Funeral and End-of-Life Benefits

for Veterans and Military Families

Eligibility, burial options, reimbursement programs and other memorial resources available through the National Cemetery Administration.



Information provided by Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and compiled by AARP.



Introduction to VA Burial and Memorial Benefits

Since the Civil War, the United States has provided burial and memorial benefits to honor veterans who served in the Armed Forces. Today, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), through its National Cemetery Administration (NCA), offers burial and memorial benefits to millions of eligible veterans and their families.

These benefits can help cover burial costs, ensure long-term care of a gravesite and provide official recognition of a veteran's service. Benefits may be provided whether a veteran is buried in a VA national cemetery, a state or tribal veterans cemetery, or in a private cemetery, depending on eligibility.

VA burial and memorial benefits are established by federal law and may change over time. Families are encouraged to confirm current eligibility and available benefits when making end-of-life or burial arrangements.

AARP brings together trusted information and tools to help veterans and their families understand these benefits and make informed decisions during a difficult time.

"With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

PRESIDENT ABRAHAM LINCOLN

The Application Process: Planning Ahead and at the Time of Need

Planning ahead is not required to receive VA burial benefits, but advance preparation can help reduce stress for families later on. To determine eligibility for burial in a VA national cemetery visit va.gov/burials-memorials/eligibility

Step 1: Choose a VA national cemetery state, territory, tribal online: cem.va.gov/find-cemetery

NOTE: Burial benefits are not limited to VA cemetery properties. Please see page 6.

Step 2: Gather supporting documents, which usually includes the DD214 form. If you have trouble finding the right records or need additional documentation, contact the National Personnel Records Center at **archives.gov/personnel-records-center** or the Veterans Benefits Administration at **benefits.va.gov**

Step 3: Submit the pre-need application for each person requesting a determination. You can start your application online at **va.gov/burials-and-memorials/pre-need/form-10007-apply-for-eligibility/introduction**

NOTE: There are hundreds of national military cemeteries and hundreds of state, territory, or tribal-operated cemeteries in the U.S. and its territories. **State, territorial and tribal cemeteries may have different or additional requirements** – contact these facilities directly to find out about their pre-need programs. There is no pre-need process for Arlington National Cemetery, which is managed by the Army, and determines eligibility for interment only after a veteran's death.

Commonly Asked Questions

Who qualifies for VA burial benefits? Are they only for combat veterans?

Burial benefits are not limited to combat veterans.

Most veterans with a discharge other than dishonorable are eligible for burial in a VA national cemetery. In many cases, spouses and dependent children may also qualify. Learn more about eligibility: **va.gov/burials-memorials/eligibility**

What to do when a loved one passes?

The VA instructs families (or funeral directors) to call the National Cemetery Scheduling Office at 800-535-1117 to request a burial.

Even if a veteran did not complete advance planning or pre-need eligibility, families can still begin the process after a death. If records like the DD214 are not readily available, the VA can help obtain them.

Is advance planning required to receive VA burial benefits?

No, advance planning is helpful but not required.

If a veteran dies unexpectedly and has not filed pre-need eligibility, families can still contact the NCA to determine eligibility and schedule burial. Even if burial in a national cemetery was not previously requested, a veteran may still qualify for memorial benefits such as a headstone, marker, or medallion in a private cemetery.

Are VA burial benefits only for national or military cemeteries?

No, VA burial benefits are not limited to military cemeteries.

The VA may provide certain memorial items at no cost, including a headstone, marker, or medallion, even if the veteran is buried in a private cemetery. Eligibility varies, but combat service is not required. In many cases, spouses are eligible to be buried alongside the veteran at little or no cost in a VA national cemetery. More information: **va.gov/burials-memorials/eligibility/burial-in-private-cemetery**

What documents do families need?

The VA's scheduling guidance says you generally need the DD214 or other discharge documents to determine eligibility.

If you can't find the DD214, the VA can work with the National Archives to obtain records needed to verify service. The VA may also request documents to confirm the survivors' relationship to the veteran, such as a death certificate or a statement from the Social Security Administration.

Do veterans receive Military Funeral Honors?

Yes, all eligible veterans are entitled to Military Funeral Honors under federal law (10 U.S.C. §1491).

Honors include, at minimum:

- Folding and presentation of the U.S. flag
- Playing of Taps (live or ceremonial)
- At least two uniformed service members, one from the veteran's branch

This benefit is provided by the Department of Defense (DoD), not the VA. Families should inform the funeral home that their loved one is a veteran and that they would like to request military funeral honors. In most cases, the funeral home will coordinate these honors on the family's behalf, so families typically do not need to arrange them directly.

Does the VA provide financial assistance for burial expenses?

In some cases the VA provides burial allowances to help offset funeral or burial costs.

The amount depends on factors such as:

- The veteran's service history and eligibility
- Whether the death was service-connected
- Where the veteran passed away (for example, at a VA facility or in their home)

Burial allowances vary by situation and are not the same for everyone.

How long does it take to get VA burial benefits?

The application takes about 30 minutes to complete. Once submitted, the VA will follow up by mail, either to request additional information or to inform you whether your claim has been approved or denied.

Timelines vary, but it may take several days to verify eligibility if discharge documents are not immediately available.

Are VA burial benefits widely used?

VA burial benefits are often underutilized.

Of the approximately 582,000 veterans who died in fiscal year 2022, only about 22% were buried in a national, state, or tribal veterans cemetery. The VA estimates that less than half of eligible veterans and families use any available burial and memorial benefits.

How can families honor and remember a veteran online?

The Veterans Legacy Memorial (VLM) honors more than 10 million veterans and service members buried in VA, state, tribal, and private cemeteries.

Family members can visit their loved one's page to post tributes, photos, and biographical information: **vlm.cem.va.gov**

Are there transportation or additional burial-related benefits?

Depending on eligibility and circumstances, the VA may provide reimbursement for transportation and other burial-related expenses. Learn more:
va.gov/burials-memorials/veterans-burial-allowance

I saw something online about a $25,000 VA burial benefit. Is that real?

No, claims of a $25,000 VA burial benefit are not accurate and are often tied to scams.

The VA's actual 2026 burial allowances are:

- Up to $1,002 for non-service-connected deaths
- Up to $2,000 for service-connected deaths

Messages promoting much higher payments may look official but are fraudulent. If you receive suspicious communications, report them to the VSAFE Fraud Hotline: **833-388-7233**

Resources

AARP

Veterans and Military Families Initiative
AARP's veterans initiative provides FREE resources to help veterans with health, housing and other service-connected benefits, family caregiving, and other VA programs, such as Survivor Benefits. All of this content and more is free and available at our website: **aarp.org/veterans**

Family Caregiving and End-of-Life Care
AARP offers comprehensive resources from experts to help you and your family prepare for end-of-life care including how to cope with emotions, illness and other caregiving journeys. Find detailed information on hospice care, family planning, financial and legal tips, funerals and memorials and grief and loss: **aarp.org/endoflife**

- Read **AARP's Tips for Funeral Planning** and learn how to make smart decisions and arrangements: **aarp.org/family-relationships/when-loved-one-dies-checklist**
- Find support and connect with experts and other caregivers in AARP's online Grief and Loss Community: **community.aarp.org/t5/Grief-Loss/bd-p/GriefLoss**
- Get connected with local caregiving and end-of-life resources: **aarp.org/caregiving/local**

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Even if you're unsure whether a veteran qualifies, contacting the VA can help clarify eligibility and prevent families from missing available benefits.

Burial and Memorial Benefits
Questions about, or to apply for benefits:

- **800-827-1000**
- **va.gov/burials-memorials**

Bereavement Support
va.gov/burials-memorials/bereavement-counseling

Forms
VA forms change periodically; current versions can be found online at:
va.gov/forms



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Scan or visit: **aarp.org/veterans**
601 E Street NW, Washington, DC 20049
888-OUR-AARP (**888-687-2277**)

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