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VA Service-Connected Disability Compensation

What is a service-connected disability under V.A. rules?

A service-connected disability is a physical or mental/emotional condition that meets both of the following criteria:

- Affects a veteran's ability to perform the activities of daily life
- Resulted from, or was aggravated by, injuries or diseases that happened while the veteran was on active duty, active duty for training purposes, or inactive duty for training purposes

Important: *Disabilities may show up late in life.* In order for a disability to be considered service-connected, the injury or illness need not have been disabling at the time it occurred, or even during the veteran's active duty. If at any time in a veteran's life he or she suffers a disability that results from an injury or disease that occurred while on active duty, that disability might be considered service-related. This kind of delayed disability is common in older veterans, whose injury or illness didn't disable them for many years but whose injury or disease has become disabling in advanced age.

How much compensation does the V.A. pay for a service-connected disability?

To receive any compensation for a service-connected disability, a veteran must have been discharged under conditions other than dishonorable.

The amount of compensation a veteran receives for a service-connected disability depends on the seriousness of the disability. The V.A. does a medical and vocational (the ability to perform work) evaluation of a veteran who applies for compensation and then assigns the veteran a disability rating. This rating can be anywhere from 0 percent to 100 percent (assigned in 10-percent increments).

Compensation for a service-connected disability ranges from \$123 to \$2,673 per month for a single veteran with no dependents. The main factor in determining the amount of compensation is the veteran's disability rating. The amount of compensation also goes up slightly for veterans with a spouse or dependent minor children, or with a parent or parents who are financially dependent on the veteran for some part of their living expenses. The V.A.'s website maintains a [table that shows the various compensation rates](#). In most (but not all) years, there's an annual cost-of-living increase.

Is there extra V.A. compensation for severe service-connected disabilities?

A veteran with a severe service-connected disability can receive [special monthly compensation](#), often referred to by its initials *SMC*, that significantly raises the total compensation amount. SMC can be paid for service-connected disabilities that include:

- Amputation or complete loss of use of a hand or foot.
- Paralysis or complete immobility of a joint.
- Loss of sight in an eye.
- Deafness in both ears.
- Inability to speak.

A combination of more than one of these disabilities raises the SMC even further.

SMC is also available to a veteran whose service-connected disability isn't on the specific SMC list but who's rated 100-percent disabled and who's housebound and in need of aid and attendance from a caretaker. The amount of this SMC depends on the amount of aid and attendance needed.

How do I apply for service-connected disability V.A. compensation?

A veteran applies for service-connected disability compensation by filing out V.A. Form 21-526. The form is available at any [V.A. Vet Center](#) or [V.A. Veterans Benefits Administration office](#). You can also download [Form 21-526](#), with instructions, from the V.A.'s website. Or you can request the form by phone at the V.A.'s toll-free line at 800-827-1000.

What will I need to apply for service-connected disability V.A. compensation?

In order to complete an application for service-connected disability compensation, a veteran must provide the following materials. **Important:** A veteran can begin the application process without having all the medical records. Once the application is filed, the V.A. itself can help obtain the necessary records.

- The original or a certified copy of the veteran's military discharge document (Form DD 214, or other documents for World War II veterans discharged before 1950)
- Service medical records: all service medical records, but particularly those that show the injury or disease during military service that ultimately resulted in disability
- Current medical records that show the nature and extent of the disability now
- Marriage certificate, if seeking compensation available for married veterans
- Evidence of the veteran's parent's or parents' income, assets, and expenses, plus the veteran's contribution in support of the parent(s), if the veteran is seeking compensation available for veterans with dependent parents

Where can I get help applying for service-connected disability V.A. compensation?

If you're unable to locate a discharge document among personal papers, you can get a copy online through the [National Archives' eVetRecs request system](#) or by calling the V.A.'s toll-free help line at 800-827-1000.

You can get free assistance in filling out forms and gathering the necessary information by contacting by phone or in person one of the [V.A.'s Vet Centers](#), which are located in every state. You can also get assistance by contacting the [V.A.'s Veterans Benefits Administration office](#) nearest you. The V.A. also has a toll-free telephone help line at 800-827-1000.