

# Things to Know and Do Before a Veteran Dies

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Sadly, our time with our loved one will come to end one day. We hope that time is in the distant future, but we know that one day we will face this loss. To help prepare you and your family, the Columbus VA Palliative Care Team has developed this resource guide.

## Important Documents

**Families should have easy access to papers and documents. Some of these include:**

- Family insurance policies
- Birth certificates of the spouse and children
- The Veteran's service discharge (DD214); call (314) 801-0800 to make an emergency request. Otherwise, requests can be done online or via fax; for more information, go to [www.archives.gov/Veterans/military-service-records](http://www.archives.gov/Veterans/military-service-records)
- The Veteran's Social Security Number
- VA document(s), if any, showing the Veteran's VA claim number. A VA claim number is assigned to every Veteran as soon as he/she files for any VA benefit. Since 1974, Social Security Numbers have been assigned as claim numbers.
- A copy of the family will (not required for VA benefits)
- A copy of all marriage certificates and divorce decrees
- Location of any safety deposit box (not required by VA)

## Burial Benefits

National Cemeteries: Any Veteran discharged under conditions other than dishonorable is entitled to burial in a National Cemetery, provided space is available. In Ohio, there are two National Cemeteries open for burial of casketed or cremated remains: Dayton National Cemetery (937-262-2115) and the Ohio Western Reserve National Cemetery (330-335-3069). Gravesites cannot be reserved in advance; at the time of need, family would contact a

funeral home to assist with making burial arrangements. To schedule a burial, fax discharge documentation (DD214) to the National Cemetery Scheduling Office at 1-866-900-6417 and follow-up with a phone call to 1-800-535-1117. Family members eligible for burial in a VA cemetery include the spouse or minor child of an eligible Veteran or service member. There is no charge for such a burial, but the government does not pay the cost of transportation for the family members who will attend the funeral.

**Private Cemeteries:** Benefits available for eligible Veterans buried in a private cemetery include a headstone marker, medallion, burial flag, and a Presidential Memorial Certificate, at no cost to the family. Some Veterans may also be eligible for Burial Allowances.

**Burial Flag:** The VA provides an American flag to drape the casket of a Veteran and to a person entitled to retired military pay. After the funeral service, the flag is usually given to the next of kin. Flags are issued at CA Regional offices, VA National Cemeteries, and most U.S. Post Offices and may be arranged for by the funeral director.

**Headstone or Marker:** The VA will provide a government headstone or marker for the grave of the Veteran. The VA will inscribe free of charge the name of the deceased, the years of birth and death, the highest rank held, and the branch of service. The VA will ship the headstone or marker anywhere in the world. There cannot be any other headstone or marker already on the grave. Setting it in place is the responsibility of the family. When burial is in a National Cemetery, the grave marker is automatically provided and set in place. Medallions that can be affixed to a privately purchased headstone are also available.

**Presidential Memorial Certificate:** A Presidential Memorial Certificate (PMC) is an engraved paper certificate, signed by the current President, to honor the memory of honorably discharged deceased Veterans. Eligible recipients include the next of kin and loved ones of honorably discharged deceased Veterans. More than one certificate may be provided. Call 202-565-4964 to apply.

**Military Funeral Honors:** Families of eligible Veterans can request military funeral honors through the funeral director. The funeral director will contact the appropriate Military Service to arrange for the funeral honor detail, including Flag folding, presentation, and playing of taps.

**Reimbursement of Burial Expenses:** VA burial allowances are partial reimbursements of an eligible Veteran's burial and funeral costs. Specific eligibility criteria must be met for reimbursement and the amount paid differs between service-related deaths and non-service-related deaths. A Veteran Service Officer can assist the family with this and other benefits.

**Indigent Burial Assistance:** Your County Veterans Service Office may have funds to provide assistance with burial costs and setting of the grave marker for persons in poverty. Availability of funds and income eligibility vary.

## **Social Security**

The Social Security Administration may be able to provide a burial benefit in some cases. A lump sum death payment can be made only if an eligible spouse survives or if there is a child entitled to benefits. When a Veteran dies, the spouse and family may be entitled to survivor benefits. After a Veteran's death, contact your nearest Social Security Office (or call 1-800-772-1213) for more information and to apply for benefits. The requirements for eligibility for Social Security benefits and for VA benefits are different and separate applications must be filed for each.

## **GI Life Insurance**

If the Veteran has a GI life insurance policies, forms should be obtained through a service organization to apply for the policies' proceeds or by calling the Service Members and/or Veterans Group Life Insurance (SGLI) Program at 1-800-419-1473 or other VA Life Insurance Programs at 1-800-669-8477.

## **Benefits for Survivors of Veterans**

Benefit eligibility for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) or Death Pension to survivors of Veterans is evaluated case-by-case based on certain

criteria. For more information, go to [www.vba.va.gov/survivors](http://www.vba.va.gov/survivors) or contact your local Veterans Service Office or the VA at one of the phone numbers listed on the last page of this guide.

## **Resources for More Information and Assistance**

**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

1-800-827-1000

[www.cem.va.gov](http://www.cem.va.gov)