

Section 6: Veterans Affairs

Program Purpose

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is a federal agency established in 1930 to administer the various Veteran's benefit programs.

Benefits for Eligible Veterans

- **Disability Compensation** – Monthly tax-free payments for service-connected disabilities.
- **Pension** – Financial support for wartime veterans with limited income and assets.
- **Health Care** – Access to VA medical services, including hospital, outpatient, and specialized care.
- **Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E)** – Assistance for veterans with service-connected disabilities to prepare for, find, and maintain suitable employment.
- **Education and Training** – Programs like the GI Bill to support higher education and training.
- **Home Loan Guarantees** – VA-backed loans to purchase, build, or improve a home; includes specially adapted housing for disabled veterans.
- **Service-Disabled Life Insurance** – Life insurance for veterans with service-connected disabilities.
- **Specially Adapted Housing & Structural Alterations** – Grants for home modifications for veterans with certain service-connected disabilities.
- **Employment Assistance** – Support for finding and maintaining employment.
- **Small and Disadvantaged Business Programs** – Assistance for veteran-owned small businesses.
- **Medical and Domiciliary Care** – Long-term care services, including nursing home and residential care.
- **Homeless Veterans Programs** – Services to prevent and assist veterans experiencing homelessness.
- **Prosthetics and Sensory Aids** – Devices and equipment for service-connected conditions.
- **Automobile Assistance** – Financial aid for vehicle purchase or adaptive equipment for disabled veterans.

- **Death Benefits** – Benefits for survivors of deceased veterans, including burial and survivor compensation.

Eligibility

Veterans must have been discharged from active military service under conditions other than dishonorable. There may be length of service requirement for veterans depending on when they enlisted.

There is no time limit regarding application for enrollment.

Enrollment levels are based on eight priority groups established by Congress. The priority groups include:

Priority Group 1

- Veterans with service-connected disabilities rated 50% or more.
- Veterans with a total disability rating for compensation based on unemployability.

Priority Group 2

- Veterans with service-connected disabilities rated 30% to 40%.

Priority Group 3

- Former Prisoners of War (POWs).
- Veterans awarded the Purple Heart Medal.
- Veterans awarded the Medal of Honor.
- Veterans discharged for a disability incurred or aggravated in the line of duty.
- Veterans with service-connected conditions rated 10% or 20%.
- Veterans with special eligibility under Title 38 USC, Section 1151.

Priority Group 4

- Veterans receiving increased compensation or pension due to the need for regular aid and attendance or being permanently housebound.
- Veterans determined by the VA to be catastrophically disabled.

Priority Group 5

- Non-service-connected veterans, or service-connected veterans rated 0%, whose income and net worth do not exceed VA financial thresholds.
- Veterans receiving VA pension benefits.
- Veterans eligible for Medicaid.

Priority Group 6

- Veterans with compensable 0% service-connected disabilities.
- Veterans exposed to ionizing radiation during atmospheric testing or the occupation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
- Participants in Project 112/SHAD.
- Veterans who served in World War II between December 7, 1941, and December 31, 1946.
- Veterans who served in Vietnam between Jan 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975.
- Veterans of the Persian Gulf War who served in the Southwest Asia theater of operations between Aug 2, 1990, and Nov 11, 1998.
- Veterans who served on active duty at Camp Lejeune for at least 30 days between August 1, 1953 and December 31, 1987.
- Veterans can also qualify if all of these descriptions are true:
 - Served in a combat theater after November 11, 1998, and
 - Were discharged from active duty on or after October 1, 2013, and
 - Meet the minimum active-duty requirement

Priority Group 7

- Veterans with income below the Geographic Means Test (GMT) thresholds who agree to pay applicable copayments.

Priority Group 8

- Veterans with **gross household income above the VA Means Test** but who enrolled as of Jan 16, 2003, and agree to pay applicable copayments.
- Veterans whose income does not exceed VA Means Test or GMT thresholds by more than **10%** and agree to pay applicable copayments.

Once enrolled, veterans will remain enrolled for one year. Renewal is automatic, unless the veteran chooses not to enroll or if VA resources limit the number of veterans to whom VA can provide care.

Services Provided

VA can offer enrolled veterans a Uniform Benefits Package that emphasizes preventive medicine and primary care, and that provides a comprehensive healthcare benefit plan including inpatient and outpatient treatment. Among these services are the following:

1. Preventive and Wellness Services

- Immunizations
- Screening tests
- Health education and training programs

2. Primary and Outpatient Care

- Primary medical care
- Outpatient surgery
- Diagnosis and treatment
- Drugs and pharmaceuticals

3. Inpatient Care Services

- General medical and surgical care
- Mental health care
- Dialysis
- Acute care

4. Specialized Inpatient Care

- Intensive Care Units (ICU)
- Organ transplants
- Spinal cord injury care
- Traumatic brain injury care
- Polytrauma centers

5. Surgery and Specialty Care

- Surgery (general and specialized)
- Specialty care services, including:
 - Anesthesiology
 - Bariatric surgery
 - Cardiology
 - Dermatology
 - Neurology
 - Oncology
 - Orthopedics
 - Pain management
 - Chaplain services

6. Mental Health and Substance Use Treatment

- Counseling
- Therapy
- Substance abuse programs

7. Home and Long-Term Care

- Home healthcare
- Domiciliary care
- Nursing home care
- Respite and hospice care

8. Emergency and Urgent Care

- Emergency care in VA facilities

9. Ancillary and Support Services

- Audiology
- Vision rehabilitation
- Chiropractic care
- Dental care
- Laboratory services
- Nutrition
- Nuclear medicine
- Skilled therapies (physical, occupational, speech-language)
- Prosthetics
- Respiratory therapy
- Social work services

Program Considerations

- Co-payment charges for healthcare are the veteran's personal responsibility.
- Prescription Co-payments

Assistive Technology Covered

Medically necessary equipment provided by the VA

- Prosthetic appliances, devices, equipment and services for any condition, except for sensory-neural aids, will be provided to veterans receiving VA care.

- Sensory-neural aids, (i.e., hearing aids and eyeglasses), to veterans receiving VA care with compensable service-connected disabilities, former Prisoners of War, Purple Heart Recipients, or Veterans in receipt of VA's Aid and Attendance or Housebound benefits and receiving VA care or services, are provided eyeglasses based on clinical need.
- ***Automobile Adaptive and Access Equipment*** - Veterans and service members qualify for automobile and van adaptations if they have service-connected loss or permanent loss of use of one or both hands or feet, or permanent impairment of vision of both eyes. The VA will pay for adaptive equipment, and for repair, replacement, or reinstallation required because of a disability, as well as for the safe operation of a vehicle purchased with VA assistance or a previously or subsequently acquired vehicle.
- ***Home Improvements and Structural Alterations*** - Grants may be awarded for Improvements or structural alterations needed to access home or essential bathroom facilities.

Problems Obtaining Assistive Technology

- **Eligibility:** Individuals must be either a veteran or a dependent of a veteran to qualify for VA coverage. Each VA service area has its own specific eligibility requirements.
- **Access to Services:** If the Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) in a veteran's local area does not have a large prosthetics department, they may need to travel long distances to obtain assistive technology devices and related services.
- **Funding and Equipment Requests:** Recent funding shifts within the VA have redirected resources away from prosthetic devices toward other services. As a result, equipment requests are subject to increased scrutiny, which may lead to delays or denials in receiving assistive technology.

Application Process

Veterans can obtain application forms for enrollment by visiting, calling, or writing their nearest VA healthcare facility, Veterans Benefits Office, or Toll-free 1-877-222-VETS.

Appeals Process

Time Limit to Appeal: Veterans have one year from the date they are notified of a VA decision to file an appeal.

Step One: File a Notice of Disagreement: Submit a written statement to your nearest VA Regional Office explaining that you disagree with the decision. This is called a Notice of Disagreement (NOD).

Step Two: Review by the Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA): The BVA reviews your case and makes the final decision within the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Step Three: Appeal to the Court of Veterans Appeals (COVA): If you disagree with the BVA's decision, you may appeal to the Court of Veterans Appeals (COVA). This court is independent from the VA.

Step Four: Further Appeals: If you are still not satisfied, you may appeal to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, and then to the Supreme Court of the United States. You may represent yourself, choose to have a lawyer, or select an approved representative to assist you at any stage of the process.