



Government Benefits for Vets with PTSD

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While [post-traumatic stress disorder \(PTSD\)](#) occurs throughout the U.S. population, military veterans are particularly at risk. Some studies estimate that up to 30 percent of the vets who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan have been diagnosed with PTSD. The disorder, which is caused by experiencing or witnessing a terrifying event, can result in anxiety, flashbacks and more. The condition can affect family members, too, damaging marriages, triggering mental health problems for spouses, and causing social, behavioral and academic difficulties in children,

While the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and other health care providers have made progress in dealing with this crisis, obstacles remain. Since PTSD-trained professionals are concentrated in cities, there's an alarming lack of resources in rural communities, where nearly 40 percent of the veterans diagnosed with PTSD live. Non-VA resources are ill-equipped to handle the specific needs of veterans, which differ from those in the general population who have PTSD. And, finally, the stigma within military culture that's associated with mental illness leads many vets to avoid treatment.

VA Benefits

The VA recognizes the severe challenges posed by the PTSD "epidemic":

- In the most severe cases, admittedly a tiny minority, PTSD is classified as a service-related disability, qualifying veterans for financial compensation.
- Veterans who have been honorably discharged are eligible for a wide array of benefits, including evaluations, psychotherapy and family therapy.
 - All VA Medical Centers are staffed with PTSD professionals.
 - Specialized Intensive PTSD programs offer inpatient treatment. They also address related needs such as employment, housing and recreation.
 - VA Centers operated by the agency's Readjustment Counseling Service offer treatment outside VA Medical Centers. Often staffed by other vets, these centers offer an extra layer of confidentiality by not sharing patient information with the rest of VA.
 - Certain large community-based outpatient clinics offer PTSD treatment.

- Smaller community-based outpatient clinics offer PTSD treatment through telehealth services.

VA Initiatives

The VA has launched a variety of awareness campaigns to educate veterans and the wider public on the subject of PTSD. The agency is also seeking to further integrate mental and physical health services in order to reduce the stigma attached to the disorder.

To help address the shortage of trained PTSD specialists in rural areas, the VA is focusing on telehealth, the delivery of services through telephone or videoconferencing. To date, studies have shown those efforts to be effective and destigmatizing.

Although much anecdotal information has been reported concerning the use of service dogs to ease the symptoms of PTSD, it's the VA's position that additional research is needed to confirm their clinical benefit. The VA is currently sponsoring research to determine whether or not service dogs can help an individual with PTSD.

Non-VA Government Benefits

If a veteran's PTSD is classified as a disability, they may be eligible to supplement their VA support with an array of other government benefits:

- [Medicaid](#), including waiver programs covering career support and other community-based services.
- [Medicare](#).
- [Supplemental Security Income](#).
- [Social Security Disability Income](#).

Non-Government Resources

Given the overwhelming need for PTSD services, families are increasingly turning to non-VA community resources, such as primary care physicians, behavioral health centers and hospitals. However, service-related PTSD differs in important respects from other forms of the disorder, and both government and non-government organizations are rushing to educate providers about evidence-based treatments. For instance, the VA offers a PTSD Consultation Program for Community Providers that gives free training, information and consultation to non-VA health professionals.

To learn more about PTSD resources, visit [The National Center for PTSD](#) website.

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