

Obtaining VA Benefits

There are many veterans in our country that have no idea that they could be receiving benefits. While some feel like leaving the past behind them, so to speak, others do not even realize that there may be reason for them to receive benefits. Obtaining benefits from the VA can sometimes be a difficult and long process that sometimes does not seem worth the effort. But injured or disabled veterans have a right to benefits, and so should look into the process for obtaining them.

Q: How does a veteran know if he or she should be getting benefits? Who, exactly, is qualified to receive them?

A: There are three key factors in determining if you might be eligible to obtain VA service connected disability benefits. The first is that you must have done service with either the Army, the Navy, the Marines, the Air Force, or the US Coast Guard. Second, you must have a current disability, either caused by your time in the service or a disability that you had going into the service and it was aggravated or made worse by your time in the service. This could be anything from High Blood Pressure to certain types of cancers as well as many other disabilities depending on when and where you served. Third, you have to be able to connect your current disability to your time in the service.

A good illustration of this kind of injury is if you injured your knee while hiking with your some friends while on leave from active duty. Today, even though many years have passed, the problem caused by that old injury is only getting worse, and you will soon need surgery to have the knee replaced. Though it may not seem like it, this injury itself is service connected, as you were on active duty when the accident or illness occurred, even though you were on leave. Secondly, now that problem is causing pain as well as other problems which you have to be treated for.

Q: But how will receiving benefits from Veteran Affairs really help me?

A: Like this: if you do obtain benefits, you can receive monthly monetary benefits, as well as eligibility to use the VA hospital and medical facilities. The benefit amount you will receive each month will be dependent on what percentage of your current disability is determined to be service connected.

Q: If I am currently service connected and I have hearing loss at 10% and PTSD at 30% why am I only considered 30% service connected?

A: Veteran Affairs uses a rating schedule that uses the severity of your disability to tell them what percentage service connected disability to award you. They also use a rating chart to total your percentage of service connection, they do not use mathematical terms. These service connection percentages can be tricky to understand and if you feel that you should be receiving more benefits or a higher percentage then you should look into your disability and the severity or contact a professional that could assist you.

Q: Why does my neighbor receive 70% for the same disability that I have?

A: This happens because Veteran Affairs determines all service connection percentages individually, based on the severity of a veterans disability. Again, there is a rating schedule that determines the amount of benefit and the percentage of service connection that each person receives.

Q: Can I still work and receive VA service connected disability benefits?

A: Yes, you can. Unlike with Social Security Disability, the disability benefits you obtain from Veteran Affairs are not affected by working. If you are granted service connection for a disability that is not keeping you from working then you can still work and receive benefits. The VA does not reduce your VA service connected disability benefits just because you are working and receiving an earned income.

Q: Can I obtain benefits from both Social Security Disability and the Dept. of Veteran Affairs?

A: Yes. While Social Security Disability does gauge your earned income when determining your SSD benefits, your VA benefits are not considered earned income, and so will not get in the way of your SSD benefits.

Q: My husband/wife was in the service and receiving VA service connected disability benefits but they have passed.

Am I eligible to get his or her VA benefits?

A: There are benefits for surviving spouses and dependent children. However, every case is different, and you need to be sure to speak to a professional before moving forward.

Q: How do I file a claim?

A: The VA has laws that are considered veteran friendly laws. The VA has the duty to help you file a claim and walk you through the process of obtaining benefits. There are Regional Offices in every state and there are organizations set up to assist the veterans at no cost to you. To locate your local Veteran Affairs Regional Office and any local Veteran Service Organizations, visit the Veteran Affairs website at www.va.gov.

Q: Can I employ a lawyer to help me?

A: The VA does have laws that tell attorneys when they can represent a client for a fee and when they can not. You can find some lawyers who will represent you for free, or Pro Bono, and others who will require you to sign a contract promising payment for their services. If you are considering contracting a lawyer to help with your claim, it is important to contact one locally for more information about your particular case.

Q: I already get benefits for a service connected ability. Is there any other benefit I can receive?

A: This depends on your situation. If you have a service connected disability and it has gotten worse, you can request for an increase in your rating which would result in higher benefits if a higher rating is granted. Veteran Affairs also provides expanded benefits to those veterans who cannot work due to their service connected disability. If this is your situation, there is a second application that you need to fill out in order to apply. If you feel you are unemployable and should be receiving higher benefits you should contact a VSO or an Attorney to answer your questions and possibly assist you in obtaining these benefits. Veteran Affairs also provides additional benefits to those veterans who, due to their service connected disability, are mostly homebound and cannot care for themselves. This type of extra benefit is called homebound compensation. This is an option to consider if you feel you need assistance to care for yourself.

Every veterans case is different and obtaining the benefits set aside for you by the VA can be quite confusing to some people. The VAs website has a lot of information on what kind of benefits there are beyond disability benefits and what you can do to receive these benefits. If you are a veteran and you were injured in any way or your disabilities that you had before going into the service were aggravated in any way please look into your options. After all, you served your country in the past, and may very well be entitled to receive benefits for it today.

About the Author

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