

VA Benefits: 10 Things You Need to Know

The following guidelines are provided as general reference only. Additional information may be found on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs website at www.va.gov. All forms listed can be found in the back of the Veterans Benefits and Planning Guide, available free from one of our Counsellors.

1. Benefits do not come automatically to qualified veterans; they must be requested.

It can take considerable time and effort to complete and submit the appropriate paperwork for VA burial benefits. But there's help available. When you enroll in the Veterans Plus Benefits program, you and your family will receive personal assistance to complete the forms required to secure the benefits to which you are entitled from the Veterans Administration (VA).

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) does not cover ALL of the costs associated with funeral or cremation for an honorably discharged veteran.

2. In order to receive benefits, you will need documentation to verify your military service.

A discharge report (formally known as *Form DD 214: Report of Separation from the Armed Forces of the United States*) is usually required to verify military service. If Form DD 214 or its equivalent is not available, a Request Pertaining to Military Records (Standard Form 180) can be sent to the Military National Personnel Records Center to request it. A copy of the Report of Separation will then be mailed to the veteran, the deceased veteran's next of kin, or other persons or organizations that are authorized to receive it. If your family does not have a Form DD 214 at the time of death, we will be glad to help secure one.

3. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) does not cover ALL of the costs associated with funeral or cremation for an honorably discharged veteran.

While some financial benefits and recognition are provided to honorably discharged veterans, reimbursement for funeral or cremation service expenses is limited and usually only applies to veterans who:

- Were disabled due to a service-related injury; or
- Retired from the Armed Services; or
- Died in a VA hospital or nursing home under VA contract.

Generally speaking, neither the VA nor the various branches of service cover the cost of a casket for a deceased veteran unless the death occurs while on active duty.

4. A formal request must be made to receive a U.S. flag.

A ceremonial flag will be provided upon request, to drape the casket or accompany the urn of a deceased veteran at no cost. Only one flag is provided per veteran, and it is generally given to the next of kin.

To receive a flag, *VA Form 21-2008, Application for United States Flag for Burial Purposes* must be submitted along with a copy of the veteran's discharge papers. Flags may be obtained from VA regional offices and most U.S. post offices. For your family's convenience, the Funeral Director managing your service may request a flag on your behalf.

5. Veterans buried in a private cemetery may be eligible to receive a partial reimbursement for their burial costs.

If you choose not to be buried in a VA national cemetery, limited financial burial benefits may be available. For non service-related deaths, a burial expense allowance (up to \$300) and a plot allowance (up to \$300) may be awarded. If a death is service-related, benefits up to \$2,000 may be paid for burial expenses.

In order to be eligible to receive a VA burial allowance you must meet the following conditions:

- Payment for the veteran's burial was made without any reimbursement from a government agency or other source.
- The veteran was discharged under conditions other than dishonorable.
- In addition, at least one of the following conditions must be met:
 - The veteran died because of service-related disability; or
 - The veteran was receiving VA pension or compensation; or
 - The veteran died in a VA hospital or nursing home under VA contract.

In order to determine the final reimbursement amount, *VA Form 21-530, Application for Burial Benefits*, must be submitted within two years from the date of the veteran's permanent burial.

6. Military Funeral Honors ceremonies must be requested.

Upon the family's request, every eligible veteran may receive a Military Funeral Honors ceremony, which includes the folding and presentation of the United States flag and the playing of "Taps." The ceremony is performed by a Military Funeral Honors detail consisting of two or more uniformed military persons and at least one person who is a member of the veteran's branch of the Armed Forces. Arrangements can be made by your funeral director, who will submit a request to the Department of Defense.

7. A Presidential Memorial Certificate can be requested.

The families of honorably discharged, deceased veterans are entitled to receive an engraved paper certificate signed by the current U.S. President to honor the memory of the deceased veteran. Eligible recipients include the deceased veteran's next of kin and loved ones. More than one certificate may be requested. Eligible recipients, or someone acting on their behalf, may apply in person at any VA regional office or by U.S. mail. Should your family wish to request a certificate and require assistance, your funeral director can help.

8. There are eligibility requirements for burial in a VA National Cemetery.

In general, any member of the Armed Forces of the United States who died while on active duty, or any veteran who was discharged under conditions other than dishonorable, is entitled to burial in a VA National Cemetery. Under certain conditions, the un-remarried surviving spouse and minor children of an eligible person are also entitled to this benefit. Benefits for burial in a VA National Cemetery include:

- An assigned gravesite (if space is available)
- Opening and closing of the grave
- A grave liner for casketed remains
- A Government-issued marker (headstone)
- Perpetual care within the cemetery

Cremated remains are buried or inurned in VA National Cemeteries in the same manner and with the same honors as casketed remains.

Arrangements at VA National Cemeteries may be made only at the time of death; space may not be reserved ahead of need. Thus, there is no guarantee that spouses or other family members will be interred side-by-side or even in proximity to each other. Families wishing to be interred together may be better accommodated at a private cemetery. Also, burials in VA National Cemeteries are typically not conducted on weekends. This is important to note when there are relatives or dignitaries attending from out of town, as guests often prefer weekend ceremonies. When a weekend ceremony is needed, a private cemetery may be better able to meet your needs. Most private cemeteries have sections dedicated to veterans.

9. Headstones or markers for a burial space in a private cemetery must be requested.

Any deceased veteran discharged under conditions other than dishonorable is eligible for a standard government headstone or marker. The VA, upon request and at no charge to the applicant, will furnish a government headstone or marker for the grave of any deceased, eligible veteran in any cemetery around the world.

Upright headstones are available in granite and marble. Flat markers are available in granite, marble and bronze. The style must be consistent with existing monuments or markers at the place of burial. Niche markers for cremated remains are also available. *An Application for Standard Government Headstone or Marker for Installation in a Private or State Veteran's Cemetery (VA Form 40-1330)* must be submitted. If your family does not have Form 40-1330 at the time of death, we will be glad to help you secure one.

10. Military service medals, awards and decorations must be requested in writing.

Military service medals, awards and decorations are available from the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC), which is under the jurisdiction of the National Archives and Records Administration. Family members may request medals and awards for living veterans only if they have obtained their signed authorization. For deceased veterans, requests will be accepted from the next of kin (un-remarried widow or widower, son or daughter, father or mother, brother or sister of the deceased veteran). Requests should be submitted in writing to the appropriate military service branch division of the NPRC. Standard Form SF 180, available through the VA, is

recommended to submit your request. Generally, there is no charge for medal or award replacements. If your family does not have Form SF 180 at the time of death, your funeral director may be able to supply one.