

VVA'S GUIDE TO PTSD

The purpose of this guide is to assist you, the veteran, or your survivor(s), in presenting your claim for benefits based on exposure to psychologically traumatic events during military service that has resulted in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It is always best to seek the assistance of an experienced veterans service representative when presenting a claim to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

This guide describes the VA's current programs for providing disability compensation to veterans who suffer from PTSD, as well as for the survivors of such veterans. Under current VA regulations, you can be paid compensation for PTSD if you currently have a clear medical diagnosis of the disorder, evidence that a sufficiently traumatic event (called a "stressor") occurred during active military service and medical evidence that the in-service stressor is causally related to your PTSD. Once the VA determines that your PTSD is service-connected, it will then decide how seriously your symptoms impair your social and industrial abilities (i.e., your capacity to start and maintain personal relationships and your ability to work).

This guide does not address treatment techniques, but does provide suggestions for obtaining the appropriate care. Additional resources are available to help you to better understand what other VA programs may be available to you.

PTSD is not a new problem. It is simply a more recent label for an age-old disorder that has been in existence since stone-age warriors were beating each other with clubs. Around 1980, the American Psychiatric Association designated PTSD to describe a delayed-stress syndrome commonly experienced by combat-veterans. This condition had previously been referred to as "shell-shock" and "war/combat neurosis". Although PTSD is often associated with Vietnam veterans, it appears in veterans of all wars and eras.

There have been many changes in the VA's rules involving PTSD since 1980 and some additional changes are expected soon as a result of new understanding about PTSD. Recent decisions by the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims have also forced changes in how the VA processes PTSD claims. It is important to keep up with these changes by accessing the VVA website (www.vva.org), as well as the VA's website (www.va.gov) for the latest information. You can also contact a VVA service representative in your area to answer any questions that you might have about PTSD or the claims adjudication process in general (www.vva.org, click on "Veterans Benefits", then on "Service Representatives" and select your state of residence).

We have included in this guide a short description of what to do if the VA denies your claim or establishes an unjust rating percentage for your disability.