



WHEN A VETERAN PASSES AWAY:

A Planning Guide for the Surviving Family





PRODUCED BY:

Vietnam Veterans of America - New York State Council and
The New York State Tribute Foundation, Inc., an affiliate of the
New York State Funeral Directors Association, Inc.

WHEN A VETERAN PASSES AWAY

One of the more difficult tasks a surviving family may face after the death of their beloved Veteran is identifying, locating and completing the numerous claim forms to obtain survivors' benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The anxiety and fear of the unknown — who to call, what to do or where to go for help — can be a daunting experience.

To avoid such a situation, and to ensure that those who have proudly served our nation receive all the benefits to which they are entitled, Veterans and their families are encouraged to organize their personal and military records as part of their regular estate planning. While your funeral director can assist you with the necessary paperwork at the time of need, gathering and storing these important documents now will help ease the burden when a death occurs.

Veterans of the United States armed forces may be eligible for a broad range of programs and services provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Eligibility for most VA benefits is based upon discharge from active military service under other than dishonorable conditions. Reservists and National Guard members, as well as their spouses and dependent children, may also be eligible for VA burial and memorial benefits if they were entitled to retirement pay at the time of death, or would have been if they had been over age 60.



IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS

The following documents will be needed when applying for benefits related to a Veteran's death:

- Veteran's discharge certificate (DD Form 214) or DD Form 1300 "Report of Casualty" (provided by your Service Casualty Officer)
- Veteran's Social Security number
- Veteran's death certificate (if the Veteran did not die in a VA health care facility)
- Veteran's birth certificate (to determine parents' benefits)
- Marriage Certificate
- Divorce Decree(s) (if any)
- Birth certificate, adoption and/or custody documents for each of the Veteran's children
- Social Security numbers for all family members
- Wills and Deeds of Trust
- Government life insurance policies

MILITARY RECORDS

Veterans and next-of-kin of deceased Veterans have the same rights to full access to military records. Next-of-kin are the surviving spouse who has not remarried, children, parents, or siblings of the deceased Veteran. Most Veterans and their next-of-kin can obtain free copies of their military records by visiting www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records.

eBENEFITS

eBenefits is an online portal that provides resources and self-service capabilities to servicemembers, Veterans, and their families to apply, research, access, and manage their VA and military benefits and personal information through a secure Internet connection. Veterans and their families may register for an eBenefits account at www.ebenefits.va.gov.



FEDERAL (VA) BURIAL AND MEMORIAL BENEFITS

Veterans discharged from active duty under conditions other than dishonorable and servicemembers who die while on active duty, active duty for training, as well as the spouses and dependent children of Veterans and active duty servicemembers, may be eligible for VA burial and memorial benefits. These benefits include:

- **Burial in a VA National Cemetery** — Eligible Veterans, their spouse and dependents can be buried in a VA National Cemetery at no cost to the family.
- **Headstones and Markers** — Eligible Veterans are provided with an inscribed headstone or marker at no cost to the family.
- **Presidential Memorial Certificates** — Serves to recognize the military service of honorably discharged deceased Veterans, and will be issued upon request of the family.
- **Military Funeral Honors** — At the family's request, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) will provide military funeral honors consisting of folding and presentation of the U.S. flag and the playing of "Taps."
- **Burial Flags** — An American flag can drape an eligible Veteran's casket; your funeral director will obtain this from the VA.
- **Reimbursement of Burial Expenses** — If the family has already paid for the Veteran's burial or funeral, and has not been reimbursed by another government agency or some other source (such as the deceased Veteran's employer), the VA may reimburse the family for their out-of-pocket expenses.

BURIAL IN A VA NATIONAL CEMETERY

Burial in a VA national cemetery is available for eligible Veterans, their spouse and dependents at no cost to the family. Burial includes the gravesite, grave-liner, opening and closing of the grave, a headstone or marker, and perpetual care as part of a national shrine.

Burial options are limited to those available at a specific cemetery, but may include in-ground casket, interment of cremated remains in a columbarium, in-ground or in a scatter garden. Gravesites cannot be reserved, and the VA does not normally conduct burials on weekends. Eligible spouses and dependents may be buried even if they predecease the Veteran.

Your funeral director will work with the National Cemetery Scheduling Office to make burial arrangements in a National Cemetery.

NATIONAL CEMETERIES IN NEW YORK STATE

- **Bath National Cemetery**
Bath, NY
- **Calverton National Cemetery**
Calverton, NY
- **Woodlawn National Cemetery****
Elmira, NY
- **Long Island National Cemetery****
Farmingdale, NY
- **Gerald B.H. Solomon Saratoga National Cemetery**
Schuylerville, NY



***** These cemeteries have space available for cremated remains in a columbarium only. However, casketed remains of subsequent family members in the same gravesite of a previously interred family member can be accommodated.***

BURIAL IN A PRIVATE CEMETERY

Burial benefits available for Veterans buried in a private cemetery may include a Government headstone, marker or medallion, a burial flag and a Presidential Memorial Certificate at no cost to the family. Some Veterans may also be eligible for Burial Allowances. VA benefits are not available to spouses and dependents buried in a private cemetery.

BURIAL ALLOWANCE

VA burial allowances are flat rate monetary benefits that are generally paid at the maximum amount authorized by law for an eligible Veteran's burial and funeral costs. A VA regulation change in 2014 simplified the program to process payments for eligible survivors quickly and efficiently. Automatic payments are now made to the eligible surviving spouse upon notification of the Veteran's death, without the need to submit a claim. The VA may grant additional benefits, including the plot or interment allowance and transportation allowance, if it receives a claim for these benefits.

For service-related deaths, the VA will pay a maximum amount of \$2,000 toward burial. If the Veteran is buried in a VA national cemetery, some or all of the cost of transporting the deceased to the nearest national cemetery with available gravesites may be reimbursed. There is no time limit for filing reimbursement claims in service-related deaths.

When the cause of death is not service-related, the reimbursements are generally described as two payments: a burial/funeral expense allowance and a plot/interment allowance.

Your funeral director can help determine if your Veteran is eligible for a burial allowance. A complete list of eligibility requirements is available at www.benefits.va.gov.

HEADSTONES, MARKERS AND MEDALLIONS

Veterans, active duty service members and retired Reservists and National Guard service members are eligible for an inscribed headstone or marker for their grave at any cemetery – national, State Veterans, or private. Headstones and markers are provided for eligible spouses and dependents of Veterans only if they are buried in a national or state Veterans cemetery.

The VA may furnish a government headstone or marker even if the grave is already marked with a private one, or the VA may furnish a medallion instead of a headstone or marker for Veterans' graves in private cemeteries when the grave is already marked with a privately-purchased headstone or marker.

Your funeral director can help you obtain VA Form 40-1330, Claim for Standard Government Headstone or Marker. There is no charge for the headstone or marker itself, however arrangements for placing it in a private cemetery are the family's responsibility and all setting fees are at private expense.

PRESIDENTIAL MEMORIAL CERTIFICATES

A Presidential Memorial Certificate (PMC) is an engraved paper certificate, signed by the current president, to honor the memory of honorably discharged Veterans who have died. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) prepares the certificates which allow the current president to express the country's grateful recognition of the Veteran's service in the United States Armed Forces. Eligible recipients include the next-of-kin and loved ones of honorably discharged deceased Veterans; more than one certificate may be provided.

To request a Presidential Memorial Certificate, eligible recipients (or someone acting on their behalf) may apply at any VA regional office or by using VA Form 40-0247. A copy of the Veteran's military discharge document (DD-214) along with a photocopy of the death certificate must be provided when submitting the request.



MILITARY FUNERAL HONORS

“Honoring Those Who Served” is the national program for providing dignified military funeral honors to Veterans who have defended our nation. Upon the family’s request, every eligible Veteran may receive a military funeral honors ceremony, to include folding and presenting the United States burial flag and the playing of Taps. A military funeral honors detail will consist of two or more uniformed military persons, with at least one being a member of the Veteran’s parent service of the armed forces; Veterans’ service organizations or volunteer groups may help provide honors.

Your funeral director will request military funeral honors on behalf of the Veteran’s family from either the U.S. Dept. of Defense, NYS Division of Military and Naval Affairs (DMNA) or the NY National Guard. It is important to inform your funeral director immediately if you would like a Military Honors Ceremony since it often takes 48 hours to process and implement a request for an honors ceremony.

BURIAL FLAGS

A United States flag is provided, at no cost, to drape the casket or accompany the urn of a deceased Veteran who honorably served in the U.S. Armed Forces. A flag is provided as a symbol of honor and remembrance of a Veteran's military service to his or her country.

Generally, after its use at the funeral service, the flag is presented to the next-of-kin as a keepsake. When there is no next-of-kin, a close friend may receive a flag from the VA. For national VA cemeteries with an Avenue of Flags, a Veteran's family may donate the burial flag of their loved one to be flown on patriotic holidays.



Your funeral director will assist you in obtaining a flag from the local U.S. Post Office or a regional VA office.

NYS SUPPLEMENTAL BURIAL ALLOWANCE

To honor servicemembers who gave their lives in combat, New York State offers surviving family members a Supplemental Burial Allowance of up to \$6,000. This allowance is used to defray funeral and burial expenses not covered by the federal government. A family member must bear part or all costs of the servicemember's funeral and/or interment to be eligible.

Applications for the Supplemental Burial Allowance are available online at veterans.ny.gov, by calling the NYS Division of Veterans' Affairs helpline at: (888) 838-7697, or from any of the State Veterans Counseling Offices.

VET CENTERS IN NEW YORK STATE

Vet Centers are community-based facilities that offer a wide range of free services to Veterans and their families, including bereavement counseling, outreach and education and assistance with benefits.

There are Vet Centers located throughout New York State, including:

- Albany
- Babylon
- Binghamton
- Bronx
- Brooklyn
- Buffalo
- Hicksville - Nassau
- Middletown
- New York - Harlem
- New York - Manhattan
- Rochester
- Staten Island
- Syracuse
- Watertown
- White Plains
- Woodhaven - Queens

For eligibility and to learn more about Vet Centers call a NYS Veterans Counselor toll-free at (888) 838-7697 (VETS NYS).

COUNTY BENEFITS

Benefits vary with each county in New York State. *Check with your County Veterans' Service Agency.*

COUNTY

PHONE

- Albany County(518) 447-7710
- Allegany County(585) 268-9387
- Broome County(607) 778-2147
- Cattaraugus County(716) 701-3298
- Cayuga County(315) 253-1281
- Chautauqua County(716) 661-8255
- Chemung County(607) 737-5445
- Chenango CountyNONE
- Clinton County(518) 565-4720
- Columbia County(518) 828-3610
- Cortland County(607) 753-5014
- Delaware County(607) 746-2334
- Dutchess County(845) 486-2060
- Erie County(716) 858-6363
- Essex County NONE
- Franklin County(518) 481-1538
- Fulton County(518) 736-5650
- Genesee County(585) 815-7905
- Greene County(518) 943-3703
- Hamilton County(518) 736-5650 *(Contracts with Fulton County)*
- Herkimer County(315) 867-1127
- Jefferson County(315) 785-3086
- Lewis County(315) 376-5316
- Livingston County(585) 243-7960
- Madison County(315) 366-2395
- Monroe County(585) 753-6040
- Montgomery County(518) 853-8152
- Nassau County(516) 572-6565
- New York City(212) 442-4171



COUNTY

PHONE

- Niagara County(716) 438-4090
- Oneida County(315) 798-5830
- Onondaga County(315) 435-3217
- Ontario County(585) 396-4185
- Orange County(845) 291-2470
- Orleans County(585) 589-3219
- Oswego County(315) 591-9100
- Otsego County(607) 547-4224
- Putnam County(845) 808-1620
- Rensselaer County(518) 270-2760
- Rockland County(845) 638-5244
- St. Lawrence County(315) 386-4754
- Saratoga County(518) 884-4115
- Schenectady County(518) 377-2738
- Schoharie County(518) 295-2053
- Schuyler County(607) 535-2091
- Seneca County(315) 539-1798
- Steuben County(607) 664-2527
- Suffolk County(631) 853-8387
- Sullivan County(845) 807-0233
- Tioga County(607) 687-8227
- Tompkins CountyNONE
- Ulster County(845) 340-3190
- Warren County(518) 761-6342
- Washington County(518) 746-2470
- Wayne County(315) 946-5993
- Westchester County(914) 995-2145
- Wyoming County(585) 786-8860
- Yates County(315) 536-5196

MISCELLANEOUS BENEFITS

A Veterans counselor can answer questions about eligibility for benefits and the application procedures for any of the benefits available.

A Veteran's family may also be entitled to additional benefits such as:

1. Dependency & Indemnity Compensation (DIC)
2. Death Pension
3. Home Loan Guaranties
4. VA Life Insurance
5. Department of Defense Death Gratuity
6. Health Insurance

For more information please visit www.vba.va.gov or call toll-free (800) 827-1000.

VETERANS' ORGANIZATIONS

If your loved one was a member of a veterans' organization, such as the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans (DAV), or Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), ask your funeral director to contact the organization's service representative to arrange for a ritual service and casket bearers.

BEREAVEMENT COUNSELING

The VA offers bereavement counseling to all immediate family members including spouses, children, parents, and siblings of servicemembers who die in the line of duty while on active service. This also includes federally-activated members of the National Guard and reserve components. VA's bereavement counseling is provided at no cost in community-based Vet Centers located near the family or can oftentimes be made available in the family's home or where the family feels most comfortable.

Families may request this service by calling (202) 461-6530.

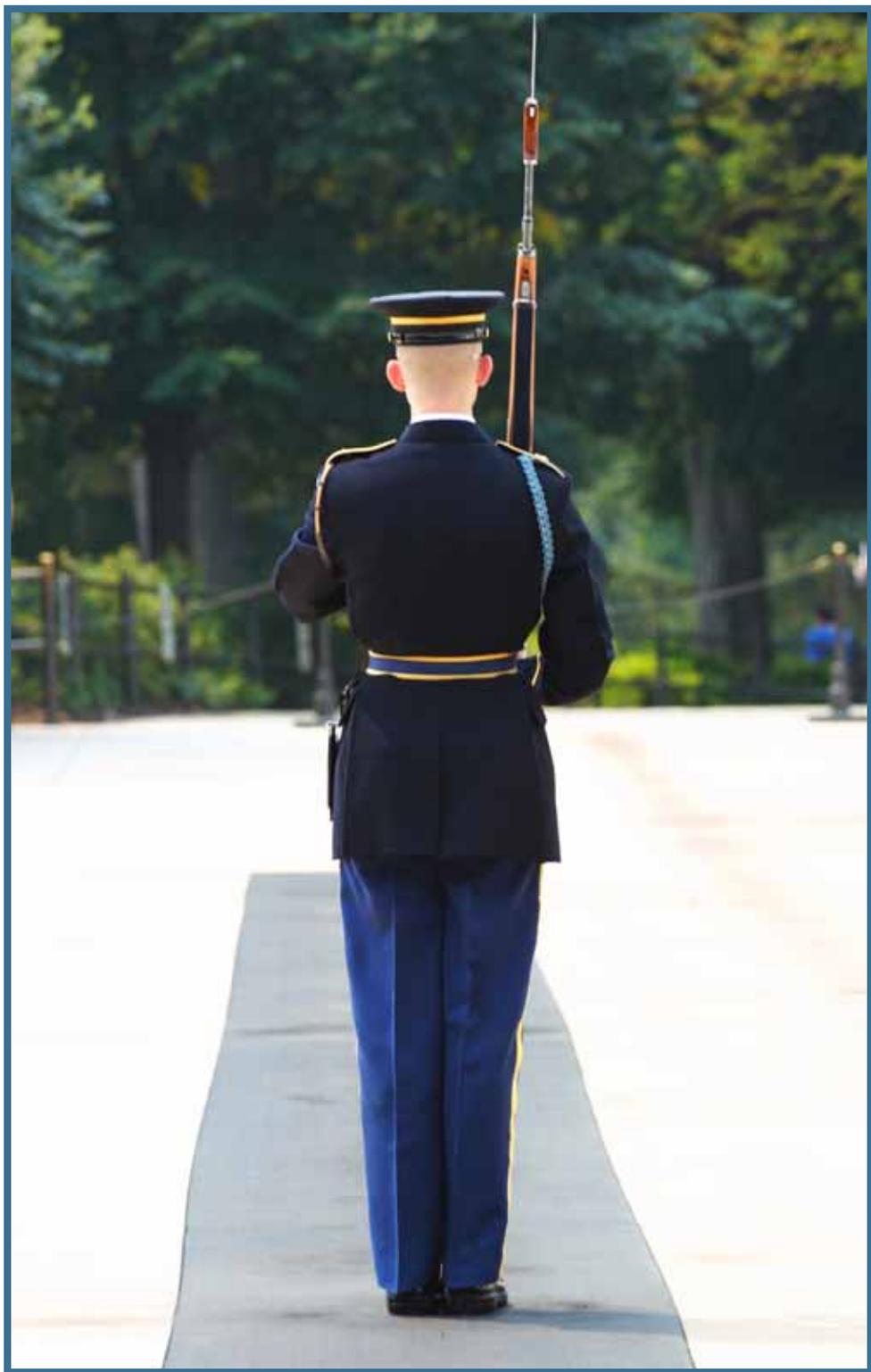
TIMING IS IMPORTANT

Any claim for VA benefits should be filed as promptly as possible to insure the earliest effective date of awarding benefits.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **VA Bereavement Counseling** (202) 461-6530
- **VA Headstones and Markers** (800) 697-6947
- **VA Life Insurance** (800) 669-8477
- **Presidential Memorial Certificate Program** (202) 565-4964
- **Telecommunication Device for the Deaf** (800) 829-4833
- **NYS Funeral Directors Association** (800) 291-2629
www.nysfda.org
- **NYS Division of Veterans' Affairs** (888) 838-7697
www.veterans.ny.gov
- **U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)** (800) 827-1000
 > VA Benefits - General www.va.gov
- **National Cemetery Administration** www.cem.va.gov
- **VA Forms** www.va.gov/vaforms
- **NYS VVA State Council** www.nyvietnamvets.org





VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA



A dedicated group of Vietnam veterans founded Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) in 1978. It is the only national Vietnam Veterans' organization congressionally chartered and exclusively dedicated to Vietnam-era veterans and their families. VVA's founding principle:

"Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another."

VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA — NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL (VVA-NYSC)



VVA-NYSC promotes and supports the full range of issues important to Vietnam veterans, to create a new identity for this generation of veterans, and to change public perception of Vietnam veterans. Our programs aggressively advocate on issues important to veterans, seek full access to quality health care for veterans, and identify the full range of disabling injuries and illnesses incurred during military service. We hold government agencies accountable for following laws mandating veterans' health care, create a positive public perception of Vietnam veterans, seek the fullest possible accounting of America's POW/MIAs, support the next generation of America's war veterans, and serve our communities. VVA-NYSC oversees 39 VVA Chapters across New York State.

NEW YORK STATE TRIBUTE FOUNDATION, INC.



The Tribute Foundation was established to advance awareness related to death, dying and bereavement by fostering a better understanding of end-of-life issues for all New Yorkers and offering support to community members in everyday situations and during times of crisis. Committed to being an agent of change, the Foundation works creatively to define issues, provide a forum to exchange ideas and be a resource for information. Its philanthropic vision is guided by its investments in consumer education and outreach, industry research, education for lifelong learning, and partnerships and collaborations.

NEW YORK STATE FUNERAL DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION, INC. (NYSFDA)



NYSFDA is the oldest association of funeral directors in the United States. Comprised of over 900 funeral firms employing more than 3300 licensed funeral directors, NYSFDA is the largest organization representing the interests of large and small funeral firms in New York State. NYSFDA is the nationally recognized leader of state funeral directors associations in the country, and is headquartered in Albany, New York.