of property that is not the primary residence, stocks, bonds, notes, individual retirement accounts, bank deposits, savings accounts and cash.

VA also compares veterans' financial assessment with geographically based income thresholds. If the veteran's gross annual household income is above VA's national means test threshold and below VA's geographic means test threshold, or is below both the VA national threshold and the VA geographically based threshold, but their gross annual household income plus net worth exceeds VA's ceiling (currently \$80,000) the veteran is eligible for an 80-percent reduction in inpatient co-pay rates.

Services Requiring Co-pays

Some veterans must make co-pays to receive VA health care.

Inpatient Care: Veterans with income above the means test threshold and below VA's geographically based income threshold (Priority Group 7) are responsible for paying 20 percent of the Medicare deductible for the first 90 days of inpatient hospital care during any 365-day period. For each additional 90 days, they are charged 10 percent of the Medicare deductible. In addition, they are charged \$2 a day for hospital care.

Non service-connected veterans and non-compensable, zero percent service-connected veterans with gross annual household incomes above the VA national and geographic income thresholds will be charged the full Medicare deductible for the first 90 days of care during any 365-day period and \$10 per day. For each additional 90 days, they are charged one half of the Medicare deductible and the per diem charge.

Extended Care: With certain exceptions, veterans must pay co-pays for extended care. The co-pay amount is based on each veteran's financial situation and is determined upon application for extended care services.

Medication: Most veterans are currently charged \$8 for a 30-day or less supply of medication for treatment of conditions that are not service-connected.

Outpatient Care: A three-tiered co-pay system is used for all outpatient services. The co-pay is \$15 for a primary care visit and \$50 for some specialized care. Certain services do not require a co-pay.

Outpatient Visits Not Requiring Co-pays

Co-pays do not apply to publicly announced VA health fairs or outpatient visits solely for preventive screening and/or immunizations, such as immunizations for influenza and pneumococcal, or screening for hypertension, hepatitis C, tobacco, alcohol, hyperlipidemia, breast cancer, cervical cancer, colorectal cancer by fecal occult blood testing, education about the risks and benefits of prostate cancer screening and smoking cessation counseling (individual or group). Laboratory, flat film radiology, and electrocardiograms are also exempt from co-pays.

Billing Insurance Companies

VA is required to bill private health insurance providers for medical care, supplies and prescriptions provided for non service-connected conditions. Generally, VA cannot bill Medicare, but can bill Medicare supplemental health insurance for covered services.

All veterans applying for VA medical care are required to provide information on their health insurance coverage, including coverage provided under policies of their spouses. Veterans are not responsible for paying any remaining balance of VA's insurance claim not paid or covered by their health insurance, and any payment received by VA may be used to offset "dollar for dollar" a veteran's VA co-pay responsibility.

Travel Costs

Certain veterans may be reimbursed for travel costs to receive VA medical care. Reimbursement is paid at \$.11 per mile -- or \$.17 per mile if called for a repeat Compensation & Pension (C&P) exam -- and is subject to a deductible of \$3 for each one-way trip and an \$18-per-month maximum payment. Two exceptions to the deductible are travel for C&P exam and special modes of transportation, such as an ambulance or a specially equipped van.

Eligibility: Payments may be made to the following:

1. Veterans whose service-connected disabilities are rated 30 percent or more.
2. Veterans traveling for treatment of a service connected condition.
3. Veterans who receive a VA pension.
4. Veterans traveling for scheduled compensation or pension examinations.
5. Veterans whose gross household income does not exceed the maximum annual VA pension.
6. Veterans whose medical condition requires a special mode of transportation, if they are unable to defray the costs and travel is pre-authorized. Advance authorization is not required in an emergency if a delay would be hazardous to life or health.

VA Medical Programs

Veteran Health Registries

Certain veterans can participate in a VA health registry and receive free medical examinations, including laboratory and other diagnostic tests deemed necessary by an examining clinician. VA maintains health registries to provide special health examinations and health-related information. To participate, contact the nearest VA health care facility or visit: <http://www.va.gov/environagents/>.

Gulf War Registry: For veterans who served in the Gulf War and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF).

Depleted Uranium Registries: VA maintains two registries for veterans possibly exposed to depleted uranium. The first is for veterans who served in the Gulf War, including OIF. The second is for veterans who served elsewhere, including Bosnia and Afghanistan.

Agent Orange Registry: For veterans possibly exposed to dioxin or other toxic substances in herbicides used during the Vietnam War, while serving in Korea in 1968 or 1969, or as a result of testing, transporting, or spraying herbicides for military purposes.

Ionizing Radiation Registry: For veterans possibly exposed to atomic radiation during the following activities: atmospheric detonation of a nuclear device; occupation of Hiroshima or Nagasaki from Aug. 6, 1945, through July 1, 1946; internment as a prisoner of war in Japan during World War II; serving in official military duties at the gaseous diffusion plants at Paducah, KY.; Portsmouth, OH; or the K-25 area at Oak Ridge, TN., for at least 250 days before Feb. 1, 1992, or in Longshot, Milrow or Cannikin underground nuclear tests at Amchitka Island, Alaska, before Jan. 1, 1974; or treatment with nasopharyngeal (NP) radium during military service.

Readjustment Counseling

VA provides readjustment counseling at 207 community-based Vet Centers located in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands to help combat veterans readjust to civilian life.

Eligibility: Veterans are eligible if they served on active duty in a combat theater during World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, or the campaigns in Lebanon, Grenada, Panama, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq and the Global War on Terror. Veterans, who served in the active military during the Vietnam Era, but not in the Republic of Vietnam, must have requested services at a Vet Center before Jan. 1, 2004.

Services: Vet Center staff provides individual, group, family, military sexual trauma, and bereavement counseling. Services include treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or help with any other military related issue that affects functioning within the family, work, school or other areas of everyday life, plus a wide range of other services including outreach, education, medical referral, homeless veteran services, employment, VA benefit referral, and the brokering of non-VA services.

Bereavement Counseling: Bereavement Counseling is available to all family members including spouses, children, parents and siblings of service members who die while on active duty. This includes federally activated members of the National Guard and reserve components. Bereavement services may be accessed by calling (202) 273-9116 or e-mail vet.center@va.gov.

For additional information, contact the nearest Vet Center or visit: <http://www.vetcenter.va.gov/>.

Prosthetic and Sensory Aids

Veterans receiving VA care for any condition may receive VA prosthetic appliances, equipment and services, such as home respiratory therapy, artificial limbs, orthopedic braces and therapeutic shoes, wheelchairs, powered mobility, crutches, canes, walkers and other durable medical equipment and supplies.

VA will provide hearing aids and eyeglasses to veterans who receive increased pension based on the need for regular aid and attendance or being permanently housebound, receive compensation for a service-connected disability or are former POWs. Otherwise, hearing aids and eyeglasses are provided only in special circumstances, and not for normally occurring hearing or vision loss. For additional information, contact the prosthetic representative at the nearest VA health care facility.

Home Improvements and Structural Alterations

VA provides up to \$4,100 for service-connected veterans and up to \$1,200 for non service-connected veterans to make home improvements necessary for the continuation of treatment or for disability access to the home and essential lavatory and sanitary facilities. For application information, contact the prosthetic representative at the nearest VA health care facility.

Services for Blind Veterans

Blind veterans may be eligible for services at a VA medical center or for admission to a VA blind rehabilitation center. In addition, blind veterans enrolled in the VA health care system may receive:

1. A total health and benefits review.
2. Adjustment to blindness training.
3. Home improvements and structural alterations.
4. Specially adapted housing and adaptations.
5. Automobile grant.
6. Low-vision aids and training in their use.
7. Electronic and mechanical aids for the blind, including adaptive computers and computer-assisted devices such as reading machines and electronic travel aids.
8. Guide dogs, including cost of training the veteran to use the dog.
9. Talking books, tapes and Braille literature.

Mental Health Care

Veterans eligible for VA medical care may apply for general mental health treatment including specialty services such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and substance abuse treatment. Contact the nearest VA health care facility to apply.

Work Restoration Programs

VA provides vocational assistance and therapeutic work opportunities through several programs for veterans receiving VA health care. Each program offers treatment and rehabilitation services to help veterans live and work in their communities.

Participation in the following VA Work Restoration Programs cannot be used to deny or discontinue VA compensation or pension benefits.

Incentive Therapy: is a pre-vocational program available at 70 VA Medical Centers and frequently serves as a mainstay for seriously disabled veterans for whom employment is not considered viable in the foreseeable future. Participants receive a token payment for services provided.

Compensated Work Therapy (CWT): is a vocational program available at 141 VA Medical Centers. Veterans receive an individualized vocational assessment, rehabilitation planning and work experience with the goal of job placement in the community. The program works closely with community-based organizations, employers and state and federal agencies to establish transitional work experiences, supported employment opportunities, direct job placement and supportive follow-up services.

CWT/Transitional Residence: provides work-based, residential treatment in a stable living environment. This program differs from other VA residential bed programs in that participants use their earnings to contribute to the cost of their residences and are responsible for planning, purchasing and preparing their own meals. The program offers a comprehensive array of rehabilitation services including home, financial and life skills management.

Domiciliary Care

Domiciliary care provides rehabilitation and long-term, health-maintenance care for veterans who require minimal medical care but do not need the skilled nursing services provided in nursing homes. A Domiciliary also provides rehabilitative care for veterans who are homeless.

Eligibility: VA may provide domiciliary care to veterans whose annual gross household income does not exceed the maximum annual rate of VA pension or those the Secretary of Veterans Affairs determines have no adequate means of support. Co-pays for extended care services apply to domiciliary care. Call the nearest VA benefits or health care facility for more information.

Outpatient Dental Treatment

VA outpatient dental treatment includes the full spectrum of diagnostic, surgical, restorative and preventive procedures.

Eligibility: The following veterans are eligible to receive dental care:

1. Veterans with service-connected, compensable dental conditions.
2. Former POWs.
3. Veterans with service-connected, non-compensable dental conditions as a result of combat wounds or service injuries.
4. Veterans with non service-connected dental conditions determined by VA to be aggravating a service-connected medical problem.
5. Veterans with service-connected conditions rated permanently and totally disabling or 100 percent by reason of un-employability.
6. Veterans in a VA vocational rehabilitation program.
7. Certain enrolled homeless veterans.
8. Veterans with non service-connected dental conditions that received dental treatment while an inpatient in a VA facility.
9. Veterans requiring treatment for dental conditions clinically determined to be complicating a medical condition currently under treatment.

Recently discharged veterans who served on active duty 90 days or more and who apply for VA dental care within 90 days of separation from active duty, may receive a one time dental treatment if their certificate of discharge does not indicate that they received necessary dental care within a 90-day period prior to discharge.

Outpatient Pharmacy Services

Eligibility: VA provides free outpatient pharmacy services to:

1. Veterans with a service-connected disability of 50 percent or more.
2. Veterans receiving medication for service-connected conditions.
3. Veterans whose annual income does not exceed the maximum annual rate of the VA pension.
4. Veterans enrolled in priority group 6 who receive medication for service-connected conditions.
5. Veterans receiving medication for conditions related to sexual trauma while serving on active duty.
6. Certain veterans receiving medication for treatment of cancer of the head or neck.
7. Veterans receiving medication for a VA-approved research project.
8. Former POWs.

Medication Co-pays: Other veterans will be charged a co-pay of \$8 for each 30-day or less supply of medication. For veterans enrolled in Priority Groups 2 through 6, the maximum co-pay amount for calendar year 2007 is \$960.

Co-pays apply to prescription and over-the-counter medications, such as aspirin, cough syrup or vitamins, dispensed by a VA pharmacy. However, veterans may prefer to purchase over-the-counter drugs, such as aspirin or vitamins, at a local pharmacy rather than making the co-pay. Co-pays are not charged for medications injected during the course of treatment or for medical supplies, such as syringes or alcohol wipes.

Nursing-Home Care

VA provides nursing home services through three national programs: VA owned and operated nursing homes, state veterans' homes owned and operated by the state, and contract community nursing homes. Each program has its own admission and eligibility criteria.

VA Nursing Homes: VA owned and operated homes typically admit residents requiring short-term skilled care or who have a 70 percent or more service-connected disability.

State Veterans' Home Programs: The state veterans' home program is a cooperative venture between the states and VA whereby the states petition VA for matching construction grants and once granted, the state, the veteran, and VA pay a portion of the per diem. The per diem is set in legislation. State veterans homes accept all veterans in need of long-term or short-term nursing home care. Specialized services offered are dependent upon the capability of the home to render them.

Community Nursing Home Program: VA maintains contracts with community nursing homes through every VA medical center. The purpose of this program is to meet the nursing home needs of veterans who require long-term nursing home care in their own community, close to their families.

Eligibility: The general admission criteria for nursing home placement requires that a resident must be medically stable, i.e. not acutely ill, have sufficient functional deficits to require inpatient nursing home care, and is assessed by an appropriate medical provider to be in need of institutional nursing home care. Furthermore, the veteran must meet the required VA eligibility criteria for nursing home care or the contract nursing home program and the eligibility criteria for the specific state veterans home. For VA nursing home care, a veteran may be subject to a co-payment determined by information supplied by completing a VA Form 10-10EZ. VA social workers are available to assist veterans in interpreting their eligibility and co-pay requirements if indicated.

Long-Term Care Services: In addition to nursing home care, VA offers a variety of other long-term care services either directly or by contract with community-based agencies. Such services include adult day health care, inpatient or outpatient respite care, inpatient or outpatient geriatric evaluation and management, hospice and palliative care, and home based primary care. Veterans receiving these services may be subject to a co-pay.

Emergency Medical Care in Non-VA Facilities

VA may reimburse or pay for medical care provided to enrolled veterans by non-VA facilities only in cases of medical emergencies where VA or other federal facilities were not feasibly available. Other conditions also apply. To determine eligibility or initiate a claim, contact the VA medical facility nearest to where the emergency service was provided.

Veterans with Service-Connected Disabilities

Disability Compensation

Disability compensation is a monetary benefit paid to veterans who are disabled by an injury or disease that was incurred or aggravated during active military service. These disabilities are considered to be service-connected. Disability compensation varies with the degree of disability and the number of veteran’s dependents, and is paid monthly. Veterans with certain severe disabilities may be eligible for additional special monthly compensation. The benefits are not subject to federal or state income tax.

The payment of military retirement pay, disability severance pay and separation incentive payments known as SSB (Special Separation Benefits) and VSI (Voluntary Separation Incentives) affects the amount of VA compensation paid to disabled veterans.

To be eligible, the service of the veteran must have been terminated through separation or discharge under conditions other than dishonorable. For additional details, visit the Web site at <http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/>.

2008 Disability Compensation Rates

| Veteran’s Disability Rating | Monthly Rate Paid |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| 10 percent | \$117 |
| 20 percent | \$230 |
| 30 percent* | \$356 |
| 40 percent* | \$512 |
| 50 percent* | \$728 |
| 60 percent* | \$921 |
| 70 percent* | \$1,161 |
| 80 percent* | \$1,349 |
| 90 percent* | \$1,517 |
| 100 percent* | \$2,527 |

**Veterans with disability ratings of at least 30 percent are eligible for additional allowances for dependents, including spouses, minor children, children between the ages of 18 and 23 who are attending school, children who are permanently incapable of self-support because of a disability arising before age 18, and dependent parents. The additional amount depends on the disability rating. For more detailed rates, please visit: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-benefits/va-compensation-tables>.*

Receiving Payments

VA offers three payment options to veterans eligible to receive benefit payments. Most veterans receive their payments by direct deposit to a bank, savings and loan or credit union account. In some areas, veterans who do not have a bank account can open a federally insured Electronic Transfer Account, which costs about \$3 a month, provides a monthly statement and allows cash withdrawals. Other veterans may choose to receive benefits by check. To choose a payment method, call toll-free 1-877-838-2778, Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. - 4 p.m., CST.

Presumptive Conditions for Disability Compensation

Certain veterans are eligible for disability compensation based on the presumption that their disability is service connected.

Prisoners of War: For former POWs who were imprisoned for any length of time, the following disabilities are presumed to be service-connected if they are rated at least 10 percent disabling anytime after military service: psychosis, any of the anxiety states, dysthymic disorder, organic residuals of frostbite, post-traumatic osteoarthritis, heart disease or hypertensive vascular disease and their complications, stroke and residuals of stroke.

For former POWs who were imprisoned for at least 30 days, the following conditions are also presumed to be service-connected: avitaminosis, beriberi, chronic dysentery, helminthiasis, malnutrition (including optic atrophy), pellagra and/or other nutritional deficiencies, irritable bowel syndrome, peptic ulcer disease, peripheral neuropathy and cirrhosis of the liver.

Veterans Exposed to Agent Orange and Other Herbicides: A veteran who served in the Republic of Vietnam between Jan. 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975, is presumed to have been exposed to Agent Orange and other herbicides used in support of military operations.

Eleven diseases are presumed by VA to be service-connected for such veterans: chloracne or other acneform disease similar to chloracne, porphyria cutanea tarda, soft-tissue sarcoma (other than osteosarcoma, chondrosarcoma, Kaposi's sarcoma or mesothelioma), Hodgkin's disease, multiple myeloma, respiratory cancers (lung, bronchus, larynx, trachea), non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, prostate cancer, acute and subacute peripheral neuropathy, diabetes mellitus (Type 2) and chronic lymphocytic leukemia.

Veterans Exposed to Radiation: For veterans who participated in "radiation risk activities" as defined in VA regulations while on active duty, the following conditions are presumed to be service-connected: all forms of leukemia (except for chronic lymphocytic leukemia); cancer of the thyroid, breast, pharynx, esophagus, stomach, small intestine, pancreas, bile ducts, gall bladder, salivary gland, urinary tract (renal pelvis, ureter, urinary bladder and urethra), brain, bone, lung, colon, and ovary, bronchiolo-alveolar carcinoma, multiple myeloma, lymphomas (other than Hodgkin's disease), and primary liver cancer (except if cirrhosis or hepatitis B is indicated).

To determine service-connection for other conditions or exposures not eligible for presumptive service-connection, VA considers factors such as the amount of radiation exposure, duration of exposure, elapsed time between exposure and onset of the disease, gender and family history, age at time of exposure, the extent to which a non service-related exposure could contribute to disease, and the relative sensitivity of exposed tissue.

Gulf War Veterans: Gulf War veterans may receive disability compensation for chronic disabilities resulting from undiagnosed illnesses, medically unexplained chronic multi-symptom illnesses defined by a cluster of signs or symptoms. A disability is considered chronic if it has existed for at least six months. The undiagnosed illnesses must have appeared either during active service in the Southwest Asia Theater of Operations during the Gulf War or to a degree of at least 10 percent at any time since then through Dec. 31, 2011.

The following are examples of symptoms of an undiagnosed illness: chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, skin disorders, headache, muscle pain, joint pain, neurological symptoms, neuropsychological symptoms, symptoms involving the respiratory system, sleep disturbances, gastrointestinal symptoms, cardiovascular symptoms, abnormal weight loss, and menstrual disorders.

Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease, may be determined to be service-connected if the veteran served in the Southwest Asia Theater of Operations anytime during the period of Aug. 2, 1990, to July 31, 1991. The Southwest Asia Theater of Operations includes Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the neutral zone between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, the Gulf of Aden, the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, the Red Sea, and the airspace above these locations.

Programs for Veterans with Service-Connected Disabilities

Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment

The Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program assists veterans who have service-connected disabilities with obtaining and maintaining suitable employment. Independent living services are also available for severely disabled veterans who are not currently ready to seek employment. Additional information is available on the Web site at <http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/vre/>.

Eligibility: A veteran must have a VA service-connected disability rated at least 20 percent with an employment handicap, or rated 10 percent with a serious employment handicap, and be discharged or released from military service under other than dishonorable conditions. Service members pending medical separation from active duty may also apply if their disabilities are reasonably expected to be rated at least 20 percent following their discharge.

Services: VA pays the cost of all approved training programs. Subsistence allowance may also be provided. Depending on an individual’s needs, services provided by VA may include:

1. An evaluation of interests, aptitudes and abilities.
2. Assistance with writing a resume and other job seeking skills.
3. Assistance with obtaining and maintaining suitable employment.
4. Vocational counseling and planning.
5. On-the-job training and work-experience programs.
6. Training, such as certificate, two or four-year college, or technical programs.
7. Supportive rehabilitation services and counseling.

Period of a Rehabilitation Program: Generally, veterans must complete a program within 12 years from their separation from military service or within 12 years from the date VA notifies them that they have a compensable service-connected disability. Depending on the length of program needed, veterans may be provided up to 48 months of full-time services or their part-time equivalent. These limitations may be extended in certain circumstances.

Work-Study: Veterans training at the three-quarter or full-time rate may participate in VA’s work-study program. Participants may provide VA outreach services, prepare and process VA paperwork, and work at a VA medical facility or perform other VA-approved activities. A portion of the work-study allowance equal to 40 percent of the total may be paid in advance.

2007 Vocational Rehabilitation Rates (Monthly)

For institutional or independent living training, or unpaid work experience in a federal, state, or local agency, or an agency of a federally recognized Indian tribe, the rates are:

| Training Time | Veterans with No Dependents | Veterans with One Dependent | Veterans with Two Dependents | Each Additional Dependent |
|----------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Full-time | \$520.74 | \$645.94 | \$761.18 | \$55.49 |
| ¾ Time | \$391.27 | \$485.15 | \$569.09 | \$42.67 |
| ½ Time | \$261.81 | \$324.38 | \$381.30 | \$28.47 |

For unpaid on-the-job training in federal, state, or local agency, or an agency of a federally recognized Indian tribe; training in a home; vocational course in a rehabilitation facility or sheltered workshop; independent instructor; institutional non-farm cooperative, the rates are:

| Training Time | Veterans with No Dependents | Veterans with One Dependent | Veterans with Two Dependents | Each Additional Dependent |
|----------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
|----------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|

| | | | | |
|-----------|----------|----------|----------|---------|
| Full-time | \$520.74 | \$645.94 | \$761.18 | \$55.49 |
|-----------|----------|----------|----------|---------|

For farm cooperative, apprenticeship, on-the-job training, or on-the-job non-farm cooperative, VA payments are variable, based on the wages received. The maximum VA rates are:

| Training Time | Veterans with No Dependents | Veterans with One Dependent | Veterans with Two Dependents | Each Additional Dependent |
|---------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Full-time | \$455.29 | \$550.59 | \$634.55 | \$41.28 |

For extended evaluation, the rates are:

| Training Time | Veterans with No Dependents | Veterans with One Dependent | Veterans with Two Dependents | Each Additional Dependent |
|---------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Full-time | \$520.74 | \$645.94 | \$761.18 | \$55.49 |
| ¾ Time | \$391.27 | \$485.15 | \$569.09 | \$42.67 |
| ½ Time | \$261.81 | \$324.38 | \$381.30 | \$28.47 |
| ¼ Time | \$130.89 | \$162.20 | \$190.64 | \$14.20 |

Specially Adapted Housing

Certain veterans and service members with service-connected disabilities may be entitled to a Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) grant from VA to help build a new specially adapted house or buy a house and modify it to meet their disability-related requirements. Eligible veterans or service members may now receive up to three grants, with the total dollar amount of the grants not to exceed the maximum allowable. Previous grant recipients who had received assistance of less than the current maximum allowable may be eligible for an additional SAH grant.

Eligible veterans who are temporarily residing in a home owned by a family member may also receive assistance in the form of a grant to assist the veteran in adapting the family member’s home to meet his or her special needs. Those eligible for a \$50,000 total grant would be permitted to use up to \$14,000 and those eligible for a \$10,000 total grant would be permitted to use up to \$2,000. (See eligibility requirements for different grant amounts.) However, VA is not authorized to make such grants available to assist active duty personnel.

\$50,000 Grant: VA may approve a grant of not more than 50 percent of the cost of building, buying, or adapting existing homes or paying to reduce indebtedness on a previously owned home that is being adapted, up to a maximum of \$50,000. In certain instances, the full grant amount may be applied toward remodeling costs. Veterans and service members must be determined eligible to receive compensation for permanent and total service-connected disability due to one of the following:

1. Loss or loss of use of both lower extremities, such as to preclude locomotion without the aid of braces, crutches, canes or a wheelchair.
2. Loss or loss of use of both upper extremities at or above the elbow.
3. Blindness in both eyes, having only light perception, plus loss or loss of use of one lower extremity.
4. Loss or loss of use of one lower extremity together with (a) residuals of organic disease or injury, or (b) the loss or loss of use of one upper extremity which so affects the functions of balance or propulsion as to preclude locomotion without the use of braces, canes, crutches or a wheelchair.

\$10,000 Grant: VA may approve a grant for the cost, up to a maximum of \$10,000, for necessary adaptations to a veteran’s or service member’s residence or to help veterans and service-members acquire a residence already adapted with special features for their disability. To be eligible for this grant, veterans and service-members must be entitled to compensation for permanent and total service-connected disability due to:

1. Blindness in both eyes with 5/200 visual acuity or less.
2. Or anatomical loss or loss of use of both hands.

Supplemental Financing: Veterans and service members with available loan guaranty entitlement may also obtain a guaranteed loan or a direct loan from VA to supplement the grant to acquire a specially adapted home. Amounts with a guaranteed loan from a private lender will vary, but the maximum direct loan from VA is \$33,000.

Automobile Assistance

Veterans and service members may be eligible for a one-time payment of not more than \$11,000 toward the purchase of an automobile or other conveyance if they have service-connected loss or permanent loss of use of one or both hands or feet, permanent impairment of vision of both eyes to a certain degree, or ankylosis (immobility) of one or both knees or one or both hips.

They may also be eligible for adaptive equipment, and for repair, replacement, or reinstallation required because of disability or for the safe operation of a vehicle purchased with VA assistance. To apply, contact a VA regional office at 1-800-827-1000 or the nearest VA medical center.

Clothing Allowance

Any veteran who is service-connected for a disability for which he or she uses prosthetic or orthopedic appliances may receive an annual clothing allowance.

The clothing allowance also is available to any veteran whose service-connected skin condition requires prescribed medication that irreparably damages his or her outer garments. To apply, contact the prosthetic representative at the nearest VA medical center.

Aid and Attendance or Housebound

A veteran who is determined by VA to be in need of the regular aid and attendance of another person, or a veteran who is permanently housebound, may be entitled to additional disability compensation or pension payments. A veteran evaluated at 30 percent or more disabled is entitled to receive an additional payment for a spouse who is in need of the aid and attendance of another person.

Concurrent Retirement and Disability Payments (CRDP)

Concurrent Retirement and Disability Payments (CRDP) restores retired pay on a graduated 10-year schedule for retirees with a 50 to 90 percent VA-rated disability. Concurrent retirement payments increase 10 percent per year through 2013. Veterans rated 100% disabled by VA are entitled to full CRDP without being phased in. Veterans receiving benefits at the 100% rate due to individual unemployability are entitled to full CRDP in 2009.

Eligibility: To qualify, veterans must also meet all three of the following criteria:

1. Have 20 or more years on active duty, or a reservist age 60 or older with 20 or more creditable years.
2. Be in a retired status.
3. Be receiving retired pay (must be offset by VA payments).

Retirees do not need to apply for this benefit. Payment is coordinated between VA and the Department of Defense (DOD).

Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC)

Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) provides tax-free monthly payments to eligible retired veterans with combat-related injuries. With CRSC, veterans can receive both their full military retirement pay and their VA disability compensation, if the injury is combat-related.

Eligibility: Retired veterans with combat-related injuries must meet all of the following criteria to apply for CRSC:

1. Active, Reserve, or medically retired with 20 years of creditable service.
2. Receiving military retired pay.
3. Have a 10% or greater VA-rated injury.
4. Military retired pay is reduced by VA disability payments (VA Waiver).

In addition, veterans must be able to provide documentary evidence that their injuries were a result of one of the following:

- Training that simulates war (e.g., exercises, field training)
- Hazardous duty (e.g., flight, diving, parachute duty)
- An instrumentality of war (e.g. combat vehicles, weapons, Agent Orange)
- Armed conflict (e.g. gunshot wounds {Purple Heart}, punji stick injuries)

For more information, visit the Web site at <http://www.dod.mil/prhome/mppcrsc.html>, or call the toll free phone number for the veteran's branch of service: (Army) 1-866-281-3254; (Air Force) 1-800-616-3775; (Navy) 1-877-366-2772; and (Coast Guard) 1-866-307-1336.

VA Pensions

Eligibility for Disability Pension

Veterans with low incomes who are permanently and totally disabled, or are age 65 and older, may be eligible for monetary support if they have 90 days or more of active military service, at least one day of which was during a period of war. (Veterans, who entered active duty on or after Sept. 8, 1980 or officers who entered active duty on or after Oct. 16, 1981, may have to meet a longer minimum period of active duty.) The veteran’s discharge must have been under conditions other than dishonorable and the disability must be for reasons other than the veteran’s own willful misconduct.

Payments are made to bring the veteran’s total income, including other retirement or Social Security income, to a level set by Congress. Un-reimbursed medical expenses may reduce countable income for VA purposes.

Improved Disability Pension

Congress establishes the maximum annual pension rates listed on the next page. Payments are reduced by the amount of countable income of the veteran, spouse or dependent children. When a veteran without a spouse or a child is furnished nursing home or domiciliary care by VA, the pension is reduced to an amount not to exceed \$90 per month after three calendar months of care. The reduction may be delayed if nursing-home care is being continued to provide the veteran with rehabilitation services.

2007 Improved Disability Pension Rates

| Status | Maximum Annual Rate |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Veteran without dependents | \$11,181 |
| Veteran with one dependent | \$14,643 |
| Veteran permanently housebound, no dependents | \$13,664 |
| Veteran permanently housebound, one dependent | \$17,126 |
| Veteran needing regular aid and attendance, no dependents | \$18,654 |
| Veteran needing regular aid and attendance, one dependent | \$22,113 |
| Two veterans married to one another | \$14,643 |
| Increase for each additional dependent child | \$1,909 |

Protected Pension Programs

Pension beneficiaries who were receiving a VA pension on Dec. 31, 1978, and do not wish to elect the Improved Pension will continue to receive the pension rate they were receiving on that date. This rate generally continues as long as the beneficiary’s income remains within established limits, his or her net worth does not bar payment, and the beneficiary does not lose any dependents.

These beneficiaries must continue to meet basic eligibility factors, such as permanent and total disability for veterans, or status as a surviving spouse or child. VA must adjust rates for other reasons, such as a veteran’s hospitalization in a VA facility.

Medal of Honor Pension

VA administers pensions to recipients of the Medal of Honor. Congress set the monthly pension at \$1,129 effective Dec. 1, 2007.

Education and Training

This chapter provides a summary of VA education and training benefits. Additional information can be found at: <http://www.gibill.va.gov/> or by calling 1-888-GI-BILL-1 (1-888-442-4551).

Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB)

Eligibility: VA educational benefits may be used while the service-member is on active duty or after the service member's separation from active duty with a fully honorable military discharge. Discharges "under honorable conditions" and "general" discharges do not establish eligibility.

Eligibility generally expires 10 years after the service member's discharge. However, there are exceptions for disability, re-entering active duty, and upgraded discharges.

All participants must have a high school diploma, equivalency certificate, or completed 12 hours toward a college degree before applying for benefits.

Previously, service members had to meet the high school requirement before they completed their initial active duty obligation. Those who did not may now meet the requirement and reapply for benefits. If eligible, they must use their benefits either within 10 years from the date of last discharge from active duty or by Nov. 2, 2010, whichever is later.

Additionally, every veteran must establish eligibility under one of four categories.

Category 1 – Service after June 30, 1985

For veterans who entered active duty for the first time after June 30, 1985, did not decline MGIB in writing, and had their military pay reduced by \$100 a month for 12 months.

Service members can apply after completing two continuous years of service. Veterans must have completed three continuous years of active duty, or two continuous years of active duty if they first signed up for less than three years or have an obligation to serve four years in the Selected Reserve (the 2x4 program) and enter the Selected Reserve within one year of discharge.

Service members or veterans who received a commission as a result of graduation from a service academy or completion of an ROTC scholarship are not eligible under Category 1 unless they received their commission:

1. After becoming eligible for MGIB benefits (including completing the minimum service requirements for the initial period of active duty).
2. Or after Sept. 30, 1996, and received less than \$3,400 during any one year under ROTC scholarship.

Service members or veterans who declined MGIB because they received repayment from the military for education loans are also ineligible under Category 1. If they did not decline MGIB and received loan repayments, the months served to repay the loans will be deducted from their entitlement.

Early Separation: Service members who did not complete the required period of military service may be eligible under Category 1 if discharged for one of the following:

1. Convenience of the government—with 30 continuous months of service for an obligation of three or more years, or 20 continuous months of service for an obligation of less than three years.
2. Service-connected disability.

3. Hardship.
4. A medical condition diagnosed prior to joining the military.
5. A condition that interfered with performance of duty and did not result from misconduct.
6. A reduction in force (in most cases).

Category 2 – Vietnam Era GI Bill Conversion

For veterans who had remaining entitlement under the Vietnam Era GI Bill on Dec. 31, 1989, and served on active duty for any number of days during the period Oct. 19, 1984, to June 30, 1985, for at least three continuous years beginning on July 1, 1985; or at least two continuous years of active duty beginning on July 1, 1985, followed by four years in the Selected Reserve beginning within one year of release from active duty.

Veterans not on active duty on Oct. 19, 1984, may be eligible under Category 2 if they served three continuous years on active duty beginning on or after July 1, 1985, or two continuous years of active duty at any time followed by four continuous years in the Selected Reserve beginning within one year of release from active duty.

Veterans are barred from eligibility under Category 2 if they received a commission after Dec. 31, 1976, as a result of graduation from a service academy or completion of an ROTC scholarship.

However, such a commission is not a bar if they received the commission after becoming eligible for MGIB benefits, or received the commission after Sept. 30, 1996, and received less than \$3,400 during any one year under ROTC scholarship.

Category 3 – Involuntary Separation/Special Separation

For veterans who meet one of the following requirements:

1. Elected MGIB before being involuntarily separated.
2. Or were voluntarily separated under the Voluntary Separation Incentive or the Special Separation Benefit program, elected MGIB benefits before being separated, and had military pay reduced by \$1,200 before discharge.

Category 4 – Veterans' Educational Assistance Program (VEAP)

Eligibility: Active duty personnel could participate in the Veterans' Educational Assistance Program (VEAP) if they entered active duty for the first time after Dec. 31, 1976, and before July 1, 1985, and made a contribution prior to April 1, 1987. The maximum contribution is \$2,700. Active duty participants may make a lump-sum contribution to their VEAP account. For more information, visit the Web site at www.gibill.va.gov/.

Service members who participated in VEAP are eligible to receive benefits while on active duty if:

1. At least three months of contributions are available, except for high school or elementary, in which only one month is needed.
2. And they enlisted for the first time after Sept. 7, 1980, and completed 24 months of their first period of active duty.

Service members must receive a discharge under conditions other than dishonorable for the qualifying period of service. Service members who enlisted for the first time after Sept. 7, 1980, or entered active duty as an officer or enlistee after Oct. 16, 1981, must have completed 24 continuous months of active duty, unless they meet a qualifying exception.

Eligibility generally expires 10 years from release from active duty, but can be extended under special circumstances.

Payments: DoD will match contributions at the rate of \$2 for every \$1 put into the fund and may make additional contributions, or “kickers,” as necessary. For training in college or vocational or technical schools, the payment amount depends on the type and hours of training pursued. The maximum amount is \$300 a month for full-time training.

Training, Work-Study, Counseling: VEAP participants may receive the same training, work-study benefits and counseling as provided under the Montgomery GI Bill.

Home Loan Guaranty

VA home loan guaranties are issued to help eligible service members, veterans, reservists and unmarried surviving spouses obtain homes, condominiums, residential cooperative housing units, and manufactured homes, and to refinance loans. For additional information or to obtain VA loan guaranty forms, visit <http://www.homeloans.va.gov/>.

Loan Uses: A VA guaranty helps protect lenders from loss if the borrower fails to repay the loan. It can be used to obtain a loan to:

1. Buy or build a home.
2. Buy a residential condominium.
3. Buy a residential cooperative housing unit.
4. Repair, alter or improve a home.
5. Refinance an existing home loan.
6. Buy a manufactured home with or without a lot.
7. Buy and improve a manufactured home lot.
8. Install a solar heating or cooling system or other weatherization improvements.
9. Buy a home and install energy-efficient improvements.

Eligibility: In addition to the periods of eligibility and conditions of service requirements, applicants must have a good credit rating, sufficient income, a valid Certificate of Eligibility, and agree to live in the property.

To obtain a Certificate of Eligibility, complete VA Form 26-1880 -- “Request for a Certificate of Eligibility for VA Home Loan” -- and mail to: VA Eligibility Center, P.O. Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120.

Applicants may also have their lenders obtain a Certificate of Eligibility for them through VA’s Automated Certificate of Eligibility (ACE) system. In many cases, ACE can generate an online certificate immediately. However, not all cases can be processed this way. For more information, visit <http://www.homeloans.va.gov/eligibility.htm>.

Periods of Eligibility

World War II: (1) active duty service after Sept. 15, 1940, and prior to July 26, 1947; (2) discharge under other than dishonorable conditions; and (3) at least 90 days service unless discharged early for a service-connected disability.

Post-World War II: (1) active duty service after July 25, 1947, and prior to June 27, 1950; (2) discharge under other than dishonorable conditions; and (3) 181 days continuous active duty service unless discharged early for a service-connected disability.

Korean War: (1) active duty after June 26, 1950, and prior to Feb. 1, 1955; (2) discharge under other than dishonorable conditions; and (3) at least 90 days total service, unless discharged early for a service-connected disability.

Post-Korean War: (1) active duty between Jan. 31, 1955, and Aug. 5, 1964; (2) discharge under conditions other than dishonorable; (3) 181 days continuous service, unless discharged early for a service-connected disability.

Vietnam: (1) active duty after Aug. 4, 1964, and prior to May 8, 1975; (2) discharge under conditions other than dishonorable; and (3) 90 days total service, unless discharged early for a service-connected disability. For veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam, the beginning date is Feb. 28, 1961.

Post-Vietnam: (1) For veterans whose enlisted service began before Sept. 8, 1980, or whose service as an officer began before Oct. 17, 1981; (2) active duty for 181 continuous days, all of which occurred after May 7, 1975; and (3) discharge under conditions other than dishonorable or early discharge for service-connected disability.

24-Month Rule: If service was between Sept. 8, 1980, (Oct. 16, 1981, for officers) and Aug. 1, 1990, veterans must generally complete 24 months of continuous active duty service or the full period (at least 181 days) for which they were called or ordered to active duty, and be discharged under conditions other than dishonorable.

Exceptions are allowed if the veteran completed at least 181 days of active duty service but was discharged earlier than 24 months for (1) hardship, (2) the convenience of the government, (3) reduction-in-force, (4) certain medical conditions, or (5) service-connected disability.

Gulf War: Veterans of the Gulf War era must generally complete 24 months of continuous active duty service or the full period (at least 90 days) for which they were called to active duty, and be discharged under conditions other than dishonorable.

Exceptions are allowed if the veteran completed at least 90 days of active duty but was discharged earlier than 24 months for (1) hardship, (2) the convenience of the government, (3) reduction-in-force, (4) certain medical conditions, or (5) service-connected disability. Reservists and National Guard members are eligible if they were activated after Aug. 1, 1990, served at least 90 days, and received an honorable discharge.

Active Duty Personnel: Until the Gulf War era is ended, persons on active duty are eligible after serving 90 continuous days.

Guaranty Amount

The VA guaranty varies with the size of the loan, and is issued to protect lenders so they may make loans to eligible borrowers. Because the lenders are able to obtain this guaranty from VA, borrowers do not need to make a down payment, provided they have enough home loan entitlement.

The maximum guaranty amount is equal to 25 percent of the Freddie Mac conforming loan limit for a single family home. This limit changes yearly, but is set at \$417,000 for calendar year 2007 (\$625,000 for Hawaii, Alaska, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands).

2007 Home Loan Guaranty Entitlement

| Loan Amount | Percent of Loan Guaranteed | Maximum Guaranty Amount |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| \$0.00 - \$45,000 | 50% | \$22,500 |
| \$45,001 - \$56,250 | 50% - 40% | \$22,500 |
| \$56,251 - \$144,000 | 40% - 25% | \$36,000 |
| \$144,001 or more | 25% | \$104,250 |
| Manufactured Home or Lot | 40% | \$20,000 |

The total loan amount may include the Funding Fee (described on next page), as well as up to \$6,000 of home improvements to make the home more energy efficient.

An eligible borrower who wishes to use a VA-guaranteed loan to refinance an existing mortgage generally can borrow up to 90 percent of the home’s appraised value. (However, a loan to reduce the interest rate on an existing VA-guaranteed loan may include the entire outstanding balance of the prior loan, the costs of energy-efficient modifications, as well as up to two discount points of loan closing fees.) An eligible borrower who wishes to obtain a

VA-guaranteed loan to purchase a manufactured home or lot can only borrow up to 95 percent of the home’s purchase price.

VA Appraisal

No loan can be guaranteed by VA without first being appraised by a qualified VA fee appraiser. A buyer, seller, real estate agent or lender can request a VA appraisal by completing VA Form 26-1805, Request for Determination of Reasonable Value. The requester pays for the appraisal according to a fee schedule approved by VA.

The VA appraisal estimates the value of the property. It is not an inspection and does not guarantee the house is free of defects. VA guarantees the loan, not the condition of the property.

Closing Costs

Payment in cash is required on all closing costs, including title search and recording fees, hazard insurance premiums and prepaid taxes. For refinancing loans, all such costs may be included in the loan, as long as the total loan does not exceed 90 percent of the reasonable value of the property. Interest rate reduction loans may include closing costs and a maximum of two discount points.

All loans, except those made to disabled veterans and unmarried surviving spouses of veterans who died as a result of service, are charged a VA funding fee. This fee is based on the loan amount and may be included in the loan.

2007 Funding Fees

| Loan Category | Service Members & Veterans Pay | Reservists Pay |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Purchase or construction loans with down payments of less than 5%, refinancing loans, and home improvement loans | 2.15% | 2.40% |
| Purchase or construction loans with down payments of at least 5% but less than 10% | 1.50% | 1.75% |
| Purchase or construction loans with down payments of 10% or more | 1.25% | 1.50% |
| Manufactured home loans | 1.00% | 1.00% |
| Interest rate reduction loans | 0.50% | 0.50% |
| Assumption of VA-guaranteed loans | 0.50% | 0.50% |
| Second or subsequent use of entitlement with no down payment | 3.30% | 3.30% |

Required Occupancy

To qualify for a VA guaranty, a veteran or the spouse of a service member must certify that he or she intends to live in the home. When refinancing a VA-guaranteed loan solely to reduce the interest rate, a veteran need only certify to prior occupancy.

Financing, Interest Rates and Terms

Veterans obtain VA-guaranteed loans through the usual lending institutions, including banks, savings and loan associations and mortgage brokers. VA-guaranteed loans can have either a fixed interest rate or an adjustable rate, where the interest rate may adjust up to one percent annually and up to five percent over the life of the loan.

Veterans may also choose a different type of adjustable rate mortgage called a hybrid ARM, where the initial interest rate remains fixed for three to 10 years. If the rate remains fixed for less than five years, the rate adjustment cannot be more than one percent annually and five percent over the life of the loan.

For a hybrid ARM with an initial fixed period of five years or more, the initial adjustment may be up to two percent. Adjustments thereafter are limited to one percent annually and six percent over the life of the loan.

If the lender charges discount points on the loan, the veteran may negotiate with the seller as to who will pay points or if they will be split between buyer and seller. Points paid by the veteran may not be included in the loan (with the exception that up to two points may be included in interest rate reduction loans). The loan may be for as long as 30 years and 32 days.

Loan Assumption Requirements and Liability

VA loans made on or after March 1, 1988, are not assumable without the prior approval of VA or its authorized agent (usually the lender collecting the monthly payments). To approve the assumption, the lender must ensure that the purchaser is a satisfactory credit risk and will assume all of the veteran's liabilities on the loan.

If approved, the purchaser will have to pay a funding fee that the lender sends to VA, and the veteran will be released from liability to the federal government. A release of liability does not mean that a veteran's guaranty entitlement is restored. That occurs only if the buyer is a veteran and agrees to substitute his or her entitlement for that of the seller.

If a veteran allows assumption of a loan without prior approval, then the lender may demand immediate and full payment of the loan, and the veteran may be liable if the loan is foreclosed and VA has to pay a claim under the loan guaranty.

Loans made prior to March 1, 1988, are generally freely assumable, but veterans should still request VA's approval in order to be released of liability. Veterans whose loans were closed after Dec. 31, 1989, usually have no liability to the government following a foreclosure, except in cases involving fraud, misrepresentation, or bad faith, such as allowing an unapproved assumption.

Repossessed Homes

VA acquires properties as a result of foreclosures. The properties are marketed by Ocwen Loan Servicing, LLC, through listing agents using local Multiple Listing Services. A listing of "VA Properties for Sale" may be found at: <http://www.ocwen.com/reo/home.cfm>. Contact a real estate agent for information on purchasing a VA acquired property.

Loans for Native American Veterans

Eligible Native American veterans can obtain a loan from VA to purchase, construct or improve a home on Federal Trust land, or to reduce the interest rate on such a VA loan. The maximum loan amount is equal to the Freddie Mac conforming loan limit for a single-family home. This limit changes yearly. In 2007, the limit is \$417,000 for the continental United States and \$625,500 for Hawaii, Alaska, and Guam.

Veterans who are not Native American, but who are married to Native American non-veterans, may be eligible for a direct loan under this program. To be eligible for such a loan, the qualified non-Native American veteran and the Native American spouse must reside on Federal Trust land, and both the veteran and spouse must have a meaningful interest in the dwelling or lot.

A funding fee must be paid to VA, unless the veteran is exempt from such a fee because they receive either VA disability compensation or military retirement pay. The fee, which is 1.25 percent for loans to purchase, construct or improve a home, and 0.5 percent to refinance an existing loan, may be paid in cash or included in the loan.

The following may not be included in the loan: VA appraisal, credit report, loan processing fee, title search, title insurance, recording fees, transfer taxes, survey charges or hazard insurance.

Safeguards for Veterans

The following safeguards have been established to protect veterans:

1. Homes completed less than a year before purchase with VA financing and inspected during construction by either VA or the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) must meet VA requirements.
2. VA may suspend from the loan program those who take unfair advantage of veterans or discriminate because of race, color, religion, sex, disability, family status or national origin.
3. The builder of a new home (or manufactured home) is required to give the purchasing veteran a one-year warranty that the home has been constructed to VA-approved plans and specifications.
4. In cases of new construction completed under VA or HUD inspection, VA may compensate a veteran borrower for correction of structural defects seriously affecting livability if requested within four years of a home loan guaranty.
5. The borrower obtaining a loan may only be charged the fees and other charges prescribed by VA as allowable.
6. The borrower can prepay without penalty the entire loan or any part not less than one installment or \$100.
7. VA encourages holders to extend forbearance if a borrower becomes temporarily unable to meet the terms of the loan.

VA Life Insurance

For complete details on government life insurance, visit the VA Internet site: <http://www.insurance.va.gov/> or call toll-free 1-800-669-8477. Specialists are available between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 6 p.m., Eastern Time, to discuss premium payments, insurance dividends, address changes, policy loans, naming beneficiaries and reporting the death of the insured.

If the insurance policy number is not known, send whatever information is available, such as the veteran's VA file number, date of birth, Social Security number, military serial number or military service branch and dates of service to:

Department of Veterans Affairs
Regional Office and Insurance Center
Box 42954
Philadelphia, PA 19101

Service Members' Group Life Insurance (SGLI)

The following are automatically insured for \$400,000 under SGLI:

1. Active-duty members of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard.
2. Commissioned members of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Public Health Service.
3. Cadets or midshipmen of the service academies.
4. Members, cadets and midshipmen of the ROTC while engaged in authorized training.
5. Members of the Ready Reserves.
6. Members who volunteer for assignment to a mobilization category in the Individual Ready Reserve or Inactive National Guard.

Individuals may elect to be covered for a lesser amount or not at all. Part-time coverage may be provided to reservists who do not qualify for full-time coverage. Premiums are automatically deducted from the service members' pay. At the time of separation from service, SGLI can be converted to either Veterans' Group Life Insurance (VGLI) or a commercial plan through participating companies. SGLI coverage continues for 120 days after separation at no charge.

Coverage of \$10,000 is also automatically provided for dependent children of members insured under SGLI with no premium required.

Traumatic Service Members' Group Life Insurance

Members of the armed services serve our nation heroically during times of great need, but what happens when they experience great needs of their own because they have sustained a traumatic injury? Traumatic Service members' Group Life Insurance (TSGLI) helps severely injured service members through their time of need with a one-time payment. The amount varies depending on the injury, but it could be the difference that allows their families to be with them during their recovery; helps them with unforeseen expenses; or gives them a financial head start on life after recovery.

TSGLI is an insurance program that is bundled with Service members' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) and an additional \$1.00 has been added to the service member's SGLI premium to cover TSGLI. After Dec. 1, 2005, all service members who are covered by SGLI are eligible for TSGLI coverage, regardless of where their qualifying traumatic injury occurred. However, TSGLI claims require approval. In addition, there is a retroactive program that covers service members who sustained a qualifying traumatic injury while in theater supporting Operation Enduring Freedom

(OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), or while on orders in a Combat Zone Tax Exclusion (CZTE) area from Oct. 7, 2001, through Nov. 30, 2005.

For more information, visit the Web site at <http://www.insurance.va.gov/sgliSite/TSGLI/TSGLI.htm>, or call 1-800-237-1336 (Army); 1-800-368-3202 (Navy); 1-703-432-9277 (Marine Corps); 1-210-565-3310 or 2410 (Air Force); and 1-202-267-1648 (Coast Guard).

Family Service Members' Group Life Insurance (FSGLI)

FSGLI provides up to \$100,000 of life insurance coverage for spouses, not to exceed the amount of SGLI the insured member has in force. FSGLI is a service members' benefit, and the member pays the premium and is the beneficiary of the policy. If a service member drops his or her SGLI coverage, leaves the military or divorces the spouse, the spouse's policy can be converted to a private life insurance policy within 120 days of the date SGLI coverage ended or the date of divorce.

Veterans' Group Life Insurance

SGLI may be converted to Veterans' Group Life Insurance (VGLI), which provides renewable term coverage to:

1. Veterans with full-time SGLI coverage upon release from active duty or the reserves.
2. Veterans with part-time SGLI coverage who incur a disability or aggravate a pre-existing disability during a reserve period that renders them uninsurable at standard premium rates.
3. Members of the Individual Ready Reserve and Inactive National Guard.

SGLI can be converted to VGLI up to the amount of coverage the service member had when separated from service. Veterans who submit an application and the initial premium within 120 days of leaving the service will be covered regardless of their health. After 120 days, veterans can still convert to VGLI if they submit an application, pay the initial premium, and show evidence of insurability within one year of termination of SGLI coverage.

Service members who are totally disabled at the time of separation are eligible for free SGLI Disability Extension of up to two years. Those covered under the SGLI Disability Extension are automatically converted to VGLI at the end of their extension period. VGLI is convertible at any time to a permanent plan policy with any participating commercial insurance company.

Accelerated Death Benefits

SGLI, FSGLI and VGLI policyholders who are terminally ill (prognosis of nine months or less to live) can receive up to 50 percent of their coverage amount in advance. This option may be requested one time only.

Service-Disabled Veterans' Insurance

A veteran who was discharged under other than dishonorable conditions and who has a service-connected disability but is otherwise in good health may apply to VA for up to \$10,000 in life insurance coverage under the Service-Disabled Veterans' Insurance (S-DVI) program. Applications must be submitted within two years from the date of being notified of the approval of a new service-connected disability by VA. This insurance is limited to veterans who left service on or after April 25, 1951.

Veterans who are totally disabled may apply for a waiver of premiums and additional supplemental coverage of up to \$20,000. However, premiums cannot be waived on the additional insurance. To be eligible for this type of supplemental insurance, veterans must meet all of the following four requirements:

1. Be under age 65.
2. Meet the requirements for total disability.

3. Have an S-DVI policy with premiums waived due to total disability.
4. Apply for additional insurance within one year from the date of notification of waiver approval on the S-DVI policy.

Veterans' Mortgage Life Insurance

Veterans' Mortgage Life Insurance (VMLI) is available to severely disabled veterans who have been approved for a Specially Adapted Housing Grant. Maximum coverage is \$90,000, and is only payable to the mortgage company. Protection is issued automatically, provided the veteran submits information required to establish a premium and does not decline coverage. Coverage automatically terminates when the mortgage is paid off.

If a mortgage is disposed of through sale of the property, VMLI may be obtained on the mortgage of another home.

Insurance Dividends

World War I, World War II, and Korean-era veterans with active policies beginning with the letters V, RS, W, J, JR, JS, or K are issued tax-free dividends annually on the policy anniversary date. Policyholders do not need to apply for dividends, but may select from among the following dividend options:

1. Cash: The dividend is paid directly to the insured either by a mailed check or by direct deposit.
2. Paid-Up Additional Insurance: The dividend is used to purchase additional insurance coverage.
3. Credit or Deposit: The dividend is held in an account for the policyholder with interest. Withdrawals from the account can be made at any time. The interest rate may be adjusted each year.
4. Net Premium Billing Options: These options use the dividend to pay the annual policy premium. If the dividend exceeds the premium, the policyholder has options to choose how the remainder is used. If the dividend is not enough to pay an annual premium, the policyholder is billed for the balance.
5. Dividend Options: Dividends can also be used to repay a loan or pay premiums in advance, be left on-account as a deposit earning interest, or paid to a bank account.

Other Insurance Information

The following information applies to policies issued to World War II, Korean, and Vietnam-era veterans and any Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance policies. Policies in this group are prefixed by the letters K, V, RS, W-J, JR, JS, or RH.

Reinstating Lapsed Insurance: Lapsed term policies may be reinstated within five years from the date of lapse. A five-year term policy that is not lapsed at the end of the term is automatically renewed for an additional five years. Lapsed permanent plans may be reinstated within certain time limits and with certain health requirements. Reinstated permanent plan policies require repayment of all back premiums, plus interest.

Converting Term Policies: Term policies are renewed automatically every five years, with premiums increasing at each renewal. Premiums do not increase after age 70. Term policies may be converted to permanent plans, which have fixed premiums for life and earn cash and loan values.

Paid-up Insurance Available on Term Policies: Effective September 2000, VA provides paid-up insurance on term policies whose premiums have been capped. Veterans who have National Service Life Insurance (NSLI) term insurance (renewal age 71 or older) and stop paying premiums on their policies will be given a termination dividend. This dividend will be used to purchase a reduced amount of paid-up insurance, which insures the veteran for life and no premium payments are required. The amount of insurance remains level. This does not apply to S-DVI (RH) policies.

Disability Provisions: National Service Life Insurance (NSLI) policyholders who become totally disabled before age 65 should ask VA about premium waivers.

Borrowing on Policies: Policyholders with permanent plan policies may borrow up to 94 percent of the cash surrender value of their insurance. Interest is compounded annually. The loan interest rate is variable and may be obtained by calling toll-free 1-800-669-8477.

Burial and Memorial Benefits

Eligibility

Veterans discharged from active duty under conditions other than dishonorable and service members who die while on active duty, as well as spouses and dependent children of veterans and active duty service members, may be eligible for VA burial and memorial benefits. The veteran does not have to pre-decease a spouse or dependent child for them to be eligible.

With certain exceptions, active duty service beginning after Sept. 7, 1980, as an enlisted person, and after Oct. 16, 1981, as an officer, must be for a minimum of 24 consecutive months or the full period of active duty (as in the case of reservists or National Guard members called to active duty for a limited duration). Eligibility is not established by active duty for training in the reserves or National Guard.

Reservists and National Guard members, as well as their spouses and dependent children, are eligible if they were entitled to retired pay at the time of death, or would have been if they were over age 60.

VA national cemetery directors verify eligibility for burial in their cemeteries. A copy of the veteran's discharge document that specifies the period(s) of active duty and character of discharge, along with the deceased's death certificate and proof of relationship to the veteran (for eligible family members) are all that are usually needed to determine eligibility.

This chapter contains information on the full range of VA burial and memorial benefits. Readers with questions should contact the nearest national cemetery, listed by state in the VA Facilities section of this book, call 1-800-827-1000, or visit the Web site at <http://www.cem.va.gov/>.

VA National Cemeteries

Burial in a VA national cemetery is available for eligible veterans, their spouses and dependents at no cost to the family and includes the gravesite, grave-liner, opening and closing of the grave, a headstone or marker, and perpetual care as part of a national shrine. For veterans, benefits also include a burial flag (with case for active duty) and military funeral honors. Family members and other loved ones of deceased veterans may request Presidential Memorial Certificates.

VA operates 124 national cemeteries, of which 84 are open for new interments and 20 of these accept only cremated remains. Burial options are limited to those available at a specific cemetery but may include in-ground casket, or interment of cremated remains in a columbarium, in ground or in a scatter garden. Contact the nearest national cemetery to determine if it is open for new burials and which options are available.

Seven new national cemeteries are scheduled to open in the next few years near the cities of Bakersfield, Calif.; Birmingham, Ala.; Greenville, S.C.; Jacksonville, Fla.; Philadelphia, Pa.; Sarasota, Fla.; and West Palm Beach, Fla.

The funeral director or the next of kin makes interment arrangements by contacting the national cemetery in which burial is desired. VA normally does not conduct burials on weekends. Gravesites cannot be reserved; however VA will honor reservations made under previous programs.

Surviving spouses of veterans who died on or after Jan. 1, 2000, do not lose eligibility for burial in a national cemetery if they remarry. Burial of dependent children is limited to unmarried children under 21 years of age, or under 23 years of age if a full-time student at an approved educational institution. Unmarried adult children who become physically or

mentally disabled and incapable of self-support before age 21, or age 23 if a full-time student, are also eligible for burial.

Headstones and Markers

Veterans, active duty service members, retired reservists, and National Guard service members are eligible for an inscribed headstone or marker to mark their grave at any cemetery -- national, state veterans, or private. The headstone or marker will be delivered at no cost, anywhere in the world. Spouses and dependent children are eligible for a government headstone or marker only if they are buried in a national or state veterans' cemetery.

Flat markers are available in bronze, granite or marble. Upright headstones come in granite or marble. In national cemeteries, the style chosen must be consistent with existing monuments at the place of burial. Niche markers are available to mark columbaria used for inurnment of cremated remains.

Headstones and markers previously provided by the government may be replaced at the government's expense if badly deteriorated, illegible, vandalized or stolen. To check the status of an application for a headstone or marker for a national or state veterans' cemetery, call the cemetery. To check the status of one being placed in a private cemetery, call 1-800-697-6947.

Inscription: Headstones and markers must be inscribed with the name of the deceased, branch of service, and year of birth and death. They also may be inscribed with other markings, including an authorized emblem of belief and, space permitting, additional text including military rank; war service such as "World War II;" complete dates of birth and death; military awards; military organizations; civilian or veteran affiliations; and words of endearment.

Private Cemeteries: To apply for a headstone or marker for a private cemetery, mail a completed VA Form 40-1330 (available at <http://www.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA40-1330.pdf>), Application for Standard Government Headstone or Marker for Installation in a Private Cemetery or a State Veterans' Cemetery, and a copy of the veteran's military discharge document and death certificate to Memorial Programs Service (41A1), Department of Veterans Affairs, 5109 Russell Rd., Quantico, VA 22134-3903. Or fax documents to 1-800-455-7143.

For veteran deaths occurring on or after Sept. 11, 2001, VA will provide a government headstone or marker even if the grave is already marked with a private one. Before ordering, check with the cemetery to ensure that the additional headstone or marker will be accepted. Any placement fee will not be reimbursed by VA.

"In Memory Of" Markers: VA provides memorial headstones and markers, bearing the inscription "In Memory Of" as the first line, to memorialize those whose remains were not recovered or identified, were buried at sea, donated to science or cremated and scattered. Eligibility is the same for regular headstones and markers. There is no fee when the "In Memory Of" marker is placed in a national cemetery. Any fees associated with placement in another cemetery will not be reimbursed by VA.

Presidential Memorial Certificates

Certificates are issued upon request to recognize the military service of honorably discharged deceased veterans. Next of kin, relatives and friends may request them in person at any VA regional office or by mail: Presidential Memorial Certificates (41A1C), Department of Veterans Affairs, 5109 Russell Rd., Quantico, VA 22143-3903. Or fax documents to 202-565-8054.

No form is required and there is no time limit for requesting a certificate(s), but requests should include a copy of the veteran's discharge document and death certificate and clearly indicate to what address the certificate(s) should be sent. Information and a sample certificate can be found at <http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/pmc.asp>.

Burial Flags

VA will furnish a U.S. burial flag for memorialization of:

1. Veterans who served during wartime or after Jan. 31, 1955.
2. Veterans who were entitled to retired pay for service in the reserves, or would have been entitled if over age 60.
3. Members or former members of the Selected Reserve who served their initial obligation, or were discharged for a disability incurred or aggravated in line of duty, or died while a member of the Selected Reserve.

Reimbursement of Burial Expenses

VA will pay a burial allowance up to \$2,000 if the veteran's death is service-connected. In such cases, the person who bore the veteran's burial expenses may claim reimbursement from VA.

In some cases, VA will pay the cost of transporting the remains of a service-connected veteran to the nearest national cemetery with available gravesites. There is no time limit for filing reimbursement claims in service-connected death cases.

Burial Allowance: VA will pay a \$300 burial and funeral allowance for veterans who, at time of death, were entitled to receive pension or compensation or would have been entitled if they weren't receiving military retirement pay. Eligibility also may be established when death occurs in a VA facility, a VA-contracted nursing home or a state veterans nursing home. In non service-connected death cases, claims must be filed within two years after burial or cremation.

Plot Allowance: VA will pay a \$300 plot allowance when a veteran is buried in a cemetery not under U.S. government jurisdiction if: the veteran was discharged from active duty because of disability incurred or aggravated in the line of duty; the veteran was receiving compensation or pension or would have been if they weren't receiving military retired pay; or they died in a VA facility.

The \$300 plot allowance may be paid to the state for the cost of a plot or interment in a state-owned cemetery reserved solely for veteran burials if the veteran is buried without charge. Burial expenses paid by the deceased's employer or a state agency will not be reimbursed.

Military Funeral Honors

Upon request, DOD will provide military funeral honors consisting of folding and presentation of the United States flag and the playing of "Taps." A funeral honors detail consists of two or more uniformed members of the armed forces, with at least one member from the deceased's branch of service.

Family members should inform their funeral directors if they want military funeral honors. DOD maintains a toll-free number (1-877-MIL-HONR) for use by funeral directors only to request honors. VA can help arrange honors for burials at VA national cemeteries. Veterans' service organizations or volunteer groups may help provide honors. For more information, visit <http://www.militaryfuneralhonors.osd.mil/>.

Veterans Cemeteries Administered by Other Agencies

Arlington National Cemetery: Administered by the Department of the Army. Eligibility is more restrictive than at VA national cemeteries. For information, call (703) 607-8000, write Superintendent, Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, VA 22211, or visit <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.org/>.

State Veterans Cemeteries: Sixty-three state veterans' cemeteries offer burial options for veterans and their families. These cemeteries have similar eligibility requirements but usually require some residence. Some services, particularly

for family members, may require a fee. Contact the state cemetery or state veterans affairs office for information. To locate a state veterans' cemetery, visit <http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/scg/lsvc.asp>.

Department of the Interior: Administers two active national cemeteries: Andersonville National Cemetery in Georgia and Andrew Johnson National Cemetery in Tennessee. Eligibility is similar to VA cemeteries.

Reserve and National Guard

Eligibility

Reservists who served on active duty establish veteran status and may be eligible for the full-range of VA benefits, depending on the length of active military service and a discharge or release from active duty under conditions other than dishonorable. In addition, reservists not activated may qualify for some VA benefits.

National Guard members can establish eligibility for VA benefits if activated for federal service during a period of war or domestic emergency. Activation for other than federal service does not qualify guard members for all VA benefits. Claims for VA benefits based on federal service filed by members of the National Guard should include a copy of the military orders, presidential proclamation or executive order that clearly demonstrates the federal nature of the service.

Health Care

Reservists and National Guard members activated for federal service can qualify for VA health care, but generally must be enrolled to receive services. See Chapter 1, “VA Health Care,” for details on enrollment and services. Reservists and National Guard members who served on active duty in a theater of combat operations during a period of war after the Gulf War, or in combat against a hostile force after Nov. 11, 1998, are eligible for enrollment in Priority Group 6 unless otherwise eligible for enrollment in a higher priority group and free health care services for conditions potentially related to combat service for two years following separation from active duty. For information, call 1-877-222-VETS (8387).

Disability Benefits

VA pays monthly compensation benefits for service-connected disabilities – those incurred or aggravated during active duty and active duty for training, and for residuals of heart attack or stroke that occurred during inactive duty for training. For additional information see Chapter 2, “Veterans with Service-Connected Disabilities.”

Montgomery GI Bill – Selected Reserve

Members of reserve elements of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard, and members of the Army National Guard and the Air National Guard, may be entitled to up to 36 months of educational benefits under the Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) – Selected Reserve. To be eligible, the participant must:

1. Have a six-year obligation in the Selected Reserve or National Guard signed after June 30, 1985, or, if an officer, agree to serve six years in addition to the original obligation.
2. Complete initial active duty for training.
3. Have a high school diploma or equivalency certificate before applying for benefits.
4. Remain in good standing in a Selected Reserve or National Guard unit.
- 5.

Reserve components determine eligibility for benefits. VA does not make decisions about eligibility and cannot make payments until the reserve component has determined eligibility and notified VA.

Period of Eligibility: Benefits generally end the day a reservist or National Guard member separates from military service. However, if you leave the Selected Reserve, you may still be eligible for a full 10 years from the date you became eligible (if you became eligible before Oct. 1, 1992), or a full 14 years from the date you became eligible on or after Oct. 1, 1992. You may be eligible if you were separated because you had a disability that was not caused by misconduct, your unit was inactivated, or you were otherwise involuntarily separated during the period from Oct. 1, 1991, through Dec. 31, 2001.

If you stayed in the Selected Reserve, VA can generally extend your eligibility period if you were called up to active duty. In this case, VA will extend your eligibility by the period of your active duty service plus four months.

Payments: The rate for full-time training effective Oct. 1, 2007, is \$317 a month for 36 months. Part-time benefits are reduced proportionately. For complete current rates, visit <http://www.gibill.va.gov/>. DOD may make additional contributions.

Training: Participants may take undergraduate or technical training at colleges and universities. Those who have a six-year commitment beginning after Sept. 30, 1990, may also take the following training: graduate courses; State licensure and certification; courses for a certificate or diploma from business, technical or vocational schools; cooperative training; apprenticeship or on-the-job training; correspondence courses; independent study programs; flight training; entrepreneurship training; or remedial, deficiency or refresher courses needed to complete a program of study.

Work-Study: Participants may be eligible for a work-study program in which they work for VA and receive hourly wages. Veterans must train at the three-quarter or full-time rate. The work allowed includes:

1. Outreach services for VA.
2. VA paperwork.
3. Work at national or state veterans' cemeteries.
4. Work at VA medical centers or state veterans homes.
5. Other VA approved activities.

Counseling: VA counseling is available to help determine educational or vocational strengths and weaknesses and plan education or employment goals. Additionally, those ineligible for MGIB may still receive VA counseling beginning 180 days prior to separation from active duty through the first full year following honorable discharge.

Reserve Educational Assistance Program

This program provides educational assistance to members of National Guard and reserve components – Selected Reserve and Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) – who are called or ordered to active duty service in response to a war or national emergency as declared by the president or Congress. Visit www.gibill.va.gov/ for more information.

Eligibility: Eligibility is determined by DOD or the Department of Homeland Security. Generally, a service member who serves on active duty on or after Sept. 11, 2001, for at least 90 consecutive days is eligible.

Payments: The educational payment rate is based on the number of continuous days of active duty service performed by the Reservist or National Guard service member. Full-time students receive payments on a monthly basis.

2007 Reserve Educational Assistance Program Educational Payment Rates*

| Length of Service | Monthly Payment for Full-Time Students |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| 90 days but less than one year | \$440.40 |
| One year but less than two years | \$660.60 |
| Two or more continuous years | \$880.80 |

**As of October 1, 2007*

Training: Approved training includes graduate and undergraduate degrees, vocational/technical training, on-the-job or apprenticeship training, correspondence training, and flight training. Licensure and certification test reimbursement is effective Jan. 6, 2006.

Period of Eligibility: Members of the Selected Reserve called to active duty are eligible as long as they continue to serve in the Selected Reserve. They lose eligibility if they go into the IRR. Members of the IRR called to active duty are eligible as long as they stay in the IRR or the Selected Reserve.

Members who are separated from the IRR or the Selected Reserve for a disability, which was not the result of willful misconduct, are entitled to benefits for 10 years after the date of eligibility.

Home Loan Guaranty

National Guard members and reservists are eligible for a VA home loan if they have completed at least six years of honorable service, are mobilized for active duty service for a period of at least 90 days, or were discharged because of a service-connected disability.

Reservists who do not qualify for VA housing loan benefits may be eligible for loans on favorable terms insured by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), part of HUD. Additional information can be found in Chapter 5 -- “Home Loan Guaranty” – of this publication.

Life Insurance

National Guard members and reservists are eligible to receive Service members’ Group Life Insurance, Veterans’ Group Life Insurance, and Family Service members’ Group Life Insurance. They may also be eligible for Traumatic Service members’ Group Life Insurance or Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance if called to active duty and injured with a service-connected disability, and Veterans’ Mortgage Life Insurance if approved for a Specially Adapted Housing Grant. Complete details can be found in Chapter 6 -- “VA Life Insurance” – of this publication.

Burial and Memorial Benefits

VA provides a burial flag for memorialization of members or former members of the Selected Reserve who served their initial obligation, or were discharged for a disability incurred or aggravated in line of duty, or died while a member of the Selected Reserve. Information on benefits and eligibility can be found in Chapter 7 -- “Burial and Memorial Benefits” – of this publication.

Re-employment Rights

A person who left a civilian job to enter active duty in the armed forces is entitled to return to the job after discharge or release from active duty if they:

1. Gave advance notice of military service to the employer.
2. Did not exceed five years cumulative absence from the civilian job (with some exceptions).
3. Submitted a timely application for re-employment.
4. Did not receive a dishonorable or other punitive discharge.

The law calls for a returning veteran to be placed in the job as if they had never left, including benefits based on seniority such as pensions, pay increases and promotions. The law also prohibits discrimination in hiring, promotion or other advantages of employment on the basis of military service.

Veterans seeking re-employment should apply, verbally or in writing, to the company’s hiring official and keep a record of their application. If problems arise, contact the Department of Labor’s Veterans’ Employment and Training Service (VETS) in the state of the employer.

Federal employees not properly re-employed may appeal directly to the Merit Systems Protection Board. Non-federal employees may file complaints in U.S. District Court. For information, visit:

<http://www.dol.gov/vets/programs/userra/main.htm>

Special Groups of Veterans

Women Veterans

Women veterans are eligible for the same VA benefits as male veterans, but can also receive additional gender-specific services, including breast and pelvic examinations and other reproductive health care services.

VA provides preventive health care counseling, contraceptive services, menopause management, Pap smears and mammography. Referrals are made for services that VA is unable to provide. Women Veterans' Program Managers are available in a private setting at all VA facilities to help women veterans seeking treatment and benefits. For information, visit <http://www.va.gov/womenvet/>.

VA health care professionals provide counseling and treatment to help veterans overcome psychological issues resulting from sexual trauma that occurred while serving on active duty, or active duty for training if service was in the National Guard or reserves. Veterans who are not otherwise eligible for VA health care may still receive these services and do not need to enroll. Appropriate services are provided for any injury, illness or psychological condition resulting from such trauma.

Homeless Veterans

VA provides comprehensive medical, psychological and rehabilitation treatment for eligible homeless veterans and conducts homeless outreach such as community-based “stand downs” to help homeless veterans. Many VA benefits, including disability compensation, pension and education can help at-risk veterans avoid homelessness.

Other programs for homeless veterans include residential rehabilitation services at VA domiciliaries, therapeutic group homes, special day centers, and comprehensive homeless centers. For assistance, contact the nearest VA medical facility or visit <http://www.va.gov/homeless/> to find contact information on VA homeless veteran coordinators in each state.

VA also provides grant and per diem funds to community agencies providing services to homeless veterans. The grant program pays up to 65 percent of the cost of construction, renovation, or acquisition of a building for use as service centers or transitional housing for homeless veterans, or for the purchase of vans for the transportation of homeless veterans. The per diem provides funding for operational costs. Call toll-free 1-877-332-0334 or visit <http://www.va.gov/home-less/>.

The Department of Labor provides employment and training services, as well as grants to community organizations that provide counseling, job search and placement assistance, remedial education and on-the-job training for homeless veterans. For information, call 202-693-4700 or visit <http://www.dol.gov/vets/welcome.html>.

World War II Era Filipino Veterans

World War II era Filipino veterans are eligible for certain VA benefits. Generally, Old Philippine Scouts are eligible for VA benefits in the same manner as U.S. veterans. Commonwealth Army veterans, including certain organized Filipino guerrilla forces and New Philippine Scouts residing in the United States who are citizens or lawfully admitted for permanent residence, are also eligible for VA health care in the United States on the same basis as U.S. veterans.

Certain Commonwealth Army veterans and new Philippine Scouts may be eligible for disability compensation and burial benefits. Other veterans of recognized guerrilla groups also may be eligible for certain VA benefits. Survivors of World War II era Filipino veterans may be eligible for dependency and indemnity compensation. Eligibility and the

rates of benefits vary based on the recipient's citizenship and place of residence. Call 1-800-827-1000 for additional information.

Veterans Living or Traveling Overseas

VA will pay for medical services to treat service-connected disabilities and related conditions or for medical services needed as part of a vocational rehabilitation program for veterans living or traveling outside the United States. Veterans living in the Philippines should register with the U.S. Veterans Affairs office in Pasay City, telephone 011-632-833-4566. All other veterans living or planning to travel outside the U.S. should register with the Denver Foreign Medical Program office, P.O. Box 65021, Denver, CO 80206-9021, USA; telephone 303-331-7590. More information about the Foreign Medical Program is available on the program Web site at <http://www.va.gov/hac/forbeneficiaries/fmp/fmp.asp>.

Some veterans traveling or living overseas can telephone the Foreign Medical Program toll free from these countries: Germany 0800-1800-011; Australia 1800-354-965; Italy 800-782-655; United Kingdom (England and Scotland) 0800-032-7425; Mexico 001-877-345-8179; Japan 00531-13-0871; Costa Rica 0800-013-0759; and Spain 900-981-776. (Note: Veterans in Mexico or Costa Rica must first dial the United States country code.)

VA monetary benefits, including disability compensation, pension, educational benefits, and burial allowances, generally are payable overseas. Some programs are restricted. Home loan guaranties are available only in the United States and selected U.S. territories and possessions. Educational benefits are limited to approved, degree-granting programs in institutions of higher learning.

Beneficiaries living in foreign countries should contact the nearest American embassy or consulate for help. In Canada, contact an office of Veterans Affairs Canada. For information, visit <http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/foreign/index.htm>.

World War II Era Merchant Marine Seamen

Certain Merchant Marine seamen who served in World War II may qualify for veterans' benefits. When applying for medical care, seamen must present their discharge certificate from the Department of Defense. Call 1-800-827-1000 for help obtaining a certificate.

Allied Veterans Who Served During WWI or WWII

VA may provide medical care to certain veterans of nations allied or associated with the United States during World War I or World War II if authorized and reimbursed by the foreign government. VA also may provide hospitalization, outpatient care, and domiciliary care to former members of the armed forces of Czechoslovakia or Poland who fought in World War I or World War II in armed conflict against an enemy of the United States if they have been U.S. citizens for at least 10 years.

World War Service

A number of groups who provided military-related service to the United States can receive VA benefits. A discharge by the Secretary of Defense is needed to qualify. Service in the following groups has been certified as active military service for benefits purposes:

1. Women Air Force Service Pilots (WASPs).
2. World War I Signal Corps Female Telephone Operators Unit.
3. World War I Engineer Field Clerks.
4. Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC).
5. Quartermaster Corps female clerical employees serving with the American Expeditionary Forces in World War I.

6. Civilian employees of Pacific naval air bases who actively participated in defense of Wake Island during World War II.
7. Reconstruction aides and dietitians in World War I.
8. Male civilian ferry pilots.
9. Wake Island defenders from Guam.
10. Civilian personnel assigned to OSS secret intelligence.
11. Guam Combat Patrol.
12. Quartermaster Corps members of the Keswick crew on Corregidor during World War II.
13. U.S. civilians who participated in the defense of Bataan.
14. U.S. merchant seamen who served on block ships in support of Operation Mulberry in the World War II invasion of Normandy.
15. American merchant marines in oceangoing service during World War II.
16. Civilian Navy IFF radar technicians who served in combat areas of the Pacific during World War II.
17. U.S. civilians of the American Field Service who served overseas in World War I.
18. U.S. civilians of the American Field Service who served overseas under U.S. armies and U.S. army groups in World War II.
19. U.S. civilian employees of American Airlines who served overseas in a contract with the Air Transport Command between Dec. 14, 1941 and Aug. 14, 1945.
20. Civilian crewmen of U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey vessels who served in areas of immediate military hazard while conducting cooperative operations with and for the U.S. armed forces between Dec. 7, 1941, and Aug. 15, 1945. Qualifying vessels are: the Derickson, Explorer, Gilber, Hilgard, E. Lester Jones, Lydonia Patton, Surveyor, Wainwright, Westdahl, Oceanographer, Hydrographer and Pathfinder.
21. Members of the American Volunteer Group (Flying Tigers) who served between Dec. 7, 1941, and July 18, 1942.
22. U.S. civilian flight crew and aviation ground support employees of United Air Lines who served overseas in a contract with Air Transport Command between Dec. 14, 1941, and Aug. 14, 1945.
23. U.S. civilian flight crew, including pursers, and aviation ground support employees of Transcontinental and Western Air, Inc. (TWA), who served overseas in a contract with the Air Transport Command between Dec. 14, 1941, and Aug. 14, 1945.
24. U.S. civilian flight crew and aviation ground support employees of Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corp. who served overseas in a contract with Air Transport Command between Dec. 14, 1941, and Aug. 14, 1945.
25. U.S. civilian flight crew and aviation ground support employees of Pan American World Airways and its subsidiaries and affiliates, who served overseas in a contract with the Air Transport Command and Naval Air Transport Service between Dec. 14, 1941, and Aug. 14, 1945.
26. Honorably discharged members of the American Volunteer Guard, Eritrea Service Command, between June 21, 1942, and March 31, 1943.
27. U.S. civilian flight crew and aviation ground support employees of Northwest Airlines who served overseas under the airline's contract with Air Transport Command from Dec. 14, 1941, through Aug. 14, 1945.
28. U.S. civilian female employees of the U.S. Army Nurse Corps who served in the defense of Bataan and Corregidor during the period Jan. 2, 1942, to Feb. 3, 1945.
29. U.S. flight crew and aviation ground support employees of Northeast Airlines Atlantic Division, who served overseas as a result of Northeast Airlines' contract with the Air Transport Command during the period Dec. 7, 1941, through Aug. 14, 1945.
30. U.S. civilian flight crew and aviation ground support employees of Braniff Airways, who served overseas in the North Atlantic or under the jurisdiction of the North Atlantic Wing, Air Transport Command, as a result of a contract with the Air Transport Command during the period Feb. 26, 1942, through Aug. 14, 1945.
31. Chamorro and Carolina former native police who received military training in the Donnal area of central Saipan and were placed under command of Lt. Casino of the 6th Provisional Military Police Battalion to accompany U.S. Marines on active, combat patrol from Aug. 19, 1945, to Sept. 2, 1945.
32. The operational Analysis Group of the Office of Scientific Research and Development, Office of Emergency Management, which served overseas with the U.S. Army Air Corps from Dec. 7, 1941, through Aug. 15, 1945.
33. Service as a member of the Alaska Territorial Guard during World War II of any individual who was honorably discharged under section 8147 of the Department of Defense Appropriations Act of 2001.

Incarcerated Veterans

VA benefits are affected if a beneficiary is convicted of a felony and imprisoned for more than 60 days.

Disability or Death Pension paid to an incarcerated beneficiary must be discontinued. Disability compensation paid to an incarcerated veteran rated 20 percent or more disabled is limited to the 10 percent rate. For a surviving spouse, child or dependent parent receiving Dependency and Indemnity Compensation, or a veteran whose disability rating is 10 percent, the payment is reduced to half of the rate payable to a veteran evaluated as 10 percent disabled.

Any amounts not paid may be apportioned to eligible dependents. Payments are not reduced for participants in work-release programs, residing in halfway houses or under community control.

Failure to notify VA of a veteran's incarceration can result in overpayment of benefits and the subsequent loss of all VA financial benefits until the overpayment is recovered. VA benefits will not be provided to any veteran or dependent wanted for an outstanding felony warrant. Persons convicted of a federal or state capital crime are barred from receiving VA burial benefits.

Transition Assistance

VA Seamless Transition

VA has stationed personnel at major military hospitals to help seriously injured service members returning from OEF and OIF as they transition from military to civilian life. OEF/OIF service members who have questions about VA benefits or need assistance in filing a VA claim or accessing services can contact the nearest VA office or call 1-800-827-1000.

Transition Assistance Program

The Transition Assistance Program (TAP) consists of comprehensive three-day workshops at military installations designed to help service members as they transition from military to civilian life. The program includes job search, employment and training information, as well as VA benefits information, to service members who are within 12 months of separation or 24 months of retirement.

A companion workshop, the Disabled Transition Assistance Program, provides information on VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program, as well as other programs for the disabled.

Additional information about these programs is available at http://www.dol.gov/vets/programs/tap/tap_fs.htm.

Pre-separation Counseling

Service members may receive pre-separation counseling 24 months prior to retirement or 12 months prior to separation from active duty. These sessions present information on education, training, employment assistance, National Guard and reserve programs, medical benefits and financial assistance.

Verification of Military Experience and Training

The Verification of Military Experience and Training (VMET) Document, DD Form 2586, helps service members verify previous experience and training to potential employers, negotiate credits at schools and obtain certificates or licenses. VMET documents are available only through Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps Transition Support offices and are intended for service members who have at least six months of active service. Service members should obtain VMET documents from their Transition Support office within 12 months of separation or 24 months of retirement.

Transition Bulletin Board (TBB)

To find business opportunities, a calendar of transition seminars, job fairs, information on veterans associations, transition services, training and education opportunities, as well as other announcements, visit the Web site at <http://www.dmdc.osd.mil/ot/>.

DoD Transportal

To find locations and phone numbers of all Transition Assistance Offices as well as mini-courses on conducting successful job search campaigns, writing resumes, using the Internet to find a job, and links to job search and recruiting Web sites, visit the DOD Transportal at <http://www.dodtransportal.org/>.

Educational and Vocational Counseling Services Provide Direction to Veterans

The Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) program provides educational and vocational counseling to service members, veterans, and certain dependents (U.S.C. Title 38, Section 3697). These counseling services are designed to help an individual choose a vocational direction, determine the course needed to achieve the chosen goal, and evaluate the career possibilities open to them.

Assistance may include interest and aptitude testing, occupational exploration, setting occupational goals, locating the right type of training program, and exploring educational or training facilities which can be utilized to achieve an occupational goal. Counseling services include, but are not limited to, educational and vocational counseling and guidance; testing; analysis of and recommendations to improve job marketing skills; identification of employment, training, and financial aid resources; and referrals to other agencies providing these services.

Eligibility for this service is based on having eligibility for a VA program such as Chapter 30 (Montgomery GI Bill); Chapter 31 (Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment); Chapter 32 (Veterans Education Assistance Program – VEAP); Chapter 35 (Dependents Education Assistance Program) for certain spouses and dependent children; Chapter 18 (Spina Bifida Program) for certain dependent children; and Chapter 106 and 107 of Title 10.

Educational and vocational counseling is available during the period the individual is on active duty with the armed forces and is within 180 days of the estimated date of his or her discharge or release from active duty. The projected discharge must be under conditions other than dishonorable. Service members are eligible even if they are only considering whether or not they will continue as members of the armed forces. Veterans are eligible if not more than one year has elapsed since the date the individual was last discharged or released from active duty.

Veterans and service members may apply for the counseling services using VA Form 28-8832, Application for Counseling. Veterans and service members may also write a letter expressing a desire for counseling services. Upon receipt of either type of request for counseling from an eligible individual, the VR&E Division will schedule an appointment for counseling.

Counseling services are provided to eligible persons at no charge.

Veterans' Workforce Investment Program

Recently separated veterans and those with service-connected disabilities, significant barriers to employment or who served on active duty during a period in which a campaign or expedition badge was authorized can contact the nearest state employment office for employment help through the Veterans' Workforce Investment Program. The program may be conducted through state or local public agencies, community organizations or private, nonprofit organizations.

State Employment Services

Veterans can find employment information, education and training opportunities, job counseling, job search workshops, and resume preparation assistance at state Workforce Career or One-Stop Centers. These offices also have specialists to help disabled veterans find employment.

Unemployment Compensation

Veterans who do not begin civilian employment immediately after leaving military service may receive weekly unemployment compensation for a limited period of time. The amount and duration of payments are determined by individual states. Apply by contacting the nearest state employment office listed in your local telephone directory.

Federal Jobs for Veterans

Since the time of the Civil War, veterans of the U.S. armed forces have been given some degree of preference in appointments to federal jobs. Veterans' preference in its present form comes from the Veterans' Preference Act of 1944, as amended, and now codified in various provisions of Title 5, United States Code. By law, veterans who are disabled or who served on active duty in the U.S. armed forces during certain specified time periods or in military campaigns are entitled to preference over others when hiring from competitive lists of eligible candidates, and also in retention during a reduction in force (RIF).

To receive preference, a veteran must have been discharged or released from active duty in the U.S. armed forces under honorable conditions (with an honorable or general discharge). Preference is also provided for certain widows and widowers of deceased veterans who died in service; spouses of service-connected disabled veterans; and mothers of veterans who died under honorable conditions on active duty or have permanent and total service-connected disabilities. This type of preference is referred to as "derived preference" because it is based on service of a veteran who is not able to use the preference. For each of these preferences, there are specific criteria that must be met in order to be eligible to receive the veterans' preference.

Recent changes in Title 5 clarify veterans' preference eligibility criteria for National Guard and Reserve service members. Veterans eligible for preference now include National Guard and Reserve service members who served on active duty as defined by Title 38 at any time in the armed forces for a period of more than 180 consecutive days, any part of which occurred during the period beginning on Sept. 11, 2001, and ending on the date prescribed by Presidential proclamation or by law as the last date of OIF. The National Guard and Reserve service members must have been discharged or released from active duty in the armed forces under honorable conditions. These changes were effective Jan. 6, 2006.

Another recent change involves veterans who earned the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal for service in OEF. Under Title 5, service on active duty in the armed forces during a war or in a campaign or expedition for which a campaign badge has been authorized also qualifies for veterans' preference. Any Armed Forces Expeditionary medal or campaign badge qualifies for preference. Medal holders must have served continuously for 24 months or the full period called or ordered to active duty. As of December 2005, veterans who received the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal are entitled to veterans' preference if otherwise eligible. For additional information on veterans' preference, visit the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Web site at <http://opm.gov/veterans/html/vetguide.asp#2>.

Veterans' preference does not require an agency to use any particular appointment process. Agencies can pick candidates from a number of different special hiring authorities or through a variety of different sources. For example, the agency can reinstate a former federal employee, transfer someone from another agency, reassign someone from within the agency, make a selection under merit promotion procedures or through open, competitive exams, or appoint someone noncompetitively under special authority such as a Veterans Readjustment Appointment or special authority for 30 percent or more disabled veterans. The decision on which hiring authority the agency desires to use rests solely with the agency.

When applying for federal jobs, eligible veterans should claim preference on their application or resume. Veterans should apply for a federal job by contacting the personnel office at the agency in which they wish to work. For more information, visit <http://www.usajobs.opm.gov/> for job openings or help creating a federal resume.

Veterans' Employment Opportunities Act: When an agency accepts applications from outside its own workforce, the Veterans' Employment Opportunities Act (VEOA) of 1998 allows preference eligible candidates or veterans to compete for these vacancies under merit promotion procedures. Veterans who are selected are given career or career-conditional appointments. Veterans are those who have been separated under honorable conditions from the U.S. armed forces with three or more years of continuous active service. For information, visit <http://www.usajobs.opm.gov/ei52.asp>.

Veterans' Recruitment Appointment: Allows federal agencies to appoint eligible veterans to jobs without competition. These appointments can be converted to career or career-conditional positions after two years of satisfactory work. Veterans should apply directly to the agency where they wish to work. For information, visit <http://www.usajobs.opm.gov/ei4.asp>.

Starting a Business

VA's Center for Veterans Enterprise helps veterans interested in forming or expanding small businesses and helps VA contracting offices identify veteran-owned small businesses. For information, write the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (OOVE), 810 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20420-0001, call toll-free 1-866-584-2344 or visit <http://www.vetbiz.gov/>.

Small Business Contracts: Like other federal agencies, VA is required to place a portion of its contracts and purchases with small and disadvantaged businesses. VA has a special office to help small and disadvantaged businesses get information on VA acquisition opportunities. For information, write the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (OOSB), 810 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 204200001, call toll-free 1-800-949-8387 or visit <http://www.va.gov/osdbu/>.

Dependents & Survivors

Bereavement Counseling

VA Vet Centers provide bereavement counseling to all family members including spouses, children, parents and siblings of service-members who die while on active duty. This includes federally activated members of the National Guard and reserve components. Bereavement services may be accessed by calling (202) 273-9116 or e-mail vet.center@va.gov.

Death Pension

VA provides pensions to low-income surviving spouses and unmarried children of deceased veterans with wartime service.

Eligibility: To be eligible, spouses must not have remarried and children must be under age 18, or under age 23 if attending a VA-approved school, or have become permanently incapable of self-support because of disability before age 18.

The veteran must have been discharged under conditions other than dishonorable and must have had 90 days or more of active military service, at least one day of which was during a period of war, or a service-connected disability justifying discharge. Longer periods of service may be required for veterans who entered active duty on or after Sept. 8, 1980, or Oct. 16, 1981, if an officer. If the veteran died in service but not in the line of duty, the death pension may be payable if the veteran had completed at least two years of honorable service.

Children who become incapable of self-support because of a disability before age 18 may be eligible for the death pension as long as the condition exists, unless the child marries or the child's income exceeds the applicable limit.

A surviving spouse may be entitled to a higher income limit if living in a nursing home, in need of the aid and attendance of another person or is permanently housebound.

Payment: Death pension provides a monthly payment to bring an eligible person's income to a level established by law. The payment is reduced by the annual income from other sources such as Social Security. The payment may be increased if the recipient has unreimbursed medical expenses that can be deducted from countable income. The following chart lists the 2007 maximum annual rate:

| Recipient | Annual Rate |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Surviving spouse | \$7,498 |
| (With dependent child) | \$9,815 |
| Permanently housebound | \$9,164 |
| (With dependent child) | \$11,478 |
| In need of regular aid & attendance | \$11,985 |
| (With dependent child) | \$14,298 |
| For each additional dependent child | \$1,909 |
| Pension for each surviving child | \$1,909 |

Military Death Gratuity Payment

Military services provide payment, called a death gratuity, in the amount of \$12,420 to the next of kin of service members who die while on active duty or retirees who die within 120 days of retirement as a result of service-connected injury or illness. In cases where service members die as a result of hostile actions in a designated combat operation or combat zone, or while training for combat or performing hazardous duty, military services pay \$100,000 to the next of kin. Parents, brothers or sisters may be provided the payment, if designated as next of kin by the deceased. The payment is made by the last military command of the deceased. If the beneficiary is not paid automatically, application may be made to the military service concerned.

Dependency and Indemnity Compensation

Eligibility: For a survivor to be eligible for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC), the veteran’s death must have resulted from one of the following causes:

1. A disease or injury incurred or aggravated in the line of duty while on active duty or active duty for training.
2. An injury incurred or aggravated in the line of duty while on inactive duty training.
3. A service-connected disability or a condition directly related to a service-connected disability.

DIC also may be paid to survivors of veterans who were totally disabled from service-connected conditions at the time of death, even though their service-connected disabilities did not cause their deaths.

The survivor qualifies if the veteran was:

1. Continuously rated totally disabled for a period of 10 years immediately preceding death.
2. Continuously rated totally disabled from the date of military discharge and for at least five years immediately preceding death.
3. Or a former POW who died after Sept. 30, 1999, and who was continuously rated totally disabled for a period of at least one year immediately preceding death.

Payments will be offset by any amount received from judicial proceedings brought on by the veteran’s death. The discharge must have been under conditions other than dishonorable.

Payments for Deaths After Jan. 1, 1993: Surviving spouses of veterans who died on or after Jan. 1, 1993, receive a basic rate, plus additional payments for dependent children, for the aid and attendance of another person if they are patients in a nursing home or require the regular assistance of another person, or if they are permanently housebound.

The following chart lists the basic rate plus additional allowances.

| Allowances | Monthly Rate |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| Basic Rate | \$1,091 |
| Additional: | |
| Each Dependent Child | \$271 |
| Aid and Attendance | \$271 |
| Housebound | \$128 |

Special Allowances: Add \$233 if the veteran was totally disabled eight continuous years prior to death. Add \$250 to the additional allowance for dependent children for the initial two years of entitlement for DIC awards commencing on or after Jan. 1, 2005.

Payments for Deaths Prior to Jan. 1, 1993: Surviving spouses of veterans who died prior to Jan. 1, 1993, receive an amount based on the deceased’s military pay grade. The following chart lists amounts.

Pay Grade Monthly Rate

| | |
|---------|---------|
| E-1-E-6 | \$1,091 |
| E-7 | \$1,129 |
| E-8 | \$1,191 |
| E-9 | \$1,242 |
| W-1 | \$1,153 |
| W-2 | \$1,198 |
| W-3 | \$1,234 |
| W-4 | \$1,305 |
| O-1 | \$1,153 |
| O-2 | \$1,191 |
| O-3 | \$1,274 |
| O-4 | \$1,349 |
| O-5 | \$1,485 |
| O-6 | \$1,674 |
| O-7 | \$1,808 |
| O-8 | \$1,985 |
| O-9 | \$2,123 |
| O-10 | \$2,328 |

Payments to Parents: The monthly payment for parents of deceased veterans depends upon their income.

Restored Entitlement Program for Survivors: Survivors of veterans who died of service-connected causes incurred or aggravated prior to Aug. 13, 1981, may be eligible for a special benefit payable in addition to any other benefits to which the family may be entitled. The amount of the benefit is based on information provided by the Social Security Administration.

Education and Training for Qualifying Dependents

Eligibility: VA provides educational assistance to qualifying dependents as follows:

1. The spouse or child of a service member who either died of a service-connected disability, or who has permanent and total service-connected disability, or who died while such a disability existed.
2. The spouse or child of a service member listed for more than 90 days as currently Missing in Action (MIA), captured in the line of duty by a hostile force, or detained or interned by a foreign government or power.
3. The spouse or child of a service member who is hospitalized or is receiving outpatient care or treatment for a disability that is determined to be totally and permanently disabling, incurred or aggravated due to active duty, and for which the service member is likely to be discharged.

Surviving spouses lose eligibility if they remarry before age 57 or are living with another person who has been held out publicly as their spouse. They can regain eligibility if their remarriage ends by death or divorce or if they cease living with the person. Dependent children do not lose eligibility if the surviving spouse remarries. Visit www.gibill.va.gov/ for more information.

Period of Eligibility: The period of eligibility for veterans’ spouses expires 10 years from the date they become eligible or the date of the veteran’s death. VA may grant an extension. Children generally must be between the ages of 18 and 26 to receive educational benefits, though extensions may be granted.

The period of eligibility for spouses of service members who died on active duty expires 20 years from the date of death. This is a change in law that became effective Dec. 10, 2004. Spouses of service members who died on active duty whose 10-year eligibility period expired before Dec. 10, 2004, now have 20 years from the date of death to use educational benefits.

Payments: The payment rate effective Oct. 1, 2006, is \$860 a month for full-time school attendance, with lesser amounts for part time. Benefits are paid for full-time training for up to 45 months or the equivalent in part-time training.

Training Available: Benefits may be awarded for pursuit of associate, bachelor or graduate degrees at colleges and universities, independent study, cooperative training, study abroad, certificate or diploma from business, technical or vocational schools, apprenticeships, on-the-job training programs and farm cooperative courses. Benefits for correspondence courses under certain conditions are available to spouses only.

Beneficiaries without high-school degrees can pursue secondary schooling, and those with a deficiency in a subject may receive tutorial assistance if enrolled halftime or more.

Work-Study: Participants who train at the three-quarter or full-time rate may be eligible for a work-study program in which they work for VA and receive hourly wages. The types of work allowed include:

1. Outreach services.
2. VA paperwork.
3. Work at national or state veterans cemeteries.
4. Work at VA medical centers or state veterans homes.
5. Other VA approved activities.

Counseling: VA may provide counseling to help participants pursue an educational or vocational objective.

Special Benefits: Dependents over age 14 with physical or mental disabilities that impair their ability to pursue an education may receive specialized vocational or restorative training, including speech and voice correction, language retraining, lip reading, auditory training, Braille reading and writing, and similar programs. Certain disabled or surviving spouses are also eligible for vocational or restorative training.

Montgomery GI Bill Death Benefit: VA will pay a special Montgomery GI Bill death benefit to a designated survivor in the event of the service-connected death of a service member while on active duty or within one year after discharge or release.

The deceased must either have been entitled to educational assistance under the Montgomery GI Bill program or a participant in the program who would have been so entitled but for the high school diploma or length-of-service requirement. The amount paid will be equal to the participant's actual military pay reduction, less any education benefits paid.

VA Medical Care

The Civilian Health and Medical Program of VA (CHAMPVA), provides reimbursement for most medical expenses – inpatient, outpatient, mental health, prescription medication, skilled nursing care and durable medical equipment.

Eligibility: To be eligible for CHAMPVA, an individual cannot be eligible for TRICARE (the medical program for civilian dependents provided by DOD) and must be one of the following:

1. The spouse or child of a veteran who VA has rated permanently and totally disabled for a service-connected disability.
2. The surviving spouse or child of a veteran, who died from a VA-rated service-connected disability, or who, at the time of death, was rated permanently and totally disabled.

3. The surviving spouse or child of a service member who died in the line of duty, not due to misconduct. However, in most of these cases, these family members are eligible for TRICARE, not CHAMPVA.

A surviving spouse under age 55 who remarries loses CHAMPVA eligibility on midnight of the date of remarriage. However, they may re-establish eligibility if the remarriage ends by death, divorce or annulment effective the first day of the month following the termination of the remarriage or Dec. 1, 1999, whichever is later. A surviving spouse who remarries after age 55 does not lose eligibility upon remarriage.

Those with Medicare entitlement may also have CHAMPVA eligibility secondary to Medicare. Eligibility limitations apply. For additional information, contact the VA Health Administration Center, P.O. Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206, call 1-800-733-8387 or visit the Web site at <http://www.va.gov/hac/hacmain.asp>.

Many VA medical centers provide services to CHAMPVA beneficiaries under the CHAMPVA In House Treatment Initiative (CITI) program.

Contact the nearest VA medical center to determine if it participates. Those who use a CITI facility incur no cost for services; however, services are provided on a space available basis, after the needs of veterans are met. Not all services are available at all times. CHAMPVA beneficiaries covered by Medicare cannot use CITI.

Children with Birth Defects

Children of Vietnam veterans born with certain birth defects may be eligible for a monthly monetary allowance, health care specific to the disability, and vocational training if reasonably feasible.

The law defines “child” as the natural child of a Vietnam veteran, regardless of age or marital status. The child must have been conceived after the date on which the veteran first entered the Republic of Vietnam. For more information about benefits for children with birth defects, visit www.va.gov/hac/forbeneficiaries/spina/spina.asp.

Children of Vietnam or Korean Veterans Born with Spina Bifida: Biological children of male and female veterans who served in Vietnam at any time during the period beginning Jan. 9, 1962, and ending May 7, 1975, or who served in or near the Korean demilitarized zone (DMZ) during the period beginning Sept. 1, 1967, and ending Aug. 31, 1971, may be eligible for certain benefits.

A monetary allowance is paid at one of three disability levels based on the neurological manifestations that define the severity of disability: impairment of the functioning of extremities, impairment of bowel or bladder function, and impairment of intellectual functioning. Effective Dec. 1, 2007, the allowances are:

| | Level I | Level II | Level III |
|--------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Monthly Rate | \$270 | \$930 | \$1,585 |

Children of Women Vietnam Veterans Born with Certain Birth Defects: Biological children of women veterans who served in Vietnam at any time during the period beginning on Feb. 28, 1961, and ending on May 7, 1975, may be eligible for certain benefits because of birth defects associated with a mother’s service in Vietnam and that resulted in a permanent physical or mental disability. The covered birth defects do not include conditions due to family disorders, birth-related injuries, or fetal or neonatal infirmities with well-established causes.

A monetary allowance is paid at one of four disability levels based on the child’s degree of permanent disability. Effective Dec. 1, 2007, the allowances are:

| | Level I | Level II | Level III | Level IV |
|--------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Monthly Rate | \$123 | \$270 | \$930 | \$1,586 |

Vocational Training: VA provides vocational counseling, rehabilitation, education and training to help these children prepare for and attain suitable employment.

To qualify, an applicant must be a child with a VA monthly allowance for spina bifida or another covered birth defect and for whom VA has determined that achievement of a vocational goal is reasonably feasible. A child may not begin vocational training before their 18th birthday or the date they complete secondary schooling, whichever comes first. Depending on need and eligibility, a child may be provided up to 48 months of full-time training.

Home Loan Guaranty

A VA loan guaranty to acquire a home may be available to an unmarried spouse of a veteran or service member who died as a result of service-connected disabilities, a surviving spouse who remarries after age 57, or to a spouse of a service member officially listed as MIA or who is currently a POW for more than 90 days. Spouses of those listed MIA/POW are limited to one loan.

Visiting Overseas Cemeteries

“No-fee” passports are available for family members visiting graves or memorial sites at World War I and World War II overseas American military cemeteries. Eligibility is limited to surviving spouses, parents, children, sisters, brothers and guardians of the deceased who are buried or commemorated in American military cemeteries on foreign soil.

For additional information, write: American Battle Monuments Commission, Courthouse Plaza II, Suite 500, 2300 Clarendon Blvd., Arlington, VA 22201, call 703-696-6900, or visit <http://www.abmc.gov/home.php>.

Appeals of VA Claims Decisions

Veterans and other claimants for VA benefits have the right to appeal decisions made by a VA regional office or medical center. Typical issues appealed are disability compensation, pension, education benefits, recovery of overpayments, and reimbursement for unauthorized medical services.

A claimant has one year from the date of the notification of a VA decision to file an appeal. The first step in the appeal process is for a claimant to file a written notice of disagreement with the VA regional office or medical center that made the decision.

Following receipt of the written notice, VA will furnish the claimant a “Statement of the Case” describing what facts, laws and regulations were used in deciding the case. To complete the request for appeal, the claimant must file a “Substantive Appeal” within 60 days of the mailing of the Statement of the Case, or within one year from the date VA mailed its decision, whichever period ends later.

Board of Veterans’ Appeals

The Board of Veterans’ Appeals makes decisions on appeals on behalf of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Although it is not required, a veterans’ service organization, an agent or an attorney may represent a claimant. Appellants may present their cases in person to a member of the Board at a hearing in Washington, D.C., at a VA regional office or by videoconference.

Decisions made by the Board can be found on the Web site at <http://www.va.gov/vbs/bva/>. The pamphlet, “Understanding the Appeal Process,” is available on the Web site or may be requested by writing: Hearings and Transcription Unit (0141A), Board of Veterans’ Appeals, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420.

U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims

A final Board of Veterans’ Appeals decision that does not grant a claimant the benefits desired may be appealed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, an independent court, not part of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Notice of an appeal must be received by the court with a postmark that is within 120 days after the Board of Veterans’ Appeals mailed its decision. The court reviews the record considered by the Board of Veterans’ Appeals. It does not hold trials or receive new evidence.

Appellants may represent themselves before the court or have lawyers or approved agents as representatives. Oral argument is held only at the direction of the court. Either party may appeal a decision of the court to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit and may seek review in the Supreme Court of the United States.

Published decisions, case status information, rules and procedures, and other special announcements can be found on the court’s Web site at <http://www.vetapp.gov/>. The court’s decisions can also be found in West’s Veterans Appeals Reporter, and on the Westlaw and LEXIS online services. For questions, write the Clerk of the Court, 625 Indiana Ave. NW, Suite 900, Washington, DC 20004, or call (202) 501-5970.

Military Medals/Records

Replacing Military Medals

Medals awarded while in active service are issued by the individual military services if requested by veterans or their next of kin. Requests for replacement medals, decorations, and awards should be directed to the branch of the military

in which the veteran served. However, for Air Force (including Army Air Corps) and Army veterans, the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) verifies awards and forwards requests and verification to appropriate services.

Requests for replacement medals should be submitted on Standard Form 180, “Request Pertaining To Military Records,” which may be obtained at VA offices or the Internet at <http://www.va.gov/vaforms/>. Forms, addresses, and other information on requesting medals can be found on the Military Personnel Records section of NPRC’s web-site at <http://www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/index.html>. For questions, call Military Personnel Records at (314) 801-0800 or e-mail questions to: MPR.center@nara.gov.

When requesting medals, type or clearly print the veteran’s full name, include the veteran’s branch of service, service number or Social Security number and provide the veteran’s exact or approximate dates of military service. The request must contain the signature of the veteran or next of kin if the veteran is deceased. If available, include a copy of the discharge or separation document, WDAGO Form 53-55 or DD Form 214.

Replacing Military Records

If discharge or separation documents are lost, veterans or the next of kin of deceased veterans may obtain duplicate copies by completing forms found on the Internet at <http://www.archives.gov/research/in-dex.html> and mailing or faxing them to the NPRC.

Alternatively, write the National Personnel Records Center, Military Personnel Records, 9700 Page Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63132-5100. Specify that a duplicate separation document is needed. The veteran’s full name should be printed or typed so that it can be read clearly, but the request must also contain the signature of the veteran or the signature of the next of kin, if the veteran is deceased. Include the veteran’s branch of service, service number or Social Security number and exact or approximate dates and years of service. Use Standard Form 180, “Request Pertaining To Military Records.”

It is not necessary to request a duplicate copy of a veteran’s discharge or separation papers solely for the purpose of filing a claim for VA benefits. If complete information about the veteran’s service is furnished on the application, VA will obtain verification of service.

Correction of Military Records

The secretary of a military department, acting through a Board for Correction of Military Records, has authority to change any military record when necessary to correct an error or remove an injustice. A correction board may consider applications for correction of a military record, including a review of a discharge issued by courts martial.

The veteran, survivor or legal representative must file a request for correction within three years after discovering an alleged error or injustice. The board may excuse failure to file within this time, however, if it finds it would be in the interest of justice. It is an applicant’s responsibility to show why the filing of the application was delayed and why it would be in the interest of justice for the board to consider it despite the delay.

To justify a correction, it is necessary to show to the satisfaction of the board that the alleged entry or omission in the records was in error or unjust. Applications should include all available evidence, such as signed statements of witnesses or a brief of arguments supporting the correction. Application is made with DD Form 149, available at VA offices, veterans’ organizations or visit <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/di-rectives/infomgt/forms/formsprogram.htm>.

Review of Discharges

Each of the military services maintains a discharge review board with authority to change, correct or modify discharges or dismissals not issued by a sentence of a general courts-martial. The board has no authority to address medical discharges.

The veteran or, if the veteran is deceased or incompetent, the surviving spouse, next of kin or legal representative may apply for a review of discharge by writing to the military department concerned, using DD Form 293 -- “Application for the Review of Discharge from the Armed Forces of the United States.” This form may be obtained at a VA regional office, from veterans’ organizations or from the Internet at <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/infomgt/forms/formsprogram.htm>.

However, if the discharge was more than 15 years ago, a veteran must petition the appropriate service Board for Correction of Military Records using DD Form 149 -- “Application for Correction of Military Records Under the Provisions of Title 10, U.S. Code, Section 1552.” A discharge review is conducted by a review of an applicant’s record and, if requested, by a hearing before the board.

Discharges awarded as a result of a continuous period of unauthorized absence in excess of 180 days make persons ineligible for VA benefits regardless of action taken by discharge review boards, unless VA determines there were compelling circumstances for the absence. Boards for the Correction of Military Records also may consider such cases.

Veterans with disabilities incurred or aggravated during active duty may qualify for medical or related benefits regardless of separation and characterization of service. Veterans separated administratively under other than honorable conditions may request that their discharge be reviewed for possible recharacterization, provided they file their appeal within 15 years of the date of separation.

Questions regarding the review of a discharge should be addressed to the appropriate discharge review board at the address listed on DOD Form 293.

Benefits Provided by Other Federal Agencies

Loans for Farms and Homes

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides loans and guarantees to buy, improve or operate farms. Loans and guarantees are available for housing in towns generally up to 20,000 in population. Applications from veterans

have preference. For further information, contact Farm Service Agency or Rural Development, USDA, 1400 Independence Ave., S.W., Washington, DC 20250, or apply at local Department of Agriculture offices, usually located in county seats.

Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

Housing and Urban Development (HUD) sponsors the Veteran Resource Center (HUDVET), which works with national veterans service organizations to serve as a general information center on all HUD sponsored housing and community development programs and services. To contact HUDVET, call 1-800-998-9999, TDD 800-483-2209 or visit their Web site at <http://www.hud.gov/hudvet>.

Naturalization Preference

Honorable active-duty service in the U.S. armed forces during a designated period of hostility allows an individual to naturalize without being required to establish any periods of residence or physical presence in the United States. A service member who was in the United States, certain territories, or aboard an American public vessel at the time of enlistment, re-enlistment, extension of enlistment or induction, may naturalize even if he or she is not a lawful permanent resident.

On July 3, 2002, the president issued Executive Order 13269 establishing a new period of hostility for naturalization purposes beginning Sept. 11, 2001, and continuing until a date designated by a future Executive Order. Qualifying members of the armed forces who have served at any time during a specified period of hostility may immediately apply for naturalization using the current application – Form N-400 -- “Application for Naturalization.” Additional information about filing and requirement fees and designated period of hostility are available on the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Web site at www.uscis.gov.

Individuals who served honorably in the U.S. armed forces, but were no longer serving on active duty status as of Sept. 11, 2001, may still be naturalized without having to comply with the residence and physical presence requirements for naturalization if they filed Form N-400 while still serving in the U.S. armed forces or within six months of termination of their active duty service. An individual who files the application for naturalization after the six-month period following termination of active-duty service is not exempt from the residence and physical presence requirements, but can count any period of active-duty service towards the residence and physical presence requirements. Individuals seeking naturalization under this provision must establish that they are lawful permanent residents (such status not having been lost, rescinded or abandoned) and that they served honorably in the U.S. armed forces for at least one year.

If a service member dies as a result of injury or disease incurred or aggravated by service during a time of combat, the service member’s survivor(s) can apply for the deceased service member to receive posthumous citizenship at any time within two years of the service member’s death. The issuance of a posthumous certificate of citizenship does not confer U.S. citizenship on surviving relatives. However, a non-U.S. citizen spouse or qualifying family member may file for certain immigration benefits and services based upon their relationship to a service member who died during hostilities or a non-citizen service member who died during hostilities and was later granted posthumous citizenship. For additional information, visit the USCIS Web site at www.uscis.gov.

Small Business Administration

The U.S. Small Business Administration’s Office of Veterans Business Development conducts comprehensive outreach to veterans, service-disabled veterans, and Reserve Component members of the U.S. military. In addition, the office is the source for the formulation, execution, and promotion of policies and programs of the Small Business Administration (SBA) that provide assistance to veteran-owned small businesses. SBA is the primary federal agency responsible for assisting veterans who own or are considering starting small businesses.

Among the services provided are business counseling and training through five Veterans Business Outreach Centers, more than 1,000 Small Business Development Centers, nearly 400 SCORE Chapters with 11,000 volunteer counselors, 100 Women Business Centers, as well as various loan and loan guarantee programs ranging from micro loans to venture capital assistance. Veterans participate in all SBA federal procurement programs, and the SBA supports veterans and others in international trade.

A special Military Reservist Economic Injury Disaster Loan is available for self-employed Reservists whose small businesses may have been damaged through extended absences of the owner or essential employee as a result of activation of the owner or essential employee to military active duty. The SBA also conducts important research in veterans' entrepreneurship. A Veterans Business Development Officer is stationed at every SBA District Office. Information about SBA's full range of services can be found at <http://www.sba.gov/vets/> and for Reservists at www.sba.gov/reservists/, or by calling 202-205-6773 or 1-800-U-ASK-SBA (1-800-827-5722).

Social Security

Monthly retirement, disability and survivor benefits under Social Security are payable to veterans and dependents if the veteran has earned enough work credits under the program. Upon the veteran's death, a one-time payment of \$255 also may be made to the veteran's spouse or child. In addition, a veteran may qualify at age 65 for Medicare's hospital insurance and medical insurance. Medicare protection is available to people who have received Social Security disability benefits for 24 months, and to insured people and their dependents who need dialysis or kidney transplants, or who have amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (more commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease).

Since 1957, military service earnings for active duty (including active duty for training) have counted toward Social Security and those earnings are already on Social Security records. Since 1988, inactive duty service in the Reserve Component (such as weekend drills) has also been covered by Social Security. Service members and veterans are credited with \$300 credit in additional earnings for each calendar quarter in which they received active duty basic pay after 1956 and before 1978.

Veterans who served in the military from 1978 through 2001 are credited with an additional \$100 in earnings for each \$300 in active duty basic pay, up to a maximum of \$1,200 a year. No additional Social Security taxes are withheld from pay for these extra credits. If veterans enlisted after Sept. 7, 1980, and did not complete at least 24 months of active duty or their full tour of duty, they may not be able to receive the additional earnings. Check with Social Security for details. Additional earnings will no longer be credited for military service periods after 2001.

Also, noncontributory Social Security earnings of \$160 a month may be credited to veterans who served after Sept. 15, 1940, and before 1957, including attendance at service academies. For information, call 1-800-772-1213 or visit <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/>. (Note: Social Security cannot add these extra earnings to the record until an application is filed for Social Security benefits.)

Supplemental Security Income

Those age 65 or older and those who are blind or otherwise disabled may be eligible for monthly Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments if they have little or no income or resources. States may supplement the federal payments to eligible persons and may disregard additional income.

Although VA compensation and pension benefits are counted in determining income for SSI purposes, some other income is not counted. Also, not all resources count in determining eligibility. For example, a person's home and the land it is on do not count. Personal effects, household goods, automobiles and life insurance may not count, depending upon their value. Information and help is available at any Social Security office or by calling 1-800-772-1213.

Armed Forces Retirement Home

Veterans are eligible to live in the Armed Forces Retirement Home located in Washington, D.C., if their active duty military service is at least 50 percent enlisted, warrant officer or limited duty officer if they qualify under one of the following categories:

1. Are 60 years of age or older; and were discharged or released under honorable conditions after 20 or more years of active service.
2. Are determined to be incapable of earning a livelihood because of a service-connected disability incurred in the line of duty.
3. Served in a war theater during a time of war declared by Congress or were eligible for hostile fire special pay and were discharged or released under honorable conditions; and are determined to be incapable of earning a livelihood because of injuries, disease or disability.
4. Served in a women's component of the armed forces before June 12, 1948; and are determined to be eligible for admission due to compelling personal circumstances.

Eligibility determinations are based on rules prescribed by the Home's Chief Operating Officer. Veterans are not eligible if they have been convicted of a felony or are not free from alcohol, drug or psychiatric problems. Married couples are welcome, but both must be eligible in their own right. At the time of admission, applicants must be capable of living independently.

The Armed Forces Retirement Home is an independent federal agency. For information, call 1-800-332-3527 or 1-800-422-9988, or visit their Web site at <http://www.afrh.gov/>.

Commissary and Exchange Privileges

Unlimited exchange and commissary store privileges in the United States are available to honorably discharged veterans with a service-connected disability rated at 100 percent, unremarried surviving spouses of members or retired members of the armed forces, recipients of the Medal of Honor, and their dependents and orphans. Certification of total disability is done by VA. Reservists and their dependents also may be eligible. Privileges overseas are governed by international law and are available only if agreed upon by the foreign government concerned.

Though these benefits are provided by DOD, VA does provide assistance in completing DD Form 1172, "Application for Uniformed Services Identification and Privilege Card." For detailed information, contact the nearest military installation.