



DUTCHESS COUNTY OFFICE OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

OVERVIEW
HANDOUT



ABOUT US

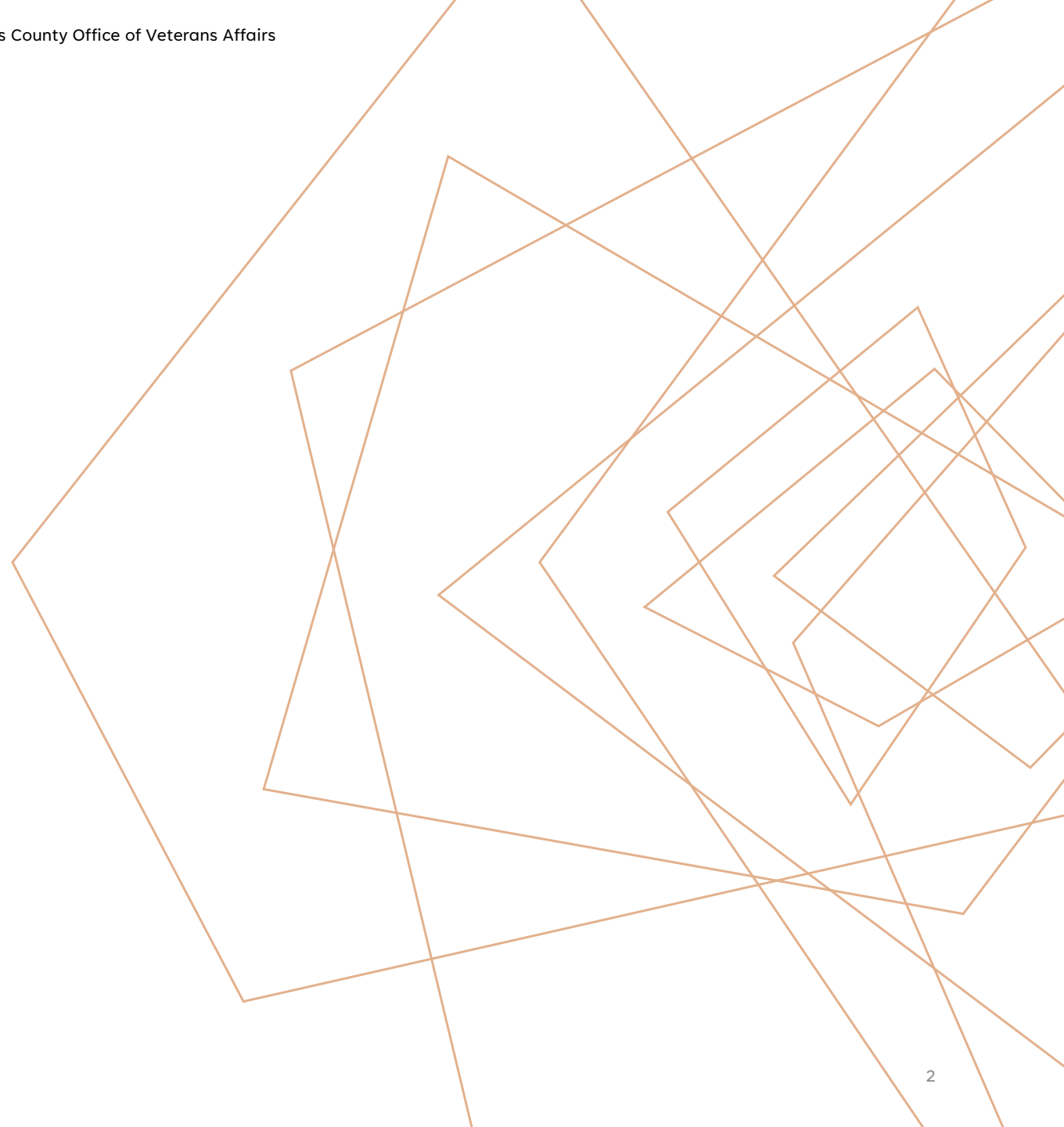
At the Dutchess County Office of Veterans Affairs, we are dedicated to serving as your trusted Veterans Affairs (VA) Veteran Service Officer, guiding you through the complex landscape of VA benefits and services. Our mission is to ensure that every Veteran in our community receives the support and resources they have rightfully earned through their service to our nation.

We offer personalized assistance to navigate the myriad of VA benefits, including: health care; disability compensation; education & training; careers & employment; family and caregivers; pension; life insurance; housing assistance; records; and burials & memorials. Additionally, we also assist with some NYS Benefits and offer a plethora of County benefits as well.

Whether you are a Veteran, a family member, or a caregiver, we are here to listen to your needs, answer your questions, and actively work with you to address your needs.

Our office is a welcoming space where you can find the assistance you need in a respectful and supportive environment.

We are honored to serve those who have served our country, and we strive to make a positive impact on the lives of Veterans, their families, and caregivers.





MEET THE TEAM



ADAM ROCHE
Director



JULIE LESLIE
Deputy Director /
Veterans Counselor



KEVIN HATHORN
Veterans Counselor



BETH-ANNE CANERO
Veterans Outreach
Coordinator /
Veterans Counselor



PAIGE WALAG
Secretary



ROSE JOERG
Program Assistant



SHAUNTE RHODES
Principal Program Assistant



BENEFITS OVERVIEW

HEALTH CARE

PACT ACT

DISABILITY COMPENSATION

WARTIME PERIODS

VA PENSION

FAMILY & CAREGIVERS

BURIALS & MEMORIALS

EDUCATION & TRAINING

CAREERS & EMPLOYMENT

HOUSING ASSISTANCE

LIFE INSURANCE

WHAT ELSE DUTCHESS VETERANS' AFFAIRS HELPS WITH
SUMMARY & OFFICE CONTACT INFORMATION



HEALTH CARE OVERVIEW

LONG-TERM CARE

- Geriatric care
- Nursing homes
- Assisted living centers
- Physical therapy
- 24/7 nursing care
- Support for caregivers
- Adult day health centers
- Veterans' own homes

VA VISION CARE

- If qualified for vision benefits, Veteran eligible for exams and glasses
- Eligibility based on:
 - Service connection, specific vision problems, functional impairment

DENTAL CARE

- Depends on a number of factors, i.e., military service history, current health, service connection, usage of other VA benefits, etc.

FOREIGN MEDICAL PROGRAM (FMP)

- If Veteran receives medical care outside of the U.S. for a service-connected condition, VA may cover cost of the care

CRISIS SUPPORT

CALL,
CHAT ON-LINE, OR
TEXT 838255





PACT ACT

THE SFC HEATH ROBINSON HONORING OUR PROMISE TO ADDRESS COMPREHENSIVE TOXICS (PACT) ACT: AUGUST 10, 2022

GULF WAR & POST 9/11

- Gulf War-era Veterans are eligible for VA health care
- Exposure to burn pits and other toxins
- Gulf War Syndrome: medically unexplained chronic multi-symptom illness
- Dates: August 2, 1990, to a date yet to be determined

CAMP LEJEUNE WATER CONTAMINATION EXPOSURE

- Exposure to the water toxins at Camp Lejeune or the Marine Corps Air Station at New River
- 30 days total on-site
- Dates: August 1, 1953 to December 31, 1987

VIETNAM ERA

- Agent Orange, and other herbicide exposure
 - Republic of Vietnam
 - Aboard a U.S. military vessel in the inland waterways of Vietnam
 - Dates: January 9, 1962 to May 7, 1975
- Thailand: Jan 9, 1962 to June 30, 1976
- Laos: Dec 1, 1965 to Sep 30, 1969
- Guam or American Samoa: Jan 9, 1962 to Jul 31, 1980
- Johnston Atoll: Jan 1, 1972 to Sep 30, 1977
- C-123 aircraft in contact w/Agent Orange

BLUE WATER NAVY VIETNAM VETERANS ACT OF 2019

- Extended the presumption of herbicide exposure to Veterans who served within 12 nautical miles from offshore waters of the Republic of Vietnam, Cambodia, or who had service in the Korean Demilitarized Zone
- Dates: January 9, 1962, to May 7, 1975



DISABILITY COMPENSATION

TAX-FREE MONTHLY FEDERAL BENEFIT PAID TO VETERAN FOR A MEDICAL CONDITION THAT WAS AT LEAST AS LIKELY AS NOT CAUSED BY, OR WORSENERED BY, THAT VETERAN'S MILITARY SERVICE

SERVICE CONNECTION

- Veteran's disability either developed during, or was aggravated during, active duty, or post-active duty discharge
 - Direct service
 - Secondary service
 - Aggravated service
 - Presumptive service
 - Section 1151

PRESUMPTIVE CONDITIONS

- VA automatically presumes that Veteran service caused the condition
- Only need to meet the service requirements for the presumption
 - PACT Act
 - Combat

HOW DO I KNOW

- Any current illness or injury (condition) that affects your body or mind may be service-connected if you served on active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training, and:
 - Veteran became sick or injured while serving in military – and can link this condition to the condition (in-service), or
 - Veteran had a condition before joining the military – and serving made it worse (aggravated), or
 - Veteran has a condition related to the active duty service that didn't appear until after service ended (post-service)

SPECIAL CLAIMS

- Special compensation for service-connected disabilities
 - Automobile allowance & adaptive equipment
 - Birth defects linked to Agent Orange
 - Replacing damaged clothing
 - Recovery from surgery or an immobilizing disability
 - Dental care
 - Time spent in VA, or VA-approved, hospital for service connection
 - Being unable to work
 - 1151 disabilities – suffered an added disability while getting VA medical care or taking part in a VA program
 - Immediate help for temporary disability needs

[Compensation & Pension \(C&P\) Exams for Disability Claim](#)



WARTIME PERIODS

UNDER CURRENT LAW, THE VA RECOGNIZES THESE WARTIME PERIODS TO DECIDE ELIGIBILITY FOR PENSION BENEFITS

- Mexican Border period (May 9, 1916, to April 5, 1917, for Veterans who served in Mexico, on its borders, or in adjacent waters)
- World War I (April 6, 1917, to November 11, 1918)
- World War II (December 7, 1941, to December 31, 1946)
- Korean conflict (June 27, 1950, to January 31, 1955)
- Vietnam War era for Veterans who served **in the Republic of Vietnam** (November 1, 1955, to May 7, 1975)
- Vietnam War era for Veterans who served **outside the Republic of Vietnam** (August 5, 1964, to May 7, 1975)
- Gulf War (August 2, 1990, through a future date to be set by law or presidential proclamation)



VA PENSION

VETERANS NON-SERVICE CONNECTED PENSION

VA CONSIDERS THE NET WORTH OF VETERAN & MAPR RATE

- A VA pension may provide income to make life more secure for Veterans and their loved ones.
- Pension is a need-based benefit for wartime Veterans with limited or no income who are age 65 or older or who have a permanent and total non-service-connected disability.
- Veterans who establish eligibility for a basic pension but are housebound or who require the aid and attendance of another person in order to perform activities of daily living, may qualify for pension at an increased rate (this is called “Special Monthly Pension”).
- There are five fundamental requirements for any **non-service-connected** pension claim:
 - Length of Service (see below)
 - Wartime Era Service (previous slide)
 - Total & Permanent Disability (social sec dis, supp security income, or nursing home, or 65+)
 - Income Below the Applicable Limit (see pension rates)
 - Personal Assets Below The “Bright-Line” Cap (above the MAPR)
- Length of Service requirements:
 - Started on active duty **before** September 8, 1980, and you served at least **90 days on active duty** with at least **1 day** during wartime, **OR**
 - Started on active duty as an enlisted person **after** September 7, 1980, and served at least **24 months or the full period for which you were called or ordered to active duty** (with some exceptions**) with at least 1 day during wartime, **OR**
 - Served an officer and started on active duty after October 16, 1981, and you hadn’t previously served on active duty for at least 24 months, **OR**
 - Any length of active service during a period of war with a discharge due to a Service-Connected disability

AID & ATTENDANCE AND HOUSEBOUND ALLOWANCE

- At least one of these need to be true:
 - You need another person to help you perform daily activities, like bathing, feeding, and dressing, **or**
 - You have to stay in bed—or spend a large portion of the day in bed—because of illness, **or**
 - You are a patient in a nursing home due to the loss of mental or physical abilities related to a disability, **or**
 - Your eyesight is limited (even with glasses or contact lenses you have only 5/200 or less in both eyes; or concentric contraction of the visual field to 5 degrees or less)
- Housebound
 - Veteran spends most of time in their home because of a permanent disability (does not need to be bedridden)
- Aid & Attendance
 - Veteran needs assistance with at least 2 activities of daily living
 - Bathing/showering; dressing; eating; toileting
 - Veteran’s eyesight is severely limiting
 - Safety of Veteran due to dementia, Alzheimer’s, etc.



FAMILY & CAREGIVERS

SURVIVORS DEPENDENTS INDEMNITY COMPENSATION (DIC)

- Tax-free monthly benefit paid to eligible survivors of service members and Veterans
- Awarded to spouse or dependent child, or parent of a Veteran who:
 - Died while serving on active duty, active duty for training purposes, or inactive duty training; OR
 - Died as the result of an injury or disease caused by their military service; OR
 - Died as the result of a non-service-connected injury or disease, and was totally disabled from a service-connected disability (or disabilities) for at least **10 years** immediately preceding the Veteran's death OR since the Veteran's release from active duty and for at least five years immediately preceding death
- To qualify, a surviving spouse must have:
 - Married the Veteran or Service Member before January 1, 1957, OR
 - Married the Veteran or Service Member within 15 years of their discharge from the period of military service during which the qualifying illness or injury started or got worse, OR
 - Were married to the Veteran or Service Member for at least 1 year, OR
 - Had a child with the Veteran or service member, aren't currently remarried, and lived with the Veteran or service member without a break until their death or, if separated, weren't at fault for the separation

SURVIVORS PENSION

VA CONSIDERS NET WORTH OF CLAIMANT & MAPR RATE

- Tax-free monthly payments to qualified surviving spouses and unmarried dependent children of wartime Veterans who meet certain income and net worth limits set by Congress
- Annual family income and net worth meet limits set by Congress
 - Net worth equals value of everything you own (except house, 2 acres, car, and most furnishings) minus debt and unreimbursed medical expenses
- Veteran met one of these requirements:
 - Veteran entered active duty on or before Sep 7, 1980 and served at least 90 days on active duty, with at least 1 day during wartime, or
 - Veteran entered active duty after Sep 7, 1980, and served at least 24 months, or the full period for which called, with at least 1 day during wartime, or
 - Veteran was an officer and began active duty after Oct 16, 1981, and hadn't previously served active duty for at least 24 months
- Child eligibility: under age 18, or; under age 23 and attending a VA-approved school, or; unable to care for yourself due to a disability that happened before age 18 (helpless child)

FAMILY & CAREGIVERS

SURVIVORS' & DEPENDENTS' EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE (CH. 35)

- The Veteran is permanently and totally disabled due to a service-connected disability, **or**
- The Veteran died as a result of a service-connected disability, **or**
- The service member died in the line of duty, **or**
- The service member is missing in action or was captured in the line of duty by a hostile force for more than 90 days, **or**
- The service member was forcibly detained (held) or interned in the line of duty by a foreign entity for more than 90 days, **or**
- The service member is in the hospital or getting outpatient treatment for a service-connected permanent and total disability and is likely to be discharged for that disability
- Child can be married or unmarried
- If claimant joins the military, cannot use on active duty, but can use after service without a dishonorable discharge

HOUSING ASSISTANCE FOR SURVIVING SPOUSES

- To get a VA-backed home loan as the surviving spouse of a Veteran, a Certificate of Eligibility (COE) is needed; at least one of the below needs to be true:
 - The Veteran is missing in action, **or**
 - The Veteran is a prisoner of war (POW), **or**
 - The Veteran died while in service or from a service-connected disability and you didn't remarry, **or**
 - The Veteran died while in service or from a service-connected disability and you didn't remarry before you were 57 years old or before December 16, 2003, **or**
 - The Veteran had been totally disabled and then died, but their disability may not have been the cause of death (in certain situations)

OTHER BENEFITS TO LOOK INTO

- Health & disability benefits
 - CHAMPVA (Civilian Health & Medical Program of the VA): if qual for TriCare, you use TriCare
 - Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers
 - Mental health services
 - VA Dental if enrolled in CHAMPVA
 - Camp Lejeune Family Member Program
 - Benefits for spina bifida linked to Agent Orange
 - Benefits for children of women Vietnam Veterans
- Life insurance (see future slide)
- Burial & memorial benefits
- Other education benefits
 - Transferred Post 9/11 GI Bill
 - Fry Scholarship (see next slide)
 - STEM Scholarship (see next slide)
 - Career counseling (see an upcoming slide)



BURIALS & MEMORIALS

PRE-NEED ELIGIBILITY FOR BURIAL IN VA CEMETERY

- Find out in advance if you're eligible for burial in a VA national cemetery through a VA application form

MEMORIAL ITEMS

- To honor a Veteran, service member, Reservist, or family member
 - Headstones, markers, medallions, plaques, urns
- Burial flags
- Presidential Memorial Certificate

VETERANS DEATH BENEFITS

- Types of burial benefits
 - Burial allowance for burial and funeral costs
 - Plot or interment allowance
 - Transportation reimbursement for Veterans' remains to final resting place
 - Bereavement counseling
- The following parties can be eligible to receive VA Burial Benefits:
 - The Veteran's surviving spouse, OR
 - The Veteran's surviving partner from a legal union, OR
 - A surviving child of the Veteran, OR
 - A parent of the Veteran, OR
 - The executor or administrator of the Veteran's estate.
- The individual requesting reimbursement of the funeral costs must be responsible for the expense and is not being reimbursed by any other organization!
- Time Limits For Burial Benefits
 - If the Veteran died from a service-connected condition, then there is no time limit to file for burial benefits
 - If the Veteran did not die from a service-connected condition, then the eligible party must file within two years for burial benefits



EDUCATION & TRAINING

POST 9/11 GI BILL (CH. 33): FOREVER GI BILL

- Helps pay for school or cover expenses, includes basic allowance for housing
- Up to 36 months of entitlement
- Honorable discharge
- Dates: Sep 11, 2001 to forever

MONTGOMERY GI BILL

- Help pays for education and training programs
- Up to 36 months of entitlement
- Dates: active duty from Jun 30, 1985 to Sep 11, 2001
- Expires 10 years post discharge
- National Guard and Reserves:
 - 6-year obligation to serve
 - Dates: Jun 30, 1985 to Sep 11, 2001
 - Expires the day the Veteran leaves the Guard or Reserves

STEM SCHOLARSHIP

- The Edith Nourse Rogers Science Technology Engineering Math (STEM) Scholarship allows eligible Veterans using the Post 9/11 or dependents using the FRY Scholarship to get added benefits
- Up to 9 months (or \$30,000) of benefits for training in high-demand fields
- Need to be enrolled in an eligible undergraduate STEM degree program that requires at least 120 standard semester hours

FRY SCHOLARSHIP

- If child or surviving spouse of a service member, or member of the Selected Reserve, who died on or after Sep 11, 2001, may be eligible for the Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship



CAREERS & EMPLOYMENT

CAREERS & EMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

- Transition & assistance program
- Find a job
- Start a career at VA
- Civil Service Preference Letter
- Free LinkedIn Premium & LinkedIn Learning for a year

EDUCATIONAL & CAREER COUNSELING (CH. 36)

- Personalized Career Planning & Guidance (PCPG) – VA Ch. 36
 - Offers free educational and career guidance, planning, and resources to veterans and dependents
- Either leaving active service or within the first year post-discharge

SUPPORT FOR VETERAN-OWNED SMALL BUSINESS

- Veteran small business certification program (VetCert)

VETERAN READINESS & EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM (VR&E)

- Veteran or service member with a service-connected disability that impacts ability to work
- 5 support-and-services tracks
 - Reemployment
 - Rapid access to employment
 - Self-employment
 - Long-term services
 - Independent living

HOUSING ASSISTANCE

HOME LOAN TYPES

- VA direct home loan
- VA-backed home loan
- Native American direct loan
- Interest rate reduction refinance loan
- Cash-out refinance loan

Need to apply for a Certificate of Eligibility (COE)

POC: Wayne Slaughter

HOMELESS PROGRAMS



- Who can call?
 - Veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
 - Family members, friends, supporters calling on behalf of Veterans
 - VA Medical Centers
 - Federal, State, and Local partners
 - Community agencies who serve Veterans who are homeless

DISABILITY HOUSING GRANTS RATES FOR FISCAL YEAR

You may be able to get a **Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) Grant**: targeted for Veterans with severe mobility impairments due to service-connected disabilities (e.g., loss of both legs, blind in both eyes, loss of leg and arm)

Both of these must be true:

- You own or will own the home, **and**
- You have a qualifying service-connected disability
- **Qualifying service-connected disabilities include:**
 - The loss, or loss of use, of more than one limb
 - The loss, or loss of use, of a lower leg along with the residuals (lasting effects) of an organic (natural) disease or injury
 - Blindness in both eyes (with 20/200 visual acuity or less)
 - Certain severe burns
 - The loss, or loss of use, of one lower extremity (foot or leg) after September 11, 2001, which makes it so you can't balance or walk without the help of braces, crutches, canes, or a wheelchair

You may be able to get a **Special Housing Adaptation (SHA) Grant**: targeted for Veterans with a wider range of service-connected disabilities, including those who can move around home, but need assist with daily tasks.

Both of these must be true:

- You or a family member own or will own the home, **and**
- You have a qualifying service-connected disability
- **Qualifying service-connected disabilities include:**
 - The loss or loss of use of both hands
 - Certain severe burns
 - Certain respiratory or breathing injuries



VETERANS' GROUP LIFE INSURANCE (VGLI)

Can get between \$10,000-\$500,000 in term life. You may be eligible for VGLI if you meet at least one of these requirements. Sign up within 240 days of discharge, and you don't need to prove you're in good health.

- **At least one of these must be true:**
 - You had SGLI while you were in the military and you're within 1 year and 120 days of being released from an active-duty period of 31 or more days, **or**
 - You're within 1 year and 120 days of retiring or being released from the Ready Reserve or National Guard, **or**
 - You're within 1 year and 120 days of assignment to the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) of a branch of service, or to the Inactive National Guard (ING). This includes members of the United States Public Health Service Inactive Reserve Corps (IRC), **or**
 - You're within 1 year and 120 days of being put on the Temporary Disability Retirement List (TDRL), **or**
 - You had part-time Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) as a member of the National Guard or Reserve. And you suffered an injury or disability (damage to your body or mind that makes it hard for you to do everyday tasks, including meaningful work) while on duty—including direct traveling to and from duty—that disqualified you for standard premium insurance rates.
- VGLI premium rates based off age and amount of coverage (see website link)

LIFE INSURANCE

VETERANS AFFAIRS LIFE INSURANCE (VALIFE)

Provides low-cost coverage to Veterans with service-connected disabilities. Can get up to \$40,000 in whole life coverage (in \$10,000 increments), and cash value that starts to add up 2 years after application is approved

If you're age 80 or younger

- You're eligible for VALife if you have a VA service-connected disability rating—even if your rating is 0%.
- There's no time limit to apply after getting your disability rating.

If you're age 81 or older, all of these must be true:

- Before you turned 81 years old, you applied for VA disability compensation for a service-connected disability, **and**
- After you turned 81, you received a rating for that same disability, **and**
- You apply for VALife within **2 years** of getting notification of your disability rating
- NOTE: the Service-Disabled Veterans Life Insurance (S-DVLI) stopped taking new applications after December 31, 2022. VALife has replaced it

VETERANS' MORTGAGE LIFE INSURANCE (VMLI)

Offers mortgage protection insurance to families of Veterans with severe service-connected disabilities who've adapted a home to fit their needs. Up to \$200,000, paid directly to the bank or other lender that holds your mortgage.

All of these must be true:

- You have a severe disability that we've concluded was caused—or made worse—by your service, **and**
- You received a Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) grant to buy, build, or make changes (like installing ramps or widening doorways) to a home so you can live more independently, **and**
- You have the title of the home, **and**
- You have a mortgage on the home, **and**
- You're under 70 years old
- VMLI is a decreasing term insurance – as mortgage goes down, coverage amount goes down
- VMLI has no loan or cash value
- You need to have an **SAH grant first**



WHAT ELSE DUTCHESS COUNTY VETERANS AFFAIRS ASSISTS WITH

NYS BENEFITS

NYS Blind Annuity Program

- For legally blind wartime Veterans or surviving un-remarried spouses of legally blind wartime Veterans, who live and are domiciled in NYS. Blindness need not be service-connected.

NYS Property Tax Exemption

- Alternative Veterans Exemption
 - Wartime Era Service = 15% of assessed value
 - Combat Zone Service = *Additional* 10% of assessed value
 - Service-Connected Disability Rating = *Additional* reduction equal to ½ of the Veteran's disability rating
- Cold War Veterans Exemption
 - Cold War Era Service = 10% or 15% of assessed value
 - Service-Connected Disability Rating = *Additional* reduction equal to ½ of the Veteran's disability rating
- Eligible Funds Veterans Exemption
 - Reduces the assessed value of a property that a Veteran purchased using money from certain sources, such as:
 - Prisoner of War Stipend
 - Mustering-Out Pay
 - Pension For Military Retirees
- [School Tax Relief \(STAR\) Program](#) is applied for with local school district

NYS BENEFITS

- [NYS Gold Star Families Annuity](#)
 - Servicemember death
- [NYS Supplemental Burial Allowance](#)
 - Servicemember death as a result of combat
- [NY Lifetime Liberty Pass](#) – FDR Library in Hyde Park, or online
- [NYS Veterans Homes](#)
 - Batavia, Oxford (central NY), Montrose, St. Albans (Queens); and, SUNY has 1 in Long Island
- [NYS Reduced Fee Hunting & Fishing Licenses for Disabled Veterans](#)
 - Veterans with 40% service-connected; 70% or more, VA pays full cost

RECORDS

- Military records
- Discharge upgrades/corrections
- Filing of discharge papers with County Clerk
- Medal(s) application
- All VA records
- Civil Service letters

DUTCHESS COUNTY SPECIFIC

- [Honor-A-Veteran Program](#)
 - Honor a Dutchess County Veteran
- [Return the FAVOR Discount Program](#)
- [Go-Go Veterans Transportation](#)
- [Other Transportation Modes](#)
 - Castle Point bus / shuttle
 - Hudson River Housing
 - Disabled American Veterans free van rides
 - Dutchess County Public Transit
- [Veteran-specific County Forms](#)
 - Authorization for Disability Record
 - Tommy Zurhellen Fund Application
 - Veterans Personal Data Sheet
 - Veterans Service Credit
- Resource referral
 - [Mental Health America of Dutchess County Veterans Programs](#)
 - HERO: housing; VET-TAP: Employment; Vet2Vet
 - VA Castle Point



KEY WEBSITES

We encourage our partnering municipalities and organizations to promote the following websites for its veteran community:

Federal: [Veterans Affairs](#)

New York State: [New York State Department of Veterans Services](#)

Dutchess County: [Office of Veterans Affairs](#)

Resource Referral: [Mental Health America of Dutchess County Veterans Programs](#)

SUMMARY

It is our sincere desire to protect and safeguard the rights and benefits of all veterans who live in Dutchess County.

If you are a veteran, family member, or caregiver, we can help you find out which benefits or services you/your family may be entitled to.

Because some benefits expire within a set amount of time following the day of separation, please visit our office as soon as possible with original military separation papers, such as:

- DD-214: Discharge document / proof of service (replaced all other previously used discharge documents as of 1950)
- WDAGO 53-55: Discharge document used by U.S. Army during WWII
- NAVPERS 533: Discharge document used by Navy and Marine Corps during WWII
- NGB-Form 22: National Guard discharge

If you have misplaced your original military separation papers, OR, if you'd like to make an appointment with a Veterans Service Counselor:

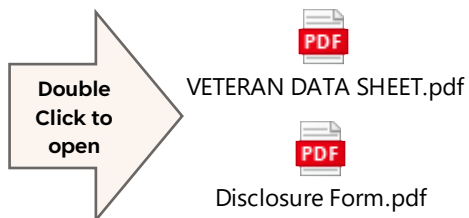
Please call us at **845-486-2060** to make an appointment so that we can assist you.

Or, come visit us at:

Dutchess County Veterans One Stop

1335 Route 44, Suite 2, Pleasant Valley, NY 12569

[Sign up for email updates with DutchessDelivery](#)



Veteran completes both of the forms and mails or brings them to the Office of Veterans Affairs