VETERAN COHORTS: VA PROGRAMS

Veterans are an extraordinarily diverse population. All age groups (with the exception of minors) may have special health needs based on their race, gender and age as well as unique risks and exposures based on when and where the served. The following material highlights some health conditions and resources specific to veteran cohorts and links to VA information and resources.

All individual veterans and groups may be eligible for a wide variety of benefits and healthcare. United States Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) benefits include disability compensation, pension, education and training, healthcare, home loans, insurance, vocational rehabilitation and employment, and burial. See VA.gov to access and manage your potential benefits.

In addition to the broad array for services and benefits, individual groups may also be eligible for special programs, presumptive eligibility for specific conditions, and resources tailored to the needs of their era of service or other defining characteristics.

Important! Some of these conditions may take years or decades after service to emerge. You may still be eligible for service-connection for these illnesses or injuries and any conditions stemming from the service-connected issue. Search for a Veteran Service Office near you on the CA-VET website to learn more.

WOMEN VETERANS

Each VA Medical Center has a Women Veterans Program Manager who is designated to advise and advocate for women veterans. They can assist women veterans with accessing medical services; from primary care, to specialized care for chronic conditions, or reproductive health.

Women veterans who are interested in receiving care at VA should:

- Contact the nearest VA Medical Center and ask for the Women Veterans Program Manager or
- Call the Women Veterans Call Center at 855-VA-WOMEN (855-829-6636), Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. ET, and Saturday, 8:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. ET.
PRIMARY CARE FOR WOMEN VETERANS

**General care** includes health evaluation and counseling, disease prevention, nutrition counseling, weight control, smoking cessation, and substance abuse counseling and treatment as well as gender-specific primary care, e.g., cervical cancer screens (Pap smears), breast cancer screens (mammograms), birth control, preconception counseling, Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine, menopausal support (hormone replacement therapy).

**Mental healthcare** includes evaluation and assistance for issues such as depression, mood, and anxiety disorders; intimate partner and domestic violence; sexual trauma; elder abuse or neglect; parenting and anger management; marital, caregiver, or family-related stress; and post-deployment adjustment or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Women—and men as well—may experience repeated sexual harassment or sexual assault during their military service. Special services are available to women who have experienced military sexual trauma. VA provides free, confidential counseling and treatment for mental and physical health conditions related to MST.

SPECIALTY CARE FOR WOMEN VETERANS

**Management and screening of chronic conditions** includes heart disease, diabetes, cancer, glandular disorders, osteoporosis, and fibromyalgia as well as sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis.

**Reproductive healthcare** includes maternity care, infertility evaluation and limited treatment; sexual problems, tubal ligation, urinary incontinence, and others. VA is prohibited by legislative authority from providing either in-vitro fertilization or abortion services.

PROGRAMS FOR SPECIFIC GROUPS OF WOMEN

- **Women veterans who are homeless**
- **Women veterans who have experienced intimate partner violence**

Additional information can be found on the VA Women Veterans Healthcare website: [www.womenshealth.va.gov](http://www.womenshealth.va.gov)
AGING VETERANS

According to the U.S. Census, veterans aged 55 or older represent almost 70 percent of all U.S. veterans. These veterans served in conflicts around the world including World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and even in the Persian Gulf War. Having served and researched these populations, the VHA has developed significant expertise in geriatric care and has identified and researched emerging veteran-specific health risks and exposures such as PTSD, Agent Orange and other conditions which exacerbate or impact aging and health.

As veterans age, the VA provides benefits and services that address a variety of issues including the changing health risks they face, as well as financial challenges through VA benefits and health services, as summarized in this section.

VA HEALTHCARE FOR OLDER AND AGING VETERANS

Geriatrics is healthcare for older veterans with complex needs. Older veterans can receive geriatric and long-term care programs at home, at VA medical centers, or in the community. For additional information on available VA healthcare programs for aging veterans, see the links below:

- Overview Guide to Long term Care
  - This includes information on shared decision making, advanced care planning, paying for long-term care and more.
- Geriatrics Program
- Long-Term Care
- Eligibility for Long Term Care
- Home Based and Community Services
- Nursing Home and Residential Care
- Geriatrics Research

Important! “Secondary service connection,” which is a secondary illness or injury that emerges as a result of a primary service-connected injury or illness, allows for increased disability ratings and
benefits for conditions which are the result of the service-connected illness or injury. For example, heart disease that is connected to PTSD may be secondarily service connected.

Two VA programs, Aid & Attendance Housebound, provide eligible older veterans with an additional monetary amount if you are eligible for or are receiving a VA Pension benefit.

Aid and Attendance (A&A) is an increased monthly pension amount paid if you meet one of the conditions below:

- You require help performing daily functions, which may include bathing, eating or dressing.
- You are bedridden.
- You are a patient in a nursing home.
- Your eyesight is limited to a corrected 5/200 visual acuity or less in either eye; or concentric contraction of the visual field to 5 degrees or less.

Housebound is an increased monthly pension amount paid if you are substantially confined to your immediate premises because of a permanent disability.

LGBT VETERANS

Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender veterans and those with related identities face increased health risks and unique challenges in accessing quality healthcare. VA welcomes all veterans and recognizes that sexual and gender minority Veterans have faced stigma and discrimination, which can affect health.

VA oversees a formal LGBT Point of Contact Program with an identified LGBT Veteran Care Coordinator (LGBT VCCs) at each facility and provides training and support to LGBT VCCs. Trained LGBT VCCs promote understanding of VA policies and best practices for serving LGBT veterans at their facilities.

LGBT AND RELATED IDENTITIES HEALTH PROGRAM

VA LGBT healthcare includes, among other services:
• Hormone treatment
• Substance use/alcohol treatment
• Tobacco use treatment
• Treatment and prevention of sexually transmitted infections/PrEP
• Intimate partner violence reduction and treatment of after effects
• Heart health
• Cancer screening, prevention and treatment

The following fact sheets discuss health risks and why you should talk to your provider about your sexual orientation identity, birth sex, and self-identified gender identity.

• VA Healthcare for Transgender Men
• VA Healthcare for Transgender Women
• VA Healthcare for Gay and Bisexual Men
• VA Healthcare for Lesbian and Bisexual Women

MINORITY VETERANS

MINORITY VETERANS PROGRAM COORDINATORS

There is a Minority Veteran Program Coordinator (MVPC) located in each state’s Regional Office, Healthcare Facility and National Cemetery to educate and assist with your eligibility of benefits and services. In addition to assisting individuals the MVPC’s Minority Veterans Program Coordinators is to increase the awareness of issues pertaining to minority veterans, conduct outreach and recommend ways to improve the delivery of services within VA facilities.

Each VA Regional Office has a Minority Veterans Outreach Coordinator who is a direct point of contact for you to learn more about what benefits you qualify for, assist you with applying for those benefits, and refer you to other organizations and resources that will help you meet your needs.
CENTER FOR MINORITY VETERANS

The VA Center for Minority Veterans (CMV), established in 1994, serves as an advocate for minority veterans by conducting outreach activities to promote the awareness and use of VA benefits and services.

TRIBAL VETERANS

According to the Department of Defense, American Indians and Alaska Natives have one of the highest representations in the armed forces. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs consults with American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments to develop partnerships that enhance access to services and benefits for veterans and their families.

OFFICE OF TRIBAL GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

The VA Office of Tribal Government Relations (OTGR) consults with American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments to develop partnerships that enhance access to services and benefits by veterans and their families. OTGR also sponsors regional training sessions for Tribal leaders and Veteran Service Organizations to increase access to VA healthcare and benefits through informative presentations and interactive discussions. To contact a staff member or locate an OTGR Specialist, visit the Contact Us page.

NATIVE AMERICAN DIRECT LOAN (NADL) PROGRAM

This program helps eligible Native American veterans finance their purchase, construction, or improvement of homes on Federal Trust Land or reduce their interest rate on VA loans. As a Native American veteran, you may use these direct loans to simultaneously purchase and improve your home or refinance another VA direct loan made under NADL to lower your interest rate.

Learn more about the NADL Program.

FILIPINO VETERANS

World War II era Filipino veterans are eligible for certain U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs 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 healthcare in the United States on the same basis as U.S. veterans.

WHICH FILIPINO VETERANS ARE ELIGIBLE FOR 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.

COMBAT VETERANS
Combat veterans are those who experienced any type of hostility, for any duration, resulting from military action that involved a real or perceived enemy on a theater of combat operations. This section navigates the different programs and resources that are made available to combat veterans, to help expand your system of care and support.

Recent combat veterans, those served on active duty in a theater of combat operations after November 11, 1998 are eligible for enhanced access to VA healthcare for five years after military discharge.

VET CENTER PROGRAM
Life isn't always easy after a deployment. That's where Vet Centers can help. Vet Centers across the country provide a broad range of counseling, outreach, and referral services to combat veterans and their families. Vet Centers are available to guide you and your families through the major adjustments in lifestyle that often occur after you return from combat. Services for a veteran can include individual and group counseling in areas such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), alcohol and drug assessment, and suicide prevention referrals. All services are free of cost and are strictly confidential.

VET CENTER CALL CENTER
1-877-WAR VETS (1.877.927.8387) is an around the clock confidential call center where combat Veterans and their families can call to talk about their military experience or any other issue they are facing in their readjustment to civilian life. The staff is comprised of combat veterans from several eras as well as family members of combat veterans. The
service is free for combat veterans and their families so they may find resources they need at their nearest Vet Center.

**WAR-RELATED ILLNESS AND INJURY STUDY CENTER**

The War Related Illness and Injury Study Center (WRIISC) is an educational resource for combat veterans, their family members and loved ones, and veteran healthcare providers. Our educational programs provide information on topics ranging from environmental exposures and deployment health conditions to self-management techniques for chronic health concerns.

**FORMER PRISONERS OF WAR**

Former prisoners of war (POWs) are veterans who, during active military service, were forcibly detained or interned in the line of duty by an enemy government, its agents, or a hostile force. Additionally, veterans serving in the active military service during peacetime, who were forcibly detained or interned by a foreign government or its agents or a hostile force are also considered former POWs if the circumstances of the internment were comparable to wartime internment (for example: Iran, Somalia or Kosovo). POWs are presumptively eligible for a number of healthcare services and other VA benefits.

**CERTAIN DISABILITIES PRESUMED TO BE CONNECTED TO MILITARY SERVICE FOR FORMER POWS**

Former POWs diagnosed with any of the conditions in the categories below are presumed to be service connected for those conditions, regardless of their length of time in captivity:

- Osteoporosis (if diagnosed on or after October 10, 2008, if the POW has Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD))
• Neuro-Psychiatric, including psychosis, dysthymic disorder (Depressive Neurosis), any of the “Anxiety States” including PTSD
• Cold Injury
• Traumatic Arthritis
• Stroke
• Heart Disease

The following additional conditions are presumed to be service connected for former POWs who were captive for 30 days or more:
• Osteoporosis (if diagnosed on or after September 28, 2009)
• Nutritional deficiencies, including avitaminosis, beriberi, malnutrition, and pellagra
• Helminthiasis
• Peripheral Neuropathy
• Digestive disorders, including peptic ulcer disease, chronic dysentery, irritable bowel syndrome, and cirrhosis of the liver

**Important!** Even if you have one of the conditions listed here, you must show that the condition was developed within a specific time period. This is called a presumptive period. The presumptive period can vary.

**VA BENEFITS AND PROGRAMS FOR POWS**

**POW VETERANS OUTREACH COORDINATORS**

Each VA Regional Office has a POW Veterans Outreach Coordinator who is a direct point of contact for you to learn more about what benefits you qualify for, assist you with applying for those benefits, and refer you to other organizations and resources that will help you
meet your needs. Find your local POW Veterans Outreach Coordinator at the nearest VA Regional Office.

**VA DISABILITY COMPENSATION**

Former POWs are eligible for VA disability compensation for disabilities related to their military service and captivity. Certain conditions are presumed to be related to time in captivity. These presumptive disabilities are based on studies of the long-term effects of captivity, deprivation, trauma, and cold injury on former POWs. Learn more about Disability Compensation for former POWs.

**VA HEALTHCARE**

Former POWs are eligible for VA healthcare. This includes hospital, nursing home, and outpatient treatment.

**OEF/OIF/OND VETERANS**

As returning OEF, OIF and OND servicemembers, your service has earned you access to enhanced VA healthcare benefits. In order to take advantage of these benefits, OEF/OIF/OND veterans need to enroll in VA's healthcare system.

Veterans, including activated Reservists and members of the National Guard, are eligible if they served on active duty in a theater of combat operations after November 11, 1998, and have been discharged under other than dishonorable conditions.

Every VA facility has a Transition Patient Advocate (TPA) to help you move throughout the VA healthcare system. To contact the Transition and Care Management Team, check your local VA medical center web site. You can find the website using the VA Transition and Care Management Team Locator.

**BENEFITS AND SERVICES**

- Eligible combat OEF, OIF and OND veterans will have free medical care and medications for any condition that may be related to their service in theater.
- Immediate benefits of healthcare coverage.
• No enrollment fee, monthly premiums or deductibles.
• Low or no out-of-pocket costs. During the five-year post discharge timeframe, there may be small medical care or prescription drug copayments for medical care for any condition not related to combat theater.
• Once enrolled, you will remain enrolled (but priority group may change).
• Enrollment with VA satisfies the healthcare law’s requirement to have healthcare coverage.

DENTAL CARE
Eligibility for VA dental benefits is based on very specific guidelines and differs significantly from eligibility requirements for medical care. Combat veterans may be authorized for dental treatment as reasonably necessary for the one-time correction of dental conditions if:

• They served on active duty and were discharged or released from active duty under conditions other than dishonorable from a period of service not less than 90 days; and
• The certificate of discharge or release does not bear a certification that the veteran was provided, within the 90-day period before the date of such discharge or release, a complete dental examination.
• Appropriate dental service and treatment indicated by the examination to be needed; and
• Application for VA dental treatment is made within 180 days of discharge or release under conditions other than dishonorable.

GULF WAR VETERANS
More than 650,000 veterans served in Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm from August 2, 1990 to July 31, 1991. For VA benefits eligibility purposes, the Gulf War period is still in effect. This means that anyone who served on active duty from August 2, 1990 to present is considered a Gulf War veteran and meets the Veterans Pension benefit requirements of wartime service.

GULF WAR VETERANS’ ILLNESSES
Certain illnesses and diseases are "presumed" by VA to be related to your military service in designated areas of Southwest Asia and may entitle you to VA disability compensation benefits. For Gulf War veterans, these presumptive diseases include:

- Medically unexplained illnesses (popularly called "Gulf War Syndrome").
- Certain infectious diseases.
- Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) diagnosed in all veterans who had 90 days or more continuous active military service.

Learn more about VA benefits for Gulf War benefits:

- [Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry page](#)
- [Disability Compensation Gulf War Presumptive Disability page](#)

Gulf War veterans can still seek to establish service connection individually for other "non-presumptive" diseases and illnesses related to service in the Gulf War. Learn more about qualifying for disability compensation for non-presumptive conditions on the [Compensation website](#).

**VIETNAM WAR VETERANS**

Considered by many to be a very contentious point in U.S. military history, it needs to be noted that many Vietnam veterans experienced life changing events and were not treated as veterans are today. That reception had lasting effects on Vietnam veterans. Vietnam veterans are also aging veterans and conditions and exposures related to service is impacting their health in unique ways. Vietnam veterans who experienced decades of untreated or undertreated physical and mental health issues are experiencing increased need for care.

United States military involvement in the Vietnam War officially began on August 5, 1964; however, the first U.S. casualty in Vietnam occurred on July 8, 1959. Approximately 2.7 million American men and women served in Vietnam. During the war, over 58,000 U.S. military members lost their lives and 153,000 were wounded. There were 766 prisoners of war of which 114 died in captivity.

**DISABILITY COMPENSATION FOR VETERANS EXPOSED TO AGENT ORANGE**

VA *presumes* that some disabilities diagnosed in certain veterans were caused by exposure to Agent Orange during military service.
• Learn more about VA healthcare benefits for veterans exposed to Agent Orange on the [Veterans Health Administration's Agent Orange page](#).

• Learn more about VA compensation benefits for veterans exposed to Agent Orange on the [Disability Compensation Agent Orange page](#).

**CHILDREN OF VETERANS WITH EXPOSURE TO AGENT ORANGE**

Unfortunately, Agent Orange not only affected Vietnam veterans, but also created health issues for their children. Children of veterans exposed to Agent Orange who have a birth defect including *spina bifida*, a congenital birth defect of the spine, and certain *other birth defects* may be entitled to VA benefits. These include monetary benefits, *healthcare*, and vocational rehabilitation services. Learn more about VA compensation benefits for children of veterans exposed to Agent Orange on the [Disability Compensation Birth Defects page](#).

**KOREAN WAR VETERANS**

Approximately 5.7 million veterans served in the Korean War. Korean War veterans are more prone to suffer from disabilities related to cold injures as a result of exposure to severe cold climates. Cold weather accounted for 16 percent of Army non-battle injuries and over 5,000 U.S. casualties of cold injury required evacuation from Korea during the winter of 1950-1951. In many instances, servicemembers could not seek or were unable to obtain medical care for cold injuries because of battlefield conditions. There are a variety of benefits and resources available to Korean War veterans.

**BENEFITS FOR KOREAN WAR VETERANS WHO EXPERIENCE COLD INJURIES**

Veterans who experienced cold injuries may have medical conditions such as skin cancer in frostbite scars, arthritis, fallen arches, stiff toes, and cold sensitization. These *cold-related problems* may worsen with age, and you may develop complicating conditions such as diabetes and peripheral vascular disease, which places you at higher risk for late amputations.
BENEFITS FOR KOREAN WAR VETERANS EXPOSED TO IONIZING RADIATION

Korean War-era veterans may qualify for healthcare and compensation benefits if you were exposed to ionizing radiation during military service. These include veterans who participated in certain radiation-risk activities, such as nuclear weapons testing, also known as "Atomic Veterans." Healthcare services include an Ionizing Radiation Registry health exam and clinical treatment at VA’s War Related Illness and Injury Study Centers. You may also be entitled to disability compensation benefits if you have certain cancers as a result of exposure to ionizing radiation during military service.

Learn more about VA benefits for veterans exposed to ionizing radiation:

- Veteran's Health Administration's Radiation page
- Disability Compensation Ionizing Radiation Exposure page

WWII VETERANS

World War II (WWII) was the most widespread war in history with more than 100 million people serving in military units. About 16 million Americans served during WWII, and many of those veterans are now receiving VA benefits including pension and healthcare. WWII veterans who were a part of the Occupation Forces assigned to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan soon after the detonation of Atomic-Bombs over those respective cities, and those American prisoners of war (POW's) who were housed in close proximity to those cities are sometimes called "Atomic Veterans."

BENEFITS FOR WORLD WAR II VETERANS EXPOSED TO IONIZING RADIATION

WWII era veterans may qualify for healthcare and compensation benefits if you were exposed to ionizing radiation during military service. These include veterans who participated in certain radiation-risk activities, such as nuclear weapons testing, also known as "Atomic Veterans". Healthcare services include an Ionizing Radiation Registry health exam and clinical treatment at VA’s War-Related Illness and Injury Study Centers. You may also be entitled to disability compensation benefits if you have certain cancers as a result of exposure to ionizing radiation during military service.
Learn more about VA benefits for veterans exposed to ionizing radiation:

- Veteran's Health Administration’s Radiation page
- Disability Compensation Ionizing Radiation Exposure page

**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 ten years. A number of groups of World War servicemembers who provided military-related service to the United States can receive VA benefits, and are summarized on the full VA list. If you or someone you know is an allied veteran who served during a World War, contact your local County Veteran Service Office for assistance securing benefits. Examples include US Airline flight crews that served WWII duties, scouts and guides who assisted Marines in the Mariana Islands and many more.

**WORLD WAR II ERA MERCHANT MARINE SEAMEN**

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