



**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

**Office of Public Affairs
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Fact Sheet

June 2002

Transition Assistance in the VA Military Services Program

About 215,000 to 225,000 people are discharged from the military each year. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has a long history of special efforts to bring information on VA benefits and services to active duty military personnel.

These efforts include counseling about VA benefits through the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), a nationally coordinated federal effort to assist military men and women to ease the transition to civilian life through employment and job training assistance. A second component of the program, the Disabled Transition Assistance Program (DTAP), helps service members separated for medical reasons.

Even before beginning the TAP pilot program in 1990, VA put a high priority on outreach to military members nearing separation from active duty. From its inception, VA has applied a broader definition to its military services outreach, called the VA Military Services Program.

While TAP and DTAP are the centerpieces, the broader definition encompasses pre-separation and retirement briefings, outreach to Reserve and National Guard units, and liaison and counseling services with various military post activities such as personal affairs, community affairs, and education offices.

VA also operates a growing Benefits Delivery at Discharge program that assists servicemembers at 128 participating military bases with development of VA disability compensation claims prior to their discharge. This fosters continuity of care between the military and VA systems and speeds up VA's processing of their application for compensation. The pre-discharge physical is conducted under VA disability examination protocols either by VA medical centers, contract medical examiners or military personnel.

From Pilot Program to 250 Military Sites

The Veterans Benefits Amendments of 1989 (PL 101-237) provided for a three-year pilot program of transition assistance conducted jointly by VA, the Department of Defense (DOD) and the Department of Labor (DOL). The program provided separating servicemembers employment assistance, job training assistance and other transitional services, including counseling on VA benefits and services.

The DTAP program for disabled servicemembers offers personalized employment assistance and vocational rehabilitation counseling normally conducted at major military medical centers where such separations occur.

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When the TAP pilot began in May 1990, VA supported programs in seven states at 13 installations. DTAP was included in these sites, plus three major military medical facilities. The next year, legislation authorized expanded of TAP nationwide and into Europe, and today the TAP program is available at more than 250 military installations worldwide.

The Department of Army has implemented its own version of transition services, the Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP). There are dozens of ACAP sites both in the United States and overseas.

Benefits and Entitlements

VA's goal for TAP services is to ensure that servicemembers are aware of their VA benefits and to provide assistance as needed. For those leaving active duty due to medical problems, the outreach effort is intensified to ensure a full understanding of the VA compensation process and vocational rehabilitation and employment programs.

TAP participation is voluntary and consists of three-day seminars conducted by VA, DOD and DOL at military installations for personnel within 90 days of separation. It provides a number of services to assist military personnel in making a smoother transition to civilian life. These services include: employment assistance, such as resume writing and skills marketing; job referral; and other transitional services.

Military services coordinators (MSCs) were appointed at each VA regional office with some coordinators placed near large military populations. Some of them work fulltime on military coordinating duties. MSCs and other VA benefits counselors participate in TAP and DTAP seminars and personal interviews.

They also conduct benefit briefings at other military pre-separation and retirement programs and are involved in outreach to members of the Reserve and National Guard units. The MSCs and counselors work directly with offices on military installations providing education, medical, family and personal counseling, and casualty assistance.

Worldwide Services

Concerned that military personnel overseas have less access to information about veterans benefits than their stateside counterparts, VA and DOD began in 1992 to provide briefings to personnel stationed in Europe, the Far East, Panama, and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. In the years that followed, VA transition activities in the European theater were expanded, as were visits in the Far East.

VA currently has counselors assigned in Germany, England, Italy, Korea, Japan, and on Okinawa. Circuit-traveling service provides periodic briefings in Spain, Iceland, the Azores and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

VA counselors annually participate in about 5,000 briefings for exiting military servicepersons, mostly through TAP/DTAP sessions. Last fiscal year, these were attended by about 187,750 personnel and VA conducted more than 91,000 personal interviews. In the first half of the current fiscal year, VA had already conducted 2,765 briefings with nearly 96,000 attendees and more than 50,000 personal interviews.

Benefits Delivery at Discharge

This joint VA-DOD initiative is helping service members file for and receive service-connected disability compensation benefits more quickly than in the past. The goal is to adjudicate claims within 30 days of discharge by examining servicemembers under VA protocols as part of the discharge process. By comparison, VA's national average processing time is 233 days for all types of claims requiring a rating.

In the Benefits Delivery at Discharge program, the medical information needed to begin the VA file carries over from DOD to VA seamlessly. In addition, if a service member is found to be disabled, additional applicable vocational and employment services may be initiated in a timely manner.

Of VA's 57 regional offices, 47 in 42 states plus the District of Columbia are actively participating in the initiative in conjunction with 128 military installations across the U.S. and in Korea and Germany. At 41 of the 128 locations, VA claims personnel are located at or near the military installation to register claims and perform the rating work. Disability examinations under the program are being conducted by VA medical facilities for 100 bases, and for the other locations, VA is using a combination of contractor medical examiners and military medical personnel.

In fiscal year 2001, VA finalized 22,524 claims under the Benefits Delivery at Discharge program, representing 19 per cent of the 120,000 first-time disability compensation claims processed by VA last year. VA estimates that more than a fourth of the claims for a service-connected disability filed by veterans during their first year after discharge now are being handled through the Benefits Delivery at Discharge initiative. In addition to providing faster service to veterans, the instances of veterans filing a notice of disagreement with the VA finding in their claim, the first step in an appeal, is extremely low, with only 83 such notices filed by veterans among the 22,524 claims processed under the program last year.