

Assistance for Veterans and Their Families

A number of NAMI members use the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and/or military facilities for psychiatric care for themselves or a family member. Since 1989 NAMI has advocated on behalf of these populations because they are often not included in the overall civilian planning and development of community-based treatment and services for which they, as citizens, ought to be eligible.

What are some examples of how NAMI advocates on behalf of veterans, active-duty military, and/or their dependents with severe mental illness?

- In 1990 NAMI's alert helped reverse the congressional decision to cut \$800,000,000 in psychiatric care for dependents of active-duty military.
- In 1991 NAMI supported the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) class-action lawsuit to restore \$125,000,000 for 13,500 "incompetent veterans."
- Since 1994 NAMI has had representatives on the VA Undersecretary for Health's Special Committee for the Seriously Mentally Ill Veteran.
- Since 1994 NAMI has sent presenters to the VA National Training Program continuing education workshops ("Strengthening Systems for the Primary Care of Veterans with Psychiatric Disorders").
- Each year NAMI provides expert testimony at congressional committee hearings regarding veterans with serious mental illness.

What can NAMI do to help a veteran and his/her family?

- NAMI can provide expertise in developing a family support group at your local Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center.
- NAMI can provide the latest data about serious mental illness and serve as an information clearinghouse.
- NAMI's Homeless and Missing service can assist families of the 200,000 homeless veterans with chronic mental illness.

I am a veteran. How can I or my family get help for my medical problems?

Medical care (including psychiatric care) is just one of the many benefits and services to which a veteran may be entitled. However, the federal government does not grant

veteran's benefits automatically. You must apply for them. Eligibility must be verified and justified.

How do I become eligible for medical care?

Consult your local telephone directory under United States Government, Department of Veterans Affairs, for the number to reach a VA representative. Toll-free telephone service is available in all 50 states, Washington D.C., and Puerto Rico.

You must supply information that you were honorably discharged (Form DD-214). You must complete a financial statement (a financial means test) for the past year. This statement will be audited by the IRS.

Upon verification of your discharge status and financial status, you should qualify for inpatient and outpatient medical care. Note, however, that not all benefits may be available to you if you enlisted for the first time on or after September 8, 1980, and have not completed at least two years of that enlistment. For officers, the two year requirement applies on or after October 17, 1981.

My psychiatric disorder began while I was on active duty. Am I eligible for financial compensation in addition to VA medical care?

VA pays compensation if you are disabled by injury or disease incurred in or aggravated by active service in the line of duty. Payments are based on the degree of disability. VA pays additional money for your dependents if your service-connected disabilities are evaluated as 30 percent or more disabling.

In addition, if you are 30 percent or more disabled and your spouse is in need of regular aid, an increased dependency allowance is payable for your spouse. Remember--getting service-connected compensation (or a nonservice-connected pension) can be a difficult and complicated process.

Qualifying for VA medical care does not automatically qualify you for financial compensation or pension. When in doubt, apply! You may want to get a representative (see below) to assist you in applying for these benefits. A rating as low as 10 percent may qualify for financial benefits.

All service-connected veterans rated 50 percent or higher and low-income nonservice-connected veterans are eligible for free inpatient and outpatient care at VA medical centers and clinics. If VA facilities and resources are available, VA may provide medical care for higher-income nonservice-connected veterans. They will be billed \$39/outpatient visit; \$719 per inpatient admission; plus \$10/day nursing care. Check with your VA medical center to see if this care is available.

Where can I go to get someone to represent me in applying for financial benefits?

NAMI in the past has worked closely with the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) organization. DAV is independent of the federal government. DAV will help you file your claim for benefits by building your case from the ground up--reviewing all pertinent laws, regulations, precedents, and medical histories.

DAV prepares claim forms and briefs. They help you assemble the required paperwork. If necessary, DAV will represent you before government boards. They also review government decisions, take appropriate action, and advise you if appeals are warranted.

Remember--NAMI does not have staff trained to provide this comprehensive representation. While we are confident in recommending DAV, there are a number of other veterans' service organizations (VSOs) which will represent you without charge: AMVETS, American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and others. NAMI can consult with your representative to provide expertise about mental illness.

I have lost my military discharge papers. How can I get duplicate copies?

Contact the VA to see if your records are on file. If not, the VA or your VSO representative can provide the form to help you obtain records from National Personnel Records Center/Military Personnel Records/9700 Page Boulevard/St. Louis MO 63132-5100

How can I contact a veterans' service organization (VSO)?

Call your local VA representative, your state/county veterans' office, or contact:

[AMVETS](#)

4647 Forbes Boulevard
Lanham, MD 20706
301/459-9600

[Paralyzed Veterans of America](#)

801 Eighteenth Street, N.W.
Washington D.C. 20006
202/872-1300

[Disabled American Veterans](#)

807 Maine Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20024
202/554-3506

[Veterans of Foreign Wars](#)
200 Maryland Avenue, N.E.
Washington, DC 20002
202/543-2239

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