

EVIDENCE TO FILE IN SUPPORT OF YOUR VA DISABILITY BENEFITS CLAIMS

Why this is important: To avoid a lengthy appeals process, it is important to submit relevant evidence with your claim for VA disability benefits. This guide provides general information on the types of evidence that could be helpful to any benefits claim, however certain types of claims (such as those for PTSD or presumptive conditions) have their own special evidentiary rules. If you are filing a claim for one of these conditions, we suggest you speak with a VSO or other representative to make sure that you submit the proper evidence.

There are many types of evidence you can submit to VA in support of your claim. Some common types of evidence include:

DD-214 CERTIFICATE OF DISCHARGE

The DD Form 214, or DD-214 is your official certificate of discharge from the military. It contains basic information about your service, including dates of service, medals and awards, time lost, and discharge status.

OFFICIAL MILITARY PERSONNEL FILE (OMPF)

The OMPF is an administrative record of your service. It contains details about your service history such as date and type of enlistment/appointment; duty stations and assignments; training, qualifications, performance; awards and decorations received; disciplinary actions; insurance; emergency data; administrative remarks; date and type of separation/discharge/retirement (including DD-214, Report of Separation, or equivalent); and other personnel actions.

The OMPF usually provides information about your service that is critical to your disability benefits claim. Specifically, it is usually important to provide relevant sections from the OMPF to VA to prove an in-service event or injury, or to prove that a claimed event or injury was consistent with your service.

You can request your OMPF by submitting the SF 180 to the National Personnel Records Center by mail to: National Personnel Records Center 1 Archives Drive St. Louis, Missouri 63138 or by fax

(314-801-9195). You can also request your OMPF online through eVetRecs at

<https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records>.

Important! Note that when you request your OMPF on a SF180, you should request your "ENTIRE OMPF, NOT EXTRACT". If you do not request your entire OMPF, the NPRC will likely only send you an extract summary of your file. If, despite requesting a complete file, the NPRC sends only an extract, you can send a follow-up request for the rest of the file using the record request number in the NPRC's response letter.

SERVICE TREATMENT RECORDS (STRS)

STRs are a veteran's in-service health records that the military collects, and typically include physical examinations (including entrance and discharge physical examinations), the veteran's medical history, all dental examinations, clinical cover sheet and summaries, outpatient medical records, and physical profiles.

Note that inpatient treatment records, mental health records and medical board proceeding records are not included in the STRs. These records should be requested separately from the individual medical provider(s).

The STRS are often critical to disability benefits claims because they can document in-service injuries and symptoms.

You can request your STRs by submitting [Standard Form 180](#) to the National Personnel Records Center by mail to: National Personnel Records Center 1 Archives Drive St. Louis, Missouri 63138 or by fax (314-801-9195). You can also request your STRs online through eVetRecs at

<https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records>.

POST-SERVICE MEDICAL RECORDS

Post-service medical records are often critical to disability benefits claims. They provide evidence of current diagnoses, severity of symptoms, and can also contain doctor's nexus opinions linking a veteran's current disability to an in-service event or injury. You can authorize VA to obtain your post service medical records from private treatment facilities by completing and submitting [VA Form 21-4142](#) and [VA Form 21-4142a](#). You can ask VA to obtain your medical records from VA

treatment facilities by identifying the facilities on your disability application. You can also request your own medical records from a VA treatment facility by completing and submitting [VA Form 10-5345a](#) to the treatment facility's Release of Information office.

DISABILITY BENEFITS QUESTIONNAIRES (DBQS)

Disability Benefits Questionnaires (DBQs) are questionnaires designed by VA for clinicians in order to collect the medical information VA needs (specifically from non-VA clinicians) to decide compensation and pension claims. DBQs were also designed to assist clinicians when performing compensation and pension examinations ordered by VA.

There are over 70 DBQs available online. If you are being treated by a private, non-VA clinician, you should obtain the appropriate DBQ form for your condition, bring it to your treating doctor for completion, and submit the completed form to VA as additional evidence in support of your compensation or pension claim.

DBQs are used in both Fully Developed Claims and Standard Claims. The DBQ forms are available on the ["List by DBQForm Name"](#) page.

LAY EVIDENCE

Evidence provided by witnesses (lay statements) or fellow servicemembers (buddy statements) is based on personal knowledge of facts or circumstances that can be observed and described by a lay person. Lay evidence is evidence provided by non-experts about things that do not require specialized education, training, or experience. Common types of lay evidence submitted in support of veterans' claims include statements by friends and family members about a veteran's symptoms and how they impact the veteran's life and functioning, and buddy statements from fellow servicemembers who witnessed an in-service event or injury that caused the veteran's current disability.

When VA receives lay evidence, it:

- Determines if the lay evidence is competent
- Weighs the lay evidence against other evidence to make a determination of its value

- Makes a credibility determination as to whether the evidence supports a finding of service connection and a continuity of symptomology

PERSONAL STATEMENT

A personal statement is your account of the in-service event or injury that caused your current disability, and the ways in which the disability currently impacts all areas of your life and functioning (social, educational, work, family, and personal). You should always submit a personal statement in support of your claim because it can be a very powerful and persuasive piece of evidence. Additionally, although VA will review your OMPF, STRs, and medical records, those records likely do not contain the whole story relevant to your disability claim. Your personal statement should be used to provide VA with information they do not have access to otherwise – VA does not know your story unless you tell them their story.

You can also talk about post-service here, particularly how you've improved your circumstances since your discharge.

EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF CLAIMS FOR POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER BASED ON COMBAT-RELATED STRESSORS

If you are applying for service-connected disability compensation for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, special rules apply and make it easier for your claim to be granted. Below is a brief summary of the types of evidence you should submit:

- (1) **PTSD diagnosis in service:** In general, if you were diagnosed with PTSD during service, and your stressor is related to your time in service, then your lay testimony (or statement) may be sufficient evidence to establish the occurrence of your in-service stressor. See 38 C.F.R. 3.304(f)(1).
- (2) **Combat service:** If you engaged in combat and your stressor is related to that combat, then your lay testimony (or statement) may be sufficient evidence to establish the occurrence of your in-service stressor. See 38 C.F.R. 3.304(f)(2).
- (3) **Fear of hostile military or terrorist activity:** If your stressor is related to your fear of hostile military or terrorist activity, and a VA (or contracted through VA) psychologist or psychiatrist confirms that your claimed stressor is adequate to support a diagnosis of PTSD, then your

lay testimony (or statement) may be sufficient evidence to establish the occurrence of your in-service stressor. See 38 C.F.R. 3.304(f)(3).

- (4) **Prisoner of War:** If your stressor is related to your experience as a prisoner-of-war, your lay testimony (or statement) may be sufficient to establish the occurrence of your in-service stressor. See 38 C.F.R. 3.304(f)(4).

EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF CLAIMS FOR POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER BASED ON MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA

Instances of military sexual trauma (MST) often go unreported due to a variety of reasons, including shame and fear of retaliation while in service. As a result, there is often no hard evidence of the MST in the OMPF and STRs, and no one available to provide lay statements or buddy statements because the survivor did not tell anyone about the assault. In recognition of this, VA has identified certain “markers” that provide some indication that the MST occurred. These markers include, but are not limited to:

- Records from law enforcement authorities, rape crisis centers, mental health counseling centers, hospitals, or physicians
- Pregnancy tests or tests for sexually transmitted diseases
- Statements from family members, roommates, fellow Servicemembers, clergy members, or counselors
- Requests for transfer to another military duty assignment
- Deterioration in work performance
- Substance abuse
- Episodes of depression, panic attacks, or anxiety without an identifiable cause
- Unexplained economic or social behavioral changes
- Relationship issues, such as divorce
- Sexual dysfunction

The above types of corroborating evidence should be submitted for consideration in disability claims involving MST, especially when there is no hard proof of the in-service trauma.

RESOURCES

FIND A VA FACILITY

Use the [facility locator](#) or call 1-877-222-VETS (8387).

CONTACT YOUR COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE

CalVet strongly recommends you work with the CVSO nearest you. Your CVSO can guide you through the benefits and services available as well as help connect you with other local resources.

The County Veterans Service Offices (CVSO) are locally funded agencies established to assist veterans and their families in obtaining benefits and services accrued through military service.

These County Veteran Service Offices promote the interest and welfare of veterans, their dependents, and their survivors by enhancing their quality of life through counseling, education, benefits assistance, and advocacy. They connect veterans to their benefits by assisting in their interactions with the VA.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Visit the [CalVet](#) website for more information, OR

Find the [CVSO](#) closest to you.

VA HOTLINES

[Veterans Crisis Line](#)

- 800-273-TALK (8255), or
- Text: 838255

[Combat Call Center](#)

- 877-WAR-VETS (927-8387)

[Women Veterans Call Center](#)

- 855-VA-WOMEN (829-6636)

SOURCES

https://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/dbq_disabilityexams.asp