

Disability Benefits for Veterans

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New Hampshire veterans make up more than 10% of the state's population. With the continuing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan this number will only increase. The number of veterans with disabilities is also growing. Over one-third of service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from some form of mental health disability including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), many have traumatic brain injuries, and others return with significant physical disabilities.

Veterans with "service connected" disabilities are entitled to monthly cash benefits from the Veterans Administration (VA). VA disability benefits are determined by "rating" the degree of the veteran's disability (ratings range from 0% to 100% and are calculated in 10% increments). The higher the disability rating, the larger the monthly VA benefits. Veterans can file for disability benefits through their VA Regional Office. New Hampshire's Regional Office is located in Manchester in the Norris Cotton Federal Building at 276 Chestnut Street. The toll free number for the office is 1-800-827-1000. Depending upon the circumstances, some veterans with disabilities also may receive a monthly pension benefit from the VA.

Many veterans with disabilities also may be eligible for benefits through the Social Security Administration (SSA). SSA and VA benefits are determined by different federal regulations; veterans who have received a VA disability rating will not necessarily qualify for SSA disability benefits. Veterans who have higher VA disability ratings generally are more likely to be eligible for SSA benefits than those with lower ratings. Eligible veterans who have a substantial employment history also are more likely to qualify for the SSA disability benefits. Veterans can file for Social Security disability benefits at their local Social Security office.

Those who are denied SSA benefits have a right to appeal this decision and to acquire legal representation to help with the appeal.

Many service members file for VA service-connected disability benefits before their discharge and receive a pre-discharge disability rating. However, some service-connected disabilities, like PTSD, are not always immediately evident. Veterans should know that they have the right to challenge their pre-discharge disability rating and may still apply for disability benefits after they have been discharged from the military.

The process of filing for benefits can be complicated. There are a variety of Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) that can provide assistance, including the State Veterans Council (603-624-9230) and the Disabled American Veterans (603-222-5788). Veterans seeking legal representation in the claims process can contact the Pro Bono program at the New Hampshire Bar Association (603) 624-9230 for help in finding an attorney. New Hampshire Legal Assistance also may be able to provide help through its offices in Manchester (1-800-562-3174), Concord

(1-800-921-1115), Littleton, (1-800-548- 1886), Nashua (1-800-517-0577), Portsmouth (1-800-334-3135), Claremont (1-800-562-3994), and Berlin (1-800-698-8969).

Good record keeping will help veterans through the claims process. Veterans should keep copies of all separation papers for all periods of service (e.g. DD Form 214). In applying for benefits or appealing a decision regarding benefits, veterans should keep copies of all paperwork and keep a written record of all meetings or telephone contacts, including the date and time of the contact, the person(s) spoken to, and the content of the conversation.

The Brain Injury Association of New Hampshire does not support, endorse, or recommend any product, method of treatment, or program for persons with brain injury. We endeavor to inform and believe that you have the right to know what help is available. Information within these pages consists of items that may be of interest to our community.