

Veterans' Non-Service Connected Disability Pension Benefits

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What is non-service connected disability pension?

Non-service connected disability pension is a needs-based program for veterans with war-time service who are permanently and totally disabled or over the age of 65. Non-Service Connected Pension is also known as VA pension or Widower's pension.

Information Not Legal Advice
This pamphlet is for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for the advice of an attorney.

How do I apply for non-service connected disability pension benefits?

You must file a claim with the Department of Veterans Affairs requesting pension benefits because you are permanently and totally disabled or over the age of 65 and you are in need of financial support.

What is a non-service connected disability?

A non-service-connected disability is any injury or illness that prevents you from working.

Does the injury or illness need to be related to my military service?

No. All of your injuries or illnesses are considered for pension benefits, not just the injuries or illnesses that occurred while you were on active duty.

For example, if you had a stroke that leaves you unable to work you may apply for non-service connected disability pension if you served during a period of war and you are in need of financial support.

How do I know if I served during a period of war?

Below is a list of war-time periods that have been established by Congress.

- World War II. December 7, 1941, through December 31, 1946.
- Korean conflict. June 27, 1950, through January 31, 1955.
- Vietnam era. The period beginning on February 28, 1961, and ending on May 7, 1975 in the case of a veteran who served in the Republic of Vietnam during that period. The period beginning on August 5, 1964, and ending on May 7, 1975 in all other cases.
- Persian Gulf War. August 2, 1990, through current date.

Does it matter that I did not serve in combat or in a combat zone?

No. You only need to be on active duty during a period of war.

Does the type and character of my discharge from the military matter?

Absolutely. To be eligible for most veteran's benefits and programs you must have been discharged or released from military service under conditions other than dishonorable. However, the Department of Veterans Affairs does not describe the character of your military discharge in the same way that the military does. So, the Department of Veterans Affairs will look at the character of service listed in box 24 of your DD Form 214 to determine if you were discharged or released from military service under conditions other than honorable.

You will always be eligible for veteran's benefits and programs when the character of your military service is Honorable.

You may still be eligible for non-service-connected disability pension benefits if the character of your military service is listed as a Discharge Under Honorable Conditions or a General Discharge.

Generally, you will not be eligible for non-service-connected pension benefits if your character of military service is listed as Discharge Under Other Than Honorable Conditions, Undesirable Discharge, Bad Conduct Discharge or Dishonorable Discharge.

What does it mean to be permanently and totally disabled?

The Department of Veterans Affairs will consider you to be permanently or totally disabled if your injury or illnesses is so severe that you are unable to work.

The Department of Veterans Affairs presumes that you are permanently and totally disabled if you are 65 or older.

How does the Department of Veterans Affairs determine if I am in need of financial support?

To receive a non-service-connected disability pension you must show a financial need. The Department of Veterans Affairs considers you to have a financial need if you do not have income greater than the maximum annual pension rate (MAPR), which is set by law. For 2016, the Department of Veterans Affairs has established a MAPR of \$12,868 a year for a single veteran with no dependents. Please note that the amount of MAPR is increased if you have a spouse and dependents.

For example, if you are a single veteran with no dependents and receive Social Security Retirement income of \$14,000 per year you will not receive a non-service connected disability pension, even if you are otherwise eligible, because your annual income is greater than the MAPR.

However, if you are a single veteran with no dependents and have no source of income during the year you will receive non-service-connected disability pension, if you are otherwise eligible, of \$12,868 per year because your annual income is less than the maximum amount of MAPR.

Do I need to report my income to prove that I have a financial need?

Yes. You will file an Eligibility Verification Report (EVR) with the Department of Veterans Affairs to show a financial need.

For more information...

The Department of Veterans Affairs website has useful information about service-connected disability. Go to <http://www.va.gov/>.

Veterans' Legal Assistance Project: 1-800-622-2520

Call our attorney-staffed legal hotline. Advice is free for low to moderate income Texas veterans earning up to twice the federal poverty limit, as well as their spouses, dependents, and survivors.