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***If Veterans don't help Veterans, who will?***

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# Florida State Veteran's Benefits

The state of Florida provides several veteran benefits. This section offers a brief description of each of the following benefits.

- [Housing Benefits](#)
- [Employment Benefits](#)
- [Education Benefits](#)
- [Other State Veteran Benefits](#)

## Florida Veteran Housing Programs

### Florida State Veterans' Homes Program

The Robert Jenkins, Jr. Assisted Living/Domiciliary Home is a 149-bed Assisted Living Facility (ALF) that provides a special combination of housing, personalized supportive services, and incidental medical care to eligible veterans. Domiciliary care is provided to veterans discharged under honorable conditions. Veterans admitted must be residents of Florida for one year prior to admission and be in need of ALF care.

### Veterans' Nursing Homes of Florida

The state of Florida operates 7 Veterans' nursing homes throughout the state. Basic admission requirements for all veterans' nursing homes in Florida include an honorable discharge, Florida residency for one year prior to admission, and certification of need of nursing home care by a VA physician.

### Basic Property Tax Exemptions

Eligible resident Veterans with VA certified service-connected disability of 10% or greater shall be entitled to a \$5,000 property tax exemption. The Veteran must establish the exemption with the county tax official by providing documentation of their disability. The unremarried surviving spouse, who on the disabled ex-service member's death had been married to the ex-service member for at least 5 years is also entitled to this exemption.

### Homestead Exemption

Any real estate owned and used as a homestead by a veteran who was honorably discharged and has been certified as having a service-connected, permanent and total disability, is exempt from taxation of the veteran is a permanent resident of Florida and has legal title to the property on January 1 of the tax year for which exemption is being claimed.

Any real estate owned and used as a homestead by the surviving spouse of a member of the Armed Forces who died from service-connected causes while on active duty is exempt from taxation if the member was a permanent resident of this state on January 1 of the year in which the member died.

If, upon the death of the veteran, the spouse holds the legal or beneficial title to the homestead and permanently resides there, the exemption from taxation carries over to the benefit of the veteran's spouse until such time as he or she remarries, sells, or otherwise disposes of the property. If the spouse sells the property, an exemption not to exceed the amount granted from the most recent ad valorem tax roll may be transferred to the new residence as long as it is used the primary residence and the spouse does not remarry.

Any real estate used and owned as a homestead by any quadriplegic is exempt from taxation. Veterans who are paraplegic, hemiplegic, or permanently and totally disabled who must use a wheelchair for mobility, or are legally blind, may be exempt from real estate taxation. Check with your local property appraiser to determine if gross annual household income qualifies. The veteran must be a resident of Florida.

## Florida Employment Benefits

### Veterans' Preference in Employment and Retention

The state and its political subdivisions shall give preference in employment and retention in government positions to veterans who served during a wartime period and separated under honorable conditions, or who are disabled veterans

who have compensable service-connected disabilities as well as to a spouse or un-remarried veteran's widow or widower under certain circumstances.

### **Florida Military Family Employment Advocacy Program**

The Military Family Employment Advocacy Program provides advocates located in Florida's One-Stop Career Centers for regions where military bases and communities are located. Persons eligible for assistance through this program include spouses and dependents of active-duty military personnel, activated Florida National Guard members, and activated military reservists. Approximately 37,000 military spouses, not including military spouses of mobilized National Guard Members/Reservists, currently live in Florida. An increase is projected in the military spouse population due to returning and reassigned military members and their families.

### **Florida Education Benefits**

#### **Tuition Waiver**

Florida waives undergraduate-level tuition at state universities and community colleges for Florida recipients of the Purple Heart and other combat-related decorations superior in precedence to the Purple Heart.

#### **Tuition Deferment**

Available to any veteran or other eligible student covered under Title 38, U.S.C. Allows one tuition deferment each academic year and an additional deferment when a delay in benefits occurs.

#### **Reduced Tuition for National Guard**

Active Florida Guard members in good standing as of June 30, 1997 are exempt from payment of one-half of tuition and fees. Individuals who enlist in the Guard after June 30, 1997 are eligible for full exemption of tuition and fees. Contact your National Guard Unit for details.

#### **Education for Children Of Deceased Or Disabled Florida Veterans**

Florida also provides four-year college educational opportunities for dependent children and spouses of veterans who died from a service connected disability or who are 100% percent service-connected totally and permanently disabled veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces. (FS 295. 01) For more information, call toll free (888) 827-2004. Dependent children of service members Missing In Action or Prisoners Of War may also be eligible for tuition benefits.

### **Other Florida State Veteran Benefits**

#### **Certification of Discharge or Separation**

The Clerk of the Circuit Court shall record, without cost to the veteran, certificates of discharge or separation from the Armed Forces of the United States.

#### **Disabled Veteran Identification Card**

The Department of Veterans' Affairs may issue an identification card to any veteran who is a permanent resident of the state and who has been adjudged by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs or its predecessor to have a 100-percent, service-connected permanent and total disability rating for compensation, this could also be a rating of Individual Unemployability from the VA, or who has been determined to have a service-connected total and permanent disability rating of 100 percent and is in receipt of disability retirement pay from any branch of the United States Armed Services, upon the written request of such veteran. Such card may be used by the veteran as proof of eligibility for any benefit provided by state law for 100-percent, service-connected permanently and totally disabled veterans except this card may not be used as proof of eligibility for Exemption of Homesteads. The identification card shall bear a statement that it is unlawful for any person other than the veteran to whom it was issued to use the card.

#### **Hunting and Fishing License**

In order to receive a no-cost Resident Disabled Person's Hunting and Fishing Certificate from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, applicants must attach a copy of one of the following certifying him or her as totally and permanently disabled:

- Certification by the U.S. Railroad Retirement Board

- Certification by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs or any branch of the U.S. Armed Forces
- A Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs 100% Service-connected Disabled Veteran Identification Card (must have a statement of "total and permanent disabled")
- Florida Department of Labor and Employment Security/AWI Division of Workers Compensation (LES Form DWC-4)
- An order from a Judge of Compensation claims
- Written confirmation by the carrier providing Workers' Compensation benefits
- OR
- Documentation of current (dated within the last 12 months) eligibility for Disability Benefits from Social Security Administration.

Applicants must also attach proof of Florida residency as outlined on the application.

No license shall be required for military service personnel who are Florida residents while they are home on leave for periods of 30 days or less.

Active-duty and retired military Florida residents can get a low cost Military Gold Sportsman's License. The license covers hunting, freshwater and saltwater fishing and a variety of associated permits at a greatly reduced cost. The Military Gold Sportsman's License is available at tax collectors' offices only. Applicants must present a current military ID card plus a Florida driver's license or orders showing they are stationed in Florida as proof of eligibility.

### **Motor Vehicle Military License Plates**

Joining the 'Florida Salutes Veterans' and the U.S. Marine Corps license plates already available are new plates for the Army, Navy, Air Force, and the Coast Guard.

Check with your county tax collector to purchase your specialty plate. These tags are among the most affordable and patriotic specialty tags available. \$15 of the \$17 purchase price goes to the Veterans' Homes Trust Fund for maintenance and operation of Florida's five state veterans' nursing homes and one state veterans' domiciliary home.

### **Disabled Veteran Motor Vehicle License Plate**

One free motor vehicle license number plate shall be issued by the department for use on any motor vehicle owned or leased by any disabled veteran who has been a continuous resident of Florida for the last five years or has established a domicile upon application accompanied by proof that:

1. the vehicle was acquired through financial assistance from the VA, or
2. the veteran has been determined by the VA to have a service-connected disability of 100% rating for compensation, or
3. the veteran has been determined to have a service- connected disability of 100% and is in receipt of disability retirement pay from any branch of the uniformed Armed Forces. A plate fee is charged.

### **Permits/Fees (parking, tolls, building improvements)**

No totally and permanently disabled veteran who is a resident of Florida shall be required to pay license or permit fees to any county or municipality in order to make certain improvements to assist with his or her disability on any mobile home owned by the veteran and used as his/her residence. Improvements are limited to ramps, widening of doors, and similar improvements for the purpose of making the mobile home habitable for veterans confined to wheelchairs.

Handicapped Toll Permit - Any handicapped person who has a valid driver's license, who operates a vehicle specially equipped for use by the handicapped, and who is certified by a licensed physician or by the VA Adjudication Officer as being physically disabled and having permanent impairments which impair the person's ability to deposit coins in toll baskets shall be allowed to pass free through all tollgates. A vehicle window sticker will be issued.

Exemption Parking Permit: Persons With Permanent Mobility Problems - A disabled veteran who is a resident of this state and honorably discharged, and has been determined by the VA or the Federal Government to have a service-connected disability rating for compensation of 50% or greater and has a signed physician's statement of qualification is eligible for the permit. The fees are \$1.50 for the initial parking permit, and \$1.50 for renewal parking permit and for each additional renewal parking permit. The fee must be paid to the tax collector of the county in which the fee was generated. The

department shall not issue to any one eligible applicant more than two exemption parking permits upon request of the applicant.

### **Homeless Veterans Program**

About one-third of the adult homeless population have served their country in the Armed Services. On any given day, as many as 250,000 veterans (male and female) are living on the streets or in shelters, and perhaps twice as many experience homelessness at some point during the course of a year. Many other veterans are considered near homeless or at risk because of their poverty, lack of support from family and friends, and dismal living conditions in cheap hotels or in overcrowded or substandard housing.

Right now, the number of homeless male and female Vietnam era veterans is greater than the number of service persons who died during that war -- and a small number of Desert Storm veterans are also appearing in the homeless population. At this time, scientific studies indicate that there is no known, direct connection between military service, service in Vietnam, or exposure to combat and any increased risk of becoming homeless. Family background, access to support from family and friends, and various personal characteristics (rather than military service) seem to be the stronger indicators of risk of homelessness.

Almost all homeless veterans are male (about three percent are women), the vast majority are single, and most come from poor, disadvantaged backgrounds. Homeless veterans tend to be older and more educated than homeless non-veterans. But similar to the general population of homeless adult males, about 45% of homeless veterans suffer from mental illness and (with considerable overlap) slightly more than 70% suffer from alcohol or other drug abuse problems. Roughly 56% are African American or Hispanic.

### **Benefits Counseling**

The FDVA has state Veterans' Claims Counselors co-located with the VA in the Bay Pines Regional Office, and in each VA Medical Center and VA Outpatient Clinic in Florida. Assistance with claims is free (membership is not required) and covers all state and federal veterans' programs.

### **Commission as a Notary Public**

The usual fee shall not be required for the issuance of a Commission as a Notary Public to a veteran who served during a period of wartime service, and who has been rated 50% or more for service-connected disability. Other fees may apply.

Visit the [Florida Department of Veterans Affairs](#) website for more information on any of these programs.