

How do Seniors who are Veterans file a claim for Service-Connected Disability with the VA?



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Veterans of all ages should ask a Veterans Service Officer (VSO) or a VA-accredited Attorney or Claims Agent to explain their veteran benefits and how to claim those benefits. The VA trusts these professionals because they are background-checked, must pass an examination, must take continuing education courses, are certified by the VA, the State, and a Veterans Service Organization in the VA claims processes.

VSOs work on behalf of veterans, service members, and their dependents and survivors. Their services are free. Attorneys and Agents usually charge for their services. Learn more at <https://www.va.gov/disability/get-help-filing-claim/> and <https://www.benefits.va.gov/vso/>.

Filing a claim for VA benefits can be complicated and confusing. VSOs take the confusion out of the process. Veterans can find SC County VSOs at <https://scdva.sc.gov/county-veterans-affairs-offices> and Georgia VSOs at <https://veterans.georgia.gov/locations/veterans-field-service-office-near-you>.

Veterans can also search for VA-accredited representatives at VA Regional Offices at <https://www.benefits.va.gov/vso/varo.asp>.

Veterans wanting to file a claim for a service-connected disability should read:

- “Eligibility for VA Disability Benefits” <https://www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/>.
- Types of VA Disability Claims and When to File” <https://www.va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim/when-to-file/>.
- “How to File a Disability Claim” <https://www.va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim/>.
- “Fully Developed Claims Program” <https://www.va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim/evidence-needed/fully-developed-claims/>.
- “About VA Form 21-526EZ” <https://www.va.gov/find-forms/about-form-21-526ez/>.
- “Evidence Needed for Your Disability Claim” <https://www.va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim/evidence-needed/>.
- “Submit a Lay or Witness Statement to Support a VA Claim” <https://www.va.gov/supporting-forms-for-claims/lay-witness-statement-form-21-10210/introduction>.
- “All the referenced web pages in the above web pages.

You can file a claim with the VA for service-connected disabilities online, by mail, and in person. You also have a choice of using one of the two VA claims processes:

- The VA’s Fully Developed Disability Claim (FDC) Process or
- The Standard Disability Claim Process.

If your claim is approved, the date of award of disability will be the date you filed the claim or the date you formally notified the VA of your Intent-to-File.

To file under the VA FDC Program, for disabilities not

previously claimed and worsening conditions, follow the instructions at <https://www.va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim/evidence-needed/fully-developed-claims/> and <https://www.va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim/evidence-needed/>.

If you have or can gather all the evidence and supporting documents needed to file your claim, the FDC process is normally the preferred way to file because the VA will expedite the claims process.

Under the FDC process, you will need to turn in the information and evidence at the same time as you file your claim. If you turn in more evidence after you send in your fully developed claim, the VA will process it as a standard claim.

The VA will give your standard claim the same attention as an FDC claim. However, the process will be slowed down while the VA waits for you to submit all of your evidence or waits until the VA can obtain those documents. For the VA to consider your claim fully developed, you need to:

- Submit a completed Application VA Form 21-526EZ found at <https://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/VBA-21-526ez-ARE.pdf>.
- Submit all evidence and supporting documents along with your claim.
- Certify there is no more evidence the VA might need.
- Go to any VA medical exams required.

To file a claim, you will need to follow the instructions at <https://www.va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim/> and send the VA the following documents:

1. Your DD214 or other separation documents.
2. All private medical records related to the claimed condition, like reports and letters from your own doctor or X-rays and other test results.
3. Records of medical treatment received for the claimed condition while serving.
4. Any military personnel records (Purple Heart Award, Line of Duty Investigation, Safety Report, Performance Evaluations, Orders, etc.) you have that relate to the claimed condition, and information about any related health records that you don’t have but that the VA can request from a facility like a VA medical center.
5. You can also submit letters (lay witness statements) from family members, friends, clergy members, and those you served with that can tell the VA more about your claimed condition and how and when it happened.
6. Any supporting research that was done that supports your claim of service connection.

You have up to one year from the date the VA receives your claim to turn in evidence. If the VA decides your claim before this, you’ll have the rest of the one-year period to turn in more information to support your claim.