



**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

Office of Public Affairs
Media Relations

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Fact Sheet

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VA Services for Veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense (DoD) continue their partnership to meet the needs of our newest veterans – the men and women who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom (OIF/OEF) – by assisting them with a smooth transition from active duty to civilian life.

VA's goal is to ensure that every seriously injured or ill serviceman and woman returning from combat receives priority consideration and world-class service. Together VA and DoD are finding ways to move records more efficiently between the two agencies; share critical medical information electronically; protect the health of troops stationed in areas where environmental hazards pose a threat; process benefits claims quickly and efficiently; and, in every way possible, hold open the doors to an uncomplicated passage from soldier to citizen.

Benefits and Services

Active-duty personnel, and Reservist or National Guard members who serve in a theater of combat operations are eligible for hospital care, medical services, and nursing home care for injuries or illnesses they believe are related to combat service for a period up to two years beginning on the date of discharge or release from service. This two-year eligibility for medical care is available even if there is insufficient medical evidence to conclude that the veteran's illness is the result of combat service. At the end of the two-year period, these veterans can continue to receive free health care for injuries and illnesses officially connected to military service.

In addition to health care, VA offers a spectrum of programs for veterans, including disability compensation, vocational rehabilitation, prosthetic services, life insurance, pension, education benefits, specially adapted housing and automobile grants, and survivor and burial benefits. Many VA services are provided at a higher priority or on an expedited basis for this newest generation of combat-disabled veterans. VA programs for veterans with a service-connected injury or illness apply equally to those who served in the regular active duty forces and to National Guard members or reservists returning from federal activation.

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Seamless Transition – 2/2/2/2

VA Outreach

In an effort to assist wounded military members and their families, VA placed benefits counselors and social workers at key military hospitals where severely wounded service members from Iraq and Afghanistan are frequently sent.

Currently, six staff members are assigned full-time to work with patients at both the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., and the Bethesda Naval Medical Center in Maryland. Four of the counselors specialize in benefit programs and two are social workers who facilitate health care coordination as service members transition from military to VA care.

Similar teams work with patients, discharge planners, and other military staff at six other key DoD medical centers caring for seriously injured troops: Eisenhower Army Medical Center, Ft. Gordon (Ga.); Brooke Army Medical Center, Ft. Sam Houston (Texas); Madigan Army Medical Center at Western Regional Medical Command, Tacoma (Wash.); Darnall Army Medical Center at Ft. Hood (Texas); Evans Army Hospital at Ft. Carson (Colorado); and Camp Pendleton Naval Medical Center in San Diego, (Calif.).

Throughout the nation, VA officials identify service members from Iraq or Afghanistan for special outreach efforts. Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom coordinators at each VA benefits office and medical center coordinate with DoD discharge staff to ensure a smooth transition to VA services at locations nearest to the veteran's residence after discharge. Through this coordination, the veterans are known at the local VA facilities that process their benefits claims, and continuity of their medical care, including medications and therapy, is ensured.

Military Services Briefings

Military Services Briefings are designed to ensure that servicemembers are aware of their VA benefits and to provide assistance as needed. Briefings include separation and retirement seminars, pre- and post-deployment briefings as well as the formal Transition Assistance Program. For those leaving active duty due to medical problems, the outreach effort is intensified to ensure a full understanding of the VA compensation process and vocational rehabilitation and employment programs.

Generally briefings range from one to three hours; however, the formal TAP workshop is a three-day seminar conducted by VA, DoD and the Department of Labor at military installations for personnel within 90 days of separation. It provides a number of services to assist military personnel in making a smooth transition to civilian life. All military services briefings cover the full range of benefits administered by VA including compensation, education, vocational rehabilitation and employment, health care, insurance and more.

Seamless Transition – 3/3/3/3

Benefits Delivery at Discharge

A joint VA-DoD initiative is helping personnel file for and receive service-connected disability compensation benefits more quickly than in the past. The goal is to adjudicate claims within 30 days of discharge by examining service members as part of the discharge process. By comparison, VA's national average processing time is 163 days for claims requiring a disability rating.

In the Benefits Delivery at Discharge program, the medical information needed to begin the VA claims process carries over from DoD to VA seamlessly. In addition, if a service member is found to be disabled, additional applicable vocational and employment services may be quickly initiated.

Additional Resources

VA has brochures and other information for veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom available on the Web:

Veterans Benefits Information	http://www.vba.va.gov/
Information for Iraqi Freedom Veterans	http://www.va.gov/gulfwar/
Afghanistan Service Information	http://www.va.gov/environagents/
PTSD and Iraq Veterans	http://www.ncptsd.org/topics/war.html
VA Health Care Enrollment Information	http://www.va.gov/elig/
Brochures and Publications, Including: * A Summary of VA Benefits for National Guard and Reserve Personnel * Health Care and Assistance for U.S. Veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom	http://www.vethealth.cio.med.va.gov/Pubs/Ind ex.htm
Online Benefits Applications	http://vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp/
Women Veterans Health and Benefits Information	http://www.va.gov/wvhp/ http://www.va.gov/womenvet/ http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Topics/Women/

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