

Getting Started With Your VA Benefits

A practical overview to help you identify benefits that may apply and know where to go next.

START HERE You don't need to understand the entire VA system. Use this guide to identify benefits worth exploring, then use the corresponding ALVA guide or an official veterans agency to take the next step.

UNDERSTAND → IDENTIFY → PREPARE → TAKE ACTION

1. What benefits should you explore?

VA and other veterans benefits are not one-size-fits-all. Eligibility can depend on your service history, discharge status, disability, income, age, family circumstances, and other factors. Do not assume a benefit does not apply simply because you have never used VA benefits before.

Benefit area	What to consider	ALVA guide
Disability compensation	A current condition may be connected to your military service, including certain secondary or presumptive conditions.	Disability Compensation
VA health care	You want medical, mental health, pharmacy, specialty, or other care through VA.	VA Health Care
Education & training	You want to use GI Bill or other VA education and training benefits.	Education & Training
Home loans & housing	You are buying, building, refinancing, or exploring VA housing assistance.	VA Home Loan
Family & survivors	A spouse, dependent, survivor, or caregiver may qualify for VA benefits or support.	Family & Survivor
Burial & memorial	You want to plan ahead or understand cemetery, burial, memorial, or funeral benefits.	Burial & Memorial
Decision reviews	You received a VA benefits decision you disagree with or do not understand.	Decision Reviews
Pension	You are a qualifying wartime Veteran with limited income/net worth and meet age or disability requirements.	VA.gov
Veteran Readiness & Employment	You have a service-connected disability and need help preparing for, finding, or keeping suitable employment—or living more independently.	VA.gov
Life insurance	You want to explore VA-administered life insurance options for Veterans, service members, or families.	VA.gov
State benefits	Your state may offer additional benefits such as tax relief, education, employment, licenses, recreation, or other assistance.	State agency

2. Quick self-check: what should you look into?

- ☐ Do I have an injury, illness, or condition that began during service, was made worse by service, or may be related to my service?
- ☐ Am I enrolled in VA health care—and am I using the services available to me?
- ☐ Could I or an eligible family member use education, training, or career benefits?
- ☐ Am I considering buying, building, or refinancing a home?
- ☐ Could my spouse, children, survivors, or caregiver qualify for benefits or support?
- ☐ Have I looked into VA Pension or other needs-based benefits that may apply?
- ☐ Have I checked benefits offered by my state or territory?
- ☐ Have I planned ahead for burial and memorial benefits, including pre-need eligibility?
- ☐ Have I received a VA decision I do not understand or disagree with?

IF YOU CHECKED YES Use the matching ALVA guide for a step-by-step roadmap. If you're unsure which benefits apply, your official state veterans agency is a strong place to start because it can help identify both federal and state benefits.

[FIND YOUR STATE VETERANS AGENCY →](#)

3. Get the basics together

You won't need every item for every benefit. Having these basics organized can make applications and conversations with veterans-benefits professionals much easier.

Service records

DD214 or other separation documents; service dates; branch/component; relevant orders.

Identity & contact

Current address, phone/email, Social Security number, and direct-deposit information when required.

Medical information

Relevant military, VA, and private treatment information, including providers and approximate dates.

Family information

Marriage, dependent, divorce, birth, or death information when a benefit depends on family status.

Prior VA records

Rating decisions, award letters, claim correspondence, and prior review/appeal documents.

[Need your DD214 or military service records? Request them from the National Archives →](#)

4. Choose your next step

YOU KNOW WHICH BENEFIT YOU NEED Go directly to the corresponding ALVA Benefits Guide. Each guide walks you through potential eligibility, what to prepare, how to apply, and what happens next.

YOU'RE NOT SURE WHAT APPLIES Contact your official state veterans agency. State agencies can help veterans understand federal benefits and identify state-specific programs that may otherwise be overlooked.

[FIND YOUR STATE VETERANS AGENCY →](#)

YOU WANT TO EXPLORE VA DIRECTLY VA.gov organizes benefits by disability, health care, education, employment, housing, pension, life insurance, family benefits, and burial/memorial services.

[EXPLORE VA BENEFITS →](#)

HOW TO USE THE ALVA GUIDES For each benefit: understand whether it may apply, prepare what you need, use the correct application route, and follow through after you apply.

Official starting points: [VA.gov](#) • [VA Welcome Kit](#) • [State Veterans Agencies](#) • [Military Records](#)

Educational information only; not an eligibility determination, legal advice, or individualized claims advice. Benefits and requirements can change. Confirm current requirements with VA or the responsible government agency. Verified September 18, 2026.

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