

Honoring Our Veterans:

End-of-Life Care, Services, and Support for Veterans and Their Families



To our veteran patients and their families:

At VITAS® Healthcare, we believe that we owe United States veterans a debt of gratitude for their service spent defending our country, both in war and in peacetime. In everything we do, we strive to honor their selfless contributions to the strength of our nation.

With more than four decades of hospice experience, VITAS has had the distinct privilege of caring for thousands of veterans at the end of their lives.

Over the years, VITAS has developed a special awareness of veterans' unique end-of-life needs, and we have endeavored to tailor an approach to hospice care that takes those needs into account and affords veterans the respect they deserve. We understand what patients and families are going through, and all of our hospice teams have the training and resources to address any service-related issues that arise.

What truly sets VITAS apart, however, is that our approach to veterans' end-of-life care is not limited to hospice care alone. Along the way, we have also developed an expertise about veterans' benefits, and we have staff members who dedicate themselves exclusively to making sure veterans and their families get all the assistance for which they are eligible.

- VITAS determines patients' veteran status during the admissions process to ensure their needs are met with an individually tailored care plan.
- VITAS provides ongoing training, support, and educational materials for our hospice teams about veteran-specific, clinical, social, and psychosocial issues.
- Many VITAS programs have admission liaisons who specialize in veterans' needs, and all programs have staff members who have been trained to help patients and their families gain access to important veterans benefits and replace lost medals, if necessary.
- VITAS is actively involved with local veterans organizations, and we celebrate national holidays, including Veterans Day, Memorial Day, and Independence Day.
- VITAS veteran specialists can perform bedside salutes, pinning ceremonies, and other commemorative services to honor and recognize a veteran's service.

Whatever happens, VITAS veteran patients and their families should know that they are never alone. From challenging clinical symptoms to complicated benefits issues, VITAS is there to help every step of the way.

Military Service and the End-of-Life Experience



Navigating uncharted territory

Whether you or a loved one are facing a life-limiting illness, you're up against a new experience that can seem intimidating—and sometimes even frightening. You're going into uncharted territory, and it can be hard to know what's normal and what to expect.

We hope you'll think of VITAS® Healthcare as your compass. We'll act as your guide, so you won't have to worry about dealing with the unexpected alone. While the time ahead of you will be challenging—physically, emotionally, and spiritually—remember that veterans and their families have a unique understanding of the meaning of courage.

Working through the past

Each veteran is unique, with a lifetime of memories, stories, and achievements. At the same time, veterans share a common experience regardless of when and where they served. The rigors of military training, the bonds developed among service members, long separations from family and loved ones, and the harsh stress of combat all form an important part of a veteran's character. Memories and intense emotions about those experiences commonly resurface at

the end of life, sometimes to the surprise of family members who never knew about them.

At VITAS, our goal is to make sure our veteran patients feel as comfortable and safe as possible. These intense emotions can be very upsetting to patients and their families—especially if the veteran was reticent about their military service in the past. Often it is helpful for veterans to talk about those experiences and emotions in order to come to terms with them.

We provide our hospice staff with ongoing training to help them better understand and address the issues faced by veterans and their families. This includes VITAS clinical staff, as well as our skilled social workers and chaplains, who can help and counsel patients and their families. In addition, VITAS' veteran volunteers play a valuable role by listening, understanding, and empathizing in ways even family members sometimes cannot. While it's never possible to change the past, it is possible to change a veteran's relationship with it—and to make his or her end-of-life journey more peaceful.



Honoring veterans' end-of-life needs

Because of the intense memories and emotions surrounding military service—especially wartime service—veterans may exhibit certain clinical and psychosocial issues more often than other hospice patients. Even if a patient successfully overcame military trauma during the course of a lifetime, in some cases, symptoms of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can arise at the end of life. These can be very distressing to veterans and their loved ones.

At VITAS, our goal is to make sure that our veteran patients feel safe and secure at the end of life. That's why we feel it is so important to acknowledge veterans' emotional concerns, not dismiss them. Even if they're only memories, they're very real to the person experiencing them. VITAS has a generation of insight into helping veteran patients and their families work through these issues, and we're prepared to respond appropriately to challenging clinical issues while placing patients' feelings of comfort and security first.

Fortunately, not all patients face these issues. If they should arise, however, it's important to know that you're not alone, and that VITAS is by your side with the knowledge and understanding to provide the help you need.



Veteran-specific psychosocial conditions

Many veterans did not serve in active combat, or did not sustain lasting military trauma. Many who did have been able to overcome it. For some veterans at the end of life, however, intense military experiences can reoccupy the forefront of consciousness. Sometimes, clinical symptoms can mimic those of PTSD, including:

- Traumatic recollections
- Flashbacks
- Hypervigilance
- Hyperarousal and agitation
- Nightmares

Some veterans may also have been subject to sexual abuse during the time they served, whether in wartime or not, which can create lasting trauma. Your VITAS team will be communicating with you on an ongoing basis, but it's important to let us know if a veteran patient experiences any of these symptoms, seems depressed, talks about suicide, or is having substance abuse problems. We know how to help.

Veterans Benefits Considerations

Sharing our expertise with veteran patients

At VITAS, our commitment to veterans and their families doesn't end with compassionate hospice care, or even with bereavement and grief support, which we provide to families for at least 13 months following the death of a loved one. We also want to ease the burden that veterans and their families face by ensuring they receive appropriate benefits, which in many cases amount to significant financial assistance.

As one of the nation's largest hospice care providers, VITAS has been able to devote extensive resources to developing an understanding of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the three administrative organizations. We can acquaint patients and families with benefits to which they may be entitled, help them navigate the VA, and introduce them to organizations that can provide further assistance with benefits questions and applications.

Understanding veterans benefits

In recognition of the service you have given your country, the United States government provides a number of important benefits to veterans and their families, including service-connected benefits, benefits for survivors, benefits for disabled veterans, and benefits for veterans whose countable income falls below yearly limits set by law.

Many patients who come to VITAS for hospice care already have their veterans benefits in place. In some cases, however, veterans and their families are unaware of the benefits for which they are eligible and of how to apply for them. Understanding how the VA works and how to approach the applications process can be daunting under the best of circumstances, and can seem overwhelming when added to the stress of dealing with life-limiting illness. The following pages

contain helpful contact information for a variety of veterans services. If you need assistance, your VITAS team can help you find the appropriate web address or phone number.

Helping hands

Every VITAS program across the nation has hospice team members who are devoted to addressing the needs of veterans and their families, and each team includes a skilled social worker who is also knowledgeable about benefits issues. We can help identify potential eligibilities and coordinate with the VA, veteran service organizations, and other local and state agencies to help families acquire their benefits. Our goal is to help eligible patients and families access the veterans benefits system during a time of emotional hardship.

The first step: Obtaining separation papers

A copy of the veteran's separation papers, called a DD 214, is required to prove eligibility for VA benefits (including burial and memorial benefits, which are discussed on the next page). If you do not already have a copy in your possession, you can obtain one free of charge with a written or online request to the National Personnel Records Center. VITAS has the necessary experience and familiarity with the VA to address time-sensitive matters and facilitate appropriate care.

Types of veterans benefits

There are several types of benefits for which veterans and their families may be eligible that can reduce the financial burden for end-of-life patients and their survivors. While some of those benefits are discussed briefly on the following page, your VITAS team can help you identify any additional benefits for which you may be eligible and assist you with the application process.



Replacing lost medals

At the end of life, many veterans feel it is important to talk about their military experiences to recapture their memories and achievements. While some service members prefer to forget the memories associated with wartime awards, passing on hard-won service medals to family members can be a source of pride for many others; and for families, those medals are an important way to remember and honor the sacrifices made by their loved ones after they have passed.

If cherished medals have gotten lost over the years, it is possible to have them replaced with a written request to the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC). Let a VITAS team member or volunteer know that you'd like to obtain replacement medals, and we'll help you complete the proper form and submit it to the NPRC.

Survivors benefits and death pension

Even if a veteran died after active duty, the VA often provides assistance to the surviving spouse and dependents if they meet certain eligibility requirements. The death pension is a need-based benefit paid to a surviving spouse and eligible children of a veteran who served during a wartime period. Combat service is not required.

Veteran pension benefits, including aid and attendance (non-service-connected)

The VA provides pension benefits to wartime veterans with limited or no income as well as veterans who are permanently and totally disabled. While there are a number of specific eligibility requirements, the veteran need not have been rated for a service-connected illness or condition to be eligible. Surviving spouses and dependents may also be eligible.

Veteran compensation benefits (service-connected)

The VA provides substantial assistance to veterans who became ill or injured during active duty and as they continue to decline. These are known as compensation benefits. If a veteran's death was caused by a service-related condition, surviving spouses and dependents may also be eligible for benefits.

Let us help

Understanding potential benefits, as well as eligibility requirements, can be a complicated process. Likewise, establishing a service-connected condition can be difficult and time-consuming depending on the situation. Your VITAS team can help you obtain information about potential benefits, assess challenges, and connect with a veteran service officer to engage the VA and community resources for further assistance.

Burial Planning and Memorial Benefits for Veterans



The importance of planning ahead

Burial and funeral arrangements are difficult to think about when you are facing a life-limiting illness. You may be reluctant to discuss your wishes, or you may have never considered your options at all.

Many veterans are comforted by the assurance that, in most cases, they are eligible for military funeral honors and a burial in a VA National Cemetery, alongside other men and women who served their country. Even if a veteran chooses to be buried in a private cemetery, some of the burial expenses may be eligible for reimbursement, depending on a number of qualifying factors.

Regardless of where a veteran is buried, VA benefits are not automatic. The veteran must meet certain eligibility requirements, and some benefits must be requested or scheduled ahead of time. In some cases of terminal illness, requests/claims may be expedited. At VITAS, we're always available to offer guidance and advice, and to coordinate with the VA and local providers so they can assist you with the arrangements you decide upon.

Burial in a VA National Cemetery

Veterans who are discharged under conditions other than dishonorable are entitled to burial in a VA National Cemetery—and in most cases, surviving spouses are as well. Many veterans consider it an honor to be buried in a military cemetery. They take pride in knowing that they will become a part of our national heritage, and that their resting place will always be honored and beautifully maintained.

Veterans may not reserve a space in a VA National Cemetery ahead of time, so gravesites in any particular cemetery are assigned on a space-available basis. Burials in national cemeteries include a gravesite for casketed or inurned remains, the opening and closing of the grave, a headstone or marker, and perpetual care of the gravesite.



Private burial allowances

If a burial elsewhere than a VA National Cemetery is desired, the VA may pay a small burial and/or funeral allowance for eligible veterans. In most cases, the allowance can range from a few hundred dollars to as much as \$2,000 for service-connected deaths.

To be eligible for the allowance, the veteran must be discharged under conditions other than dishonorable and must meet one of several other eligibility requirements. If you're considering a private burial, talk to your VITAS social worker for assistance in determining whether your family is eligible for the allowance.

Military funeral honors

Honorably discharged veterans are eligible for military funeral honors. The ceremony honors the veteran's service and includes the folding and presentation of the American flag and the performance of "Taps." Military funeral honors are conducted at the family's preferred setting by uniformed Armed Forces personnel, at least one of whom is a member of the branch in which the veteran served.

Headstones, flags, memorial items, and Presidential Memorial Certificates

In addition to the benefits described above, government headstones, United States flags, memorial items, and Presidential Memorial Certificates are available to veterans and their families. VITAS social workers and many funeral home directors are aware of these benefits, and can often help you obtain them. Be sure to ask if you have questions or need assistance.

Headstones or markers

While veterans' caskets and urns are never free (even in national cemetery burials), veterans are eligible for government headstones or markers no matter where they are laid to rest. The VA will furnish the upright headstone or flat marker at no charge to any cemetery in the world, but it must be requested in advance.

United States flags

To decorate the resting place of any veteran, the government provides a flag that is given to the family after the funeral or interment. Flags must be requested and can be obtained with the veteran's separation papers at any post office or funeral home.

Memorial items

Veterans may be eligible for other memorial items that can be affixed to a headstone or placed in the ground near the place of rest.

Presidential Memorial Certificates

These certificates are signed by the current president and honor the veteran's service to the United States. You can apply for the certificate at the VA in person, online, or by mail.

Special Resources for Veterans

VITAS: Your primary resource

VITAS is honored to serve our veteran patients by providing dignified, compassionate end-of-life care and bereavement support to veterans and their families. As we've emphasized throughout this guide, we hope you will consider us your primary resource for any and all service-related questions and concerns. Even if you have a need that falls beyond our own capabilities, we have the resources and relationships to connect you to someone who can help you quickly, with sensitivity for your circumstances. Always feel free to call us first. **Twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year, VITAS is there for our veterans at 866.791.2229.**

Reaching out to the larger community

In order to ensure that all avenues of assistance are open to our veteran patients, VITAS works closely with the VA, state and local departments of veterans affairs, and veterans service organizations (VSOs). These government agencies and non-government organizations provide invaluable resources for veterans and their families, including benefits assistance, community service, and support groups.

You may already hold a membership with a VSO. If so, you are welcome to continue using the channels you are familiar with for your service-related questions. However, if you prefer, VITAS has extensive contacts and can always help facilitate any requests to meet your needs.

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs

The VA administers and oversees all veterans benefits, and it has a number of resources that provide important information about assistance for veterans. Visit its website at www.va.gov for general information, or ask your VITAS veteran specialist for help navigating benefits, burial and memorial services, and healthcare.

Meet Your VITAS Team

Hospice team members

VITAS provides specialized training to our staff on the unique end-of-life issues veteran patients and families face, so they are knowledgeable and sympathetic about veterans' specialized needs. Every VITAS hospice team includes a physician, registered nurse, home health aide, chaplain, and social worker.

Our social workers can help with benefits questions and applications, and provide emotional support for veteran patients and their families. In addition, many VITAS programs have a dedicated liaison who has a special understanding of veterans benefits.

Veteran volunteers

Volunteers are another important component of the VITAS hospice team, and are often available to sit by the bedside, visit veterans in their homes or living facilities, lend an ear, and participate in special bedside salute ceremonies. VITAS strives to make volunteers who are veterans themselves available to our veteran patients. As former members of the military, they can often empathize in a way that other members of the hospice team and even family members cannot.

State and local veterans resources

Each state has its own department of veterans affairs and many counties have county veteran service officers to assist with both state and federal veterans benefits. In the experience of VITAS, both of these state and county resources can be extraordinarily helpful. If you need help contacting your state department of veterans affairs, talk to your VITAS social worker or another member of your hospice team. In many cases, we can work with them on your behalf.

Veterans service organizations

Veterans service organizations are non-government organizations that support veterans and promote their interests in communities and among local, state, and federal governments. There are dozens of VSOs, and some are chartered by the VA to provide benefits assistance. Many unite veterans who served in particular wars or come from a similar ethnic background or region. You can access the VA's comprehensive directory of VSOs at www.va.gov/vso/.

The following pages contain helpful contact information for a variety of veterans services. If you need assistance, your VITAS team can help you find the appropriate web address or phone number, as well as help you fill out any necessary forms.

Veterans Administration toll-free phone numbers

- VA Benefits – 1-800-827-1000
- Healthcare Benefits and Enrollment – 1-877-222-8387

- Status of Headstones and Markers – 1-800-697-6947
- Suicide Hotline – 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- Special Issues (Gulf War-Agent Orange-Ionizing Radiation, etc.) – 1-800-749-8387
- National Cemetery Administration - 800-535-1117

Important websites

- General Veteran Information – www.va.gov
- Veteran Benefits Information – www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/
- Burial and Memorial Benefits – www.cem.va.gov
- VA Healthcare Information – www.va.gov/health/
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – www.ptsd.va.gov
- Vet Center Program – www.vetcenter.va.gov

Obtain military separation papers (DD 214 or equivalent)

- Website – www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records

Replacing lost medals

- Request medal replacement by using the eVetRecs online application – www.archives.gov/veterans/replace-medals.html#how
- For paper application, use SF-180 and mail or fax
- For online SF-180 application – www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/public/awards-and-decorations.html



VA benefits

- Website – www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/
- To obtain correct forms use www.va.gov/vaforms/

Other benefit forms

VA Pension, Aid, Attendance and Medical Expense

- VA Form 21P-527EZ, 21P-8416, 21-2680

VA Health Enrollment

- VA Form 10-10EZ

Spousal Pension, Aid and Attendance

- VA Form 21-22, 21P-534EZ, 21P-8416, 21-2680

DIC or Accrued Benefits

- VA Form 21-22, 21P-534EZ

Compensation for Service-Connected Injury

- VA Form 21-22, 21-526EZ

Burial and Funeral Allowance

- VA Form 21P-530

Advance Directive and Living Will

- VA Form 10-0137

Authorization to Disclose Personal Information to a Third Party

- VA Form 21-0845

Statement in Support of Claim

- VA Form 21-4138

Intent to File a Claim for Compensation/Pension

- VA Form 21-0966

Burial in a VA National Cemetery

Eligible veterans, spouses, and dependent children may be buried at any of the 131 national cemeteries, with burial costs covered by the VA.

- Website – www.cem.va.gov
- For eligibility check website – www.cem.va.gov/burial_benefits/eligible.asp
Generally, veterans who die on active duty or veterans who were discharged under conditions other than dishonorable are eligible. Spouses and dependent children may also be eligible.
- Your funeral director will often be able to assist in scheduling a burial–
www.cem.va.gov/burial_benefits/need.asp

Private burial allowance

Eligible veterans choosing to be buried in a private cemetery may still make use of burial allowances and other memorial benefits.

- Burial in a private cemetery –
www.cem.va.gov/cem/burial_benefits/private_cemetery.asp
- Burial and Interment Allowances –
www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets/burials/Burial.pdf



Military funeral honors

Families or funeral directors may request military funeral honors on behalf of a deceased veteran.

Department of VA National Cemetery Administration staff can also assist in arranging military funeral honors at a VA National Cemetery.

- Website – www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets/burials/Burial.pdf
- Check website for eligibility. Generally, veterans who die on active duty or veterans who were discharged under conditions other than dishonorable are eligible.

Headstones or markers

The VA will furnish an upright headstone or flat marker at no charge to any cemetery in the world, but it must be requested in advance.

- Website – www.cem.va.gov/hmm
- Check website for eligibility. Generally, veterans who die on active duty or veterans who were discharged under conditions other than dishonorable are eligible.

- File a claim for a standard headstone – www.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA40-1330.pdf
- VA 40-1330 is submitted by the next of kin or representative.

United States flags

A United States flag is provided, at no cost, to decorate the resting place of a deceased eligible veteran. Generally, the flag is given to the next of kin after the funeral or interment.

- Explore eligibility and request a flag – www.cem.va.gov/burial_benefits/burial_flags.asp
- Check website for eligibility. Generally, veterans who die on active duty or veterans who were discharged under conditions other than dishonorable are eligible.
- You may apply by completing VA form 27-2008. Your funeral director or VITAS veteran specialist will be able to assist you.

Presidential Memorial Certificates

The Presidential Memorial Certificate is signed by the current president and provided to honor the memory of honorably discharged deceased veterans.

- Website – www.cem.va.gov/pmc.asp
- Eligible recipients include the next of kin and loved ones of honorably discharged deceased veterans. More than one certificate may be issued.
- You may apply by completing VA Form 40-0247 and mailing or faxing as indicated on the form. Ask your funeral director or VITAS team for assistance.

High-profile community veteran service organizations

The following VSOs provide support to veterans who represent a diverse array of backgrounds, identities, and conflicts served. This list is not exhaustive; your VITAS team can connect you with special organizations that relate more specifically to your unique needs.



Disabled American Veterans

Founded in 1920, the DAV is dedicated to disabled veterans and their families. www.dav.org

American Legion

The American Legion was founded in 1919 as a patriotic organization for wartime veterans. www.legion.org

Veterans of Foreign Wars

The VFW dates to 1899 and pledges to “honor the dead through helping the living.”

www.vfw.org

Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America

The IAVA is the first VSO devoted to veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. www.iava.org

National Association for Black Veterans

NABVETS addresses issues concerning black and minority veterans. www.nabvets.org

Vietnam Veterans of America

The VVA is devoted exclusively to Vietnam-era veterans and their families. www.vva.org.

American Veterans for Equal Rights

AVER informs, supports, and advocates for LGBTQ veterans nationwide. www.aver.us

Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America

The JWV provides a voice to Jewish uniformed service members and veterans in the US. www.jwv.org

American Veterans

AMVETS aims to enhance and safeguard entitlements for all American veterans who served honorably.

www.amvets.org

Military Order of the Purple Heart

The Order supports and protects the interests of Purple Heart recipients. www.purpleheart.org