

# **Planning for Your Release**

**A Guide for Incarcerated Veterans**



**NATIONAL  
COALITION  
*for*  
HOMELESS  
VETERANS**

*a not-for-profit corporation*



## **MISSION**

The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans will end homelessness among veterans by shaping public policy, promoting collaboration, and building the capacity of service providers.



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## SECTION I

### Using This Guide and Seeking Help

This guide is for you to use to plan for your release and to keep as a reference after your release. It includes addresses, phone numbers and websites you can use to find out about programs and other help that is available after your release. You may want to ask a friend or family member to help you find the information you need if you don't have phone or internet access. Keep in mind that **this guide does not include all of the services available**. What is available in one area may be different from what is available in another, so be sure to check with local resources to learn about services in your area.

### Steps to Take While Incarcerated

While you are in prison, find out which unit in your facility can help you plan for your release (often the education or transfer unit). Classes may be offered so you can work on skills development and prepare for life after release. **You don't want to risk homelessness once you are released, so take advantage of the opportunities available to you.**

Begin thinking about what specifically you will need upon release. Ask yourself these kinds of questions: Will I need housing? Will I need medical, substance abuse, or mental health care? Do I need to learn a job skill? Do I have any other legal issues? How do I restart my Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or VA checks?

Make a list of your needs. Remember that this is just a tool to help you get organized. A sample list might look like this:

1. I need a place to live.
2. I need a job.
3. I need clothing to wear to work.
4. I want to get counseling for PTSD.
5. I owe child support.
6. I need to find out what federal benefits I can get as a veteran.

Think about your list as you read through this guide. Who do you think can help you with each of your needs? Is there one organization

that may be able to work with you on many different things, or do you need to contact several agencies? Keep track of the steps you take, including the dates and names of people you contact for information or assistance. Although this guide provides *national* addresses for many organizations, we recommend you **check your phone book for local, county and state agencies that know what help is available in your area.**

When writing a letter to request information, **be clear.** Keep your letter short, to the point, and write legibly. Include the following information:

- ✓ Your name and contact information.
- ✓ A brief statement about your current situation.
- ✓ Your specific request.
- ✓ What you have done so far (Example: I have written to \_\_\_\_\_ organization and they suggested I contact you.)
- ✓ Any restrictions for mailings (Example: Mail with staples or paper clips will not be accepted by my prison facility).

When contacting an agency for help by mail, email or phone, **be persistent and polite** in order to get results. Ask questions if information is not clear to you. Remember that organizations are often staffed by volunteers who are eager to help, but may not have the answers you are looking for. **If someone cannot help you, ask about who can.**

The Internet can also be helpful to find information about VA benefits and community resources in your area. This guide includes web addresses, when available. Ask to use a computer in your facility, or visit the public library after release. Computer access may also be provided at One-Stop Career Centers (also referred to as Job Service or Unemployment Offices).

**Section II** of this guide provides information about assistance for specific needs. **Section III** covers basic information about seeking VA benefits. The last page contains a **checklist** that summarizes each section of this guide.

## **SECTION II HELP FOR VETERANS**

This section includes resources that can help you get back on your feet. Remember to check the phone book for local, county and state agencies that know what services are available in the area to assist you. Some organizations may have waiting lists, require an interview or have specific rules about whom they serve. You may ask if your name can be put on a waiting list as your release date approaches.

### **Toll-Free Numbers**

Crisis and other toll-free numbers are often listed in the front cover or first few pages of the phone book. You may also want to check under “Social Services” in the blue or yellow pages.

- **Department of Veterans Affairs** ♦ [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)
  - ♦ Benefits: 1-800-827-1000
  - ♦ Medical Centers: 1-877-222-8387
  - ♦ Persian Gulf War Helpline: 1-800-749-8387
- **National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Call Center**  
A 24-hour national alcohol and drug abuse addiction and treatment hotline: 1-800-784-6776.
- **National AIDS Hotline**  
Talk to someone who knows about HIV/AIDS and can tell you about AIDS services in your city or state: 1-800-232-4636.
- **National Coalition for Homeless Veterans** ♦ [www.nchv.org](http://www.nchv.org)  
1-800-838-4357 (1-800-VET-HELP)
- **National Suicide Support Number**  
1-800-784-2433 (1-800-SUICIDE)

### **Where to Start**

Check the local phone book yellow pages under “Homeless” or “Social Service Organizations” for a list of many local organizations that offer different services, which may include clothing, public transportation tokens, emergency shelter, and more. You may need to contact several agencies to find all the services you need. Services provided by *government* agencies are listed in the blue pages found near

the front of the phone book. Check with your local Public Assistance Office to find available programs and what their guidelines are. We have included some guidance below, but your local organizations are your best resources. **Remember, it never hurts to ask!**

#### *For Veterans Only*

- **State Departments of Veterans Affairs** provide many services which differ from state to state, but may include assistance with the benefits claims process, readjustment counseling, crisis intervention, loans, family counseling and employment assistance. Check the front of the phone book under “State Government, Veterans Affairs,” or go online to: [www.nasdva.com](http://www.nasdva.com).

#### *For Veterans and Non-Veterans*

- **National Coalition for the Homeless** has a directory of shelters and homeless assistance programs online. This does not list every program in the country, so be sure to check your phone book for local programs. Go to: [www.nationalhomeless.org/resources/local/local.html](http://www.nationalhomeless.org/resources/local/local.html). The website also includes a directory of statewide and local advocacy organizations. Not all of these coalitions provide direct services, but they may be able to tell you about local programs.

- **Salvation Army** provides services, including shelter, for homeless individuals and families. Check the phone book for a local post, write to: Salvation Army, National Headquarters, PO Box 269, Alexandria, VA 22313, or go to: [www.salvationarmyusa.org](http://www.salvationarmyusa.org).

- **United Way** provides a variety of services through local organizations. Check the phone book for a local post or locate local organizations online at: [www.unitedway.org](http://www.unitedway.org). Dial 2-1-1 in some states to access local emergency services.

- Local churches and **faith-based organizations**, such as Catholic Charities, Salvation Army, and Volunteers of America, may have a variety of programs to assist you. Find these organizations by calling your county or city Department of Social Services. Check the blue pages of the phone book for the number.

- **Traveler’s Aid International** provides emergency travel vouchers for homeless individuals and families in crisis. For help in your area, go on-line to: [www.travelersaid.org](http://www.travelersaid.org), and click on “Assistance.”

## **Housing**

It is important to know that you have a place to go when you are released. The first step in returning to the community is finding a place to stay. This section includes ways to locate emergency shelter, transitional housing, and permanent housing assistance. Transitional or temporary housing can serve as a step toward full independence upon your release. However, there are often waiting lists, so you should ask about applying as soon as possible. If you are released and find yourself homeless, emergency assistance is available.

### **Emergency and Transitional Housing**

#### ***For Veterans Only***

- **National Coalition for Homeless Veterans** members provide services to homeless veterans around the nation. To find out if there are homeless veteran service providers in your area, call 1-800-VET-HELP, write to NCHV, 333½ Pennsylvania Ave., SE, Washington, DC 20003-1148, or go to: [www.nchv.org](http://www.nchv.org).
- Every **VA Medical Center** has a Homeless Veteran Services Coordinator who is responsible for helping homeless or at-risk veterans. To find the VA Medical Center serving your area, look in the blue pages of the phone book under “United States Government, Veterans Affairs,” call the VA (toll-free) at 1-877-222-8387, or go to: [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov), click on “Health Care,” then “Facilities Locator.”

#### ***For Veterans and Non-Veterans***

- Look in the phone book yellow pages under “Homeless” or “Social Service Organizations” for local shelters and organizations.
- Look in the phone book blue pages under local, city or county government Department of Social Services “Human Services” or “Homeless Shelters,” or call the Office of the Mayor for information about low-income housing coalitions or homeless advocacy groups who may know what is available.
- To find a list of emergency shelters for men, women and families in every state, check the **Department of Housing and Urban Development** online at: [www.hud.gov/homeless/hmlsagen.cfm](http://www.hud.gov/homeless/hmlsagen.cfm).



- **Coalitions for the Homeless** are listed in the phone book of many cities and urban counties. You may also find local housing information at: [www.nationalhomeless.org/resources/local/local.html](http://www.nationalhomeless.org/resources/local/local.html).

### **Long-term or Permanent Housing**

- **Public housing** waiting lists can be long, but the length of time can vary from place to place. Even if you are not sure where you want to live yet, apply to get on the waiting list so that you have as many options as possible. To learn how to apply, contact the local housing authority listed in the phone book blue pages under “Local Government, Public Housing Authority.”

## **Finding and Keeping a Job**

Finding a job may be hard and can seem overwhelming, but it is the key to successful reintegration back into society. When you are released you may find that you are completely starting over. You should ask for job counseling and training while incarcerated so you are prepared to work when you are released. Don't wait until you get out to start thinking about what you will do. **Start planning now!**

### ***For Veterans Only***

- **Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) and Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVER)** work to help veterans find and keep jobs. DVOP specialists develop job and training opportunities for veterans with service-connected disabilities, linking veterans with employers and making sure follow-up services are provided. LVER specialists are located in state employment offices (also called One-Stop Career Centers or Unemployment Offices). To find a DVOP or LVER near you, visit your state employment service office listed in the phone book blue pages under “State Government, Employment Agencies,” or go to: [www.dol.gov/vets/aboutvets/contacts/main.htm](http://www.dol.gov/vets/aboutvets/contacts/main.htm).

- Organizations provide employment and training services to homeless veterans to help them get back into the workforce through the **Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP)**. Organizations provide job search, counseling, job placement assistance, remedial education, classroom and on-the-job training,

and referral to supportive services. To find out if there is a program near you, call the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) State Director listed for your state on the Department of Labor website at: [www.dol.gov/vets/aboutvets/contacts/main.htm](http://www.dol.gov/vets/aboutvets/contacts/main.htm).

- The VA's **Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment** services help veterans with service-connected disabilities by providing job training and counseling to those who have an employment handicap. Services include help finding a job, on-the-job training, job development and vocational training. If you are not eligible for these services, a VA counselor may help you find other options, goals or programs. Call your VA Regional Office (VARO) or go to: [www.vba.va.gov/bln/vre/index.htm](http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/vre/index.htm). Call 1-877-222-8387 for the VARO nearest you, or go to: [http://www.vba.va.gov/ro/ro\\_inter.htm](http://www.vba.va.gov/ro/ro_inter.htm).

- Department of Veterans Affairs' **Compensated Work Therapy Program (CWT)** is available to some veterans who have a primary psychiatric or medical diagnosis and are referred from certain VA programs. CWT provides a structured environment where clients participate in job training activities at least 30 hours per week. Contact the local VA Medical Center to see if you qualify. Call 1-877-222-8387 to find the medical center nearest you.

#### ***For Veterans and Non-Veterans***

- Each state has a **Vocational Rehabilitation** program that helps people with disabilities find and keep jobs. Apply for these services immediately after your release. Look in the phone book blue pages under "Department of Human Resources" or "Department of Education" (it may be different for each state), then "Rehabilitation," or search the internet for "Vocational Rehabilitation" in your state.

## **Health**

#### ***If eligible for veteran's benefits:***

- We encourage you to enroll in the **VA Health Benefits** system as soon as you are released. Every VA Medical Center has a homeless services coordinator who helps veterans and their families. Call 1-877-222-8387 to find the medical center nearest you.

*If ineligible for veteran's benefits, free or low-cost health care may be available from the following sources:*

- **Department of Social Services** can tell you where to find health care facilities for the homeless. Check the phone book blue pages under local, city or county government for the number.
- **National Health Care for the Homeless Council** has a list of health care providers working with homeless people across the nation. For a list of providers in your state, go to: [www.nhchc.org](http://www.nhchc.org).
- **Free clinics** are run by many local organizations and communities. Look in the phone book blue pages under "Public Health" to contact local government office for clinics in your area.

*Special health information for veterans:*

- If you think you may be at risk for **AIDS and HIV infection** after your release, contact the nearest VA Medical Center to get tested and seek counseling. Those at highest risk for AIDS and HIV infection are:
    - people who share needles or syringes to inject drugs or steroids;
    - men who have sex with other men;
    - those born to mothers who have HIV;
    - people who received blood transfusions before 1985;
    - anyone who has sex with anyone who is at risk for HIV/AIDS.
  - Veterans, homeless, and incarcerated people are at high risk for **Hepatitis C (HCV)**, a serious disease that can cause cirrhosis (scarring of the liver) and liver cancer. If you think you are at risk after your release, contact the nearest VA Medical Center to get tested and seek HCV counseling. You are at risk if:
    - you ever used a needle to inject drugs;
    - you had a blood transfusion or organ transplant before 1992;
    - you were a health care worker and had contact with blood;
    - you were on long-term kidney dialysis;
    - your mother had hepatitis C when she gave birth to you.
- The Veterans Health Administration also recommends testing if:
- you are a Vietnam-era veteran;
  - you have had exposure to blood on your skin;
  - you have had multiple sex partners;

- you have tattoos or body piercings;
- you have ever snorted cocaine;
- you have liver disease;
- you have a history of drinking a lot of alcohol;
- you have had an abnormal liver function test.

## **Substance Abuse & Mental Health Treatment**

### *If eligible for veterans' benefits:*

- Contact the Homeless Veteran Services Coordinator at the local **VA Medical Center**. Call 1-877-222-8387 to find the medical center nearest you.

### *If not eligible for veterans' benefits, the following sources may be able to tell you where you can go to get help:*

- The Department of Health and Human Services **Drug and Alcohol Treatment Referral Routing Service** can refer you to local programs. Call 1-800-662-4357.
- **National Alliance for the Mentally Ill** lists community mental health services providers at: [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org), or call 1-800-950-6264.
- **Mental Health America** offers support groups, rehabilitation, socialization and housing services through 340 community organizations located across the country. Call 1-800-273-TALK, or find a local office online at: [www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org).

## **Financial Help**

- The American Legion provides **Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA)** from its national headquarters to help maintain a stable environment for children of veterans. To obtain an application, look in the phone book to contact a local post, or contact the National Headquarters (see page 15) to find the post nearest you.

### *For Veterans and Non-Veterans*

- If you are unemployed with little or no income, you may be able to get **food stamps**. A person may normally qualify for \$85 to \$100 worth of food stamps per month. Call the toll-free information

number at 1-800-221-5689, or find a list of food stamp hotlines for each state at: [www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/contact\\_info/hotlines.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/contact_info/hotlines.htm). You can also contact the local Department of Human Services, many drop-in shelters, or legal aid services to ask for an application.

- **Supplemental Security Income (SSI)** benefits can be applied for before your release, even though you won't receive the benefits until after you are released. Food Stamps can be applied for together with SSI. Normally, it takes about three months to review an application, so apply well before your release date. It is best to get help filling out the application. For information or assistance, call 1-800-772-1213, or go to: [www.ssa.gov/notices/supplemental-security-income/text-apply-ussi.htm](http://www.ssa.gov/notices/supplemental-security-income/text-apply-ussi.htm).
- **Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)** has a program called Emergency Food and Shelter Program to help prevent homelessness. Contact the local Office of the Mayor or United Way to ask who awards this money in your area and what the rules are.

## **Legal Help**

### *Veteran status issues:*

- You should talk to a **Veterans Advocate Service Officer** for help with discharge upgrades, seeking benefits, and filing a VA claim (see "Seeking Benefits" on page 15).

### *Other legal issues:*

- Most law is state-specific. Most common legal problems are governed by the law in the state where you live or where the problem occurred. When looking for legal help, make sure that information you find applies to your state, or that the lawyer or other service provider is qualified to work in your state.
- The **American Bar Association** has a web site with guidelines about free legal services and links to directories of legal aid offices and pro-bono programs. Go to: [www.abanet.org/legal services/public.html](http://www.abanet.org/legal services/public.html).
- **Legal Services** or **Legal Aid offices** have staff lawyers to provide free legal help to low-income clients. Look in the yellow pages for a local Legal Aid office or check online at [www.rin.lsc.gov/rinboard/rguide/pdir1.htm](http://www.rin.lsc.gov/rinboard/rguide/pdir1.htm).

■ **Pine Tree Legal Assistance** has an online list of organizations across the nation that provide free legal help to clients who qualify. Go to: [www.ptla.org/links/services.htm](http://www.ptla.org/links/services.htm).

■ Lawyers in private practice sometimes volunteer in “pro-bono” programs to take cases for poor clients free of charge. Check the yellow pages to contact your **Local Bar Association**, or go to: [www.abanet.org/barserv/stlobar.html](http://www.abanet.org/barserv/stlobar.html).

## **Women Veterans**

### ***For Veterans Only***

■ All **VA Medical Centers** and many Readjustment Counseling (Vet) Centers have a designated Women Veterans Program Manager to help women veterans access VA benefits and healthcare services. Call 1-877-222-8387 to find the VA Medical Center nearest you.

There are eight **Women Veterans Comprehensive Health Centers** in the VA system. These centers, structured under a primary care model, serve as prototypical health care centers for women veterans. These centers develop new and enhanced programs focusing on the unique health care needs of women veterans. For locations and contact information, go to: <http://www1.va.gov/vvhp>.

■ All regional offices of the **Veterans Benefits Administration** have a Women Veterans Coordinator to help women veterans apply for VA benefits and assistance programs. Call 1-800-827-1000 to locate your local office, or go to: [http://www.vba.va.gov/ro/ro\\_inter.htm](http://www.vba.va.gov/ro/ro_inter.htm).

■ Most **State Departments of Veterans Affairs** have a designated Women Veterans Coordinator to help women veterans. Check the phone book blue pages under “State Government, Veterans Affairs,” or go to: <http://www.naswvc.com/WomenCoordinators.htm>.

### ***For Veterans and Non-Veterans***

■ Many women in prison had similar problems and personal issues before their arrest. Mentors with **Women in Community Service (WICS)** help women preparing to leave prison and those who are just getting back into society. To find a WICS program in your area, call 1-800-442-9427, or go to: <http://www.wics.org/offices.asp>.

### **SECTION III**

#### **SEEKING FEDERAL BENEFITS**

The Department of Veterans Affairs publishes a booklet called “**Federal Benefits for Veterans and Their Dependents**” that describes the types of benefits available and lists the addresses and phone numbers for VA facilities nationwide. Write to your VA Regional Office (VARO) for a copy. Call 1-800-827-1000, or find information about benefits and addresses for regional offices at: [http://www.vba.va.gov/ro/ro\\_inter.htm](http://www.vba.va.gov/ro/ro_inter.htm).

#### **Eligibility for VA Benefits While Incarcerated**

Your ability to get most VA benefits depends on your discharge from the military. In general, you are eligible for services if you were discharged under honorable conditions. This includes general discharges. You and your family may be able to get certain benefits while you are in prison, but these benefits are limited if you are convicted of a felony and imprisoned for more than 60 days. Payments are not reduced for veterans participating in work-release programs, living in halfway houses or under community control.

**Disability Compensation** is money paid to veterans who were injured or have a disease that started or got worse during active duty. If you are already receiving disability compensation and are in prison, your payment will be reduced to the 10% disability rate beginning on the 61st day you are in prison. For example, if you were receiving \$201 or more before your incarceration, your new payment amount will be \$104. If your disability rating was 10% before you were incarcerated, your new payment will be at the 5% rate. However, you may apply to have the difference awarded to eligible family members.

**VA Disability Pension** is money that may be available to low-income veterans who are permanently and totally disabled, but not as a result of military service, and have 90 days or more of active military service, at least one day of which was during a period of war. Payments are stopped on the 61st day of incarceration. You may apply to have some of this money awarded to family members.

**VA Medical Care** is not provided to veterans in prison, but VA health facilities may provide care to you after your release. Contact 1-877-222-8387 for the VA Medical Center nearest you.

### **Benefits for Your Family**

Even though you can only receive part of your disability compensation while in prison, the rest may be awarded to your family if they depend upon your income. For example, if you are rated at 80% disabled but can only receive the 10% disability rate while in prison, your dependent family may be given up to the remaining 70%.

Your family members will only get the shared amounts if they can show financial need. This applies to the spouse, children, or dependent parents who are applying for these benefits. Send a letter to the VA Regional Office that has jurisdiction over your case to apply for your family to receive part of your benefits.

### **Benefits Payments**

There is a **60-day “grace period”** following a conviction when you may still receive full benefits. **To avoid an overpayment**, it is important that you notify the VARO immediately when you go to prison if you are receiving payments. If you do not notify the VA and receive overpayment, you and your family will lose all financial payments until the debt is paid.

For example, Joe is a veteran who receives a VA pension of \$807 per month. He commits a crime and is incarcerated, but doesn't tell the VA right away and keeps getting paid for 6 months. **Joe is overpaid a total of \$4,872.** After serving his sentence of 18 months, he is released and applies to the VA to have his pension restarted. The new pension rate is \$830 per month, but the VA will use that amount to start repaying the \$4,872 debt. **Joe's first real check will start 5 months after he is released and will be for the amount of \$30!** Joe has to go at least 5 months without that income.

Your award for compensation or pension benefits should resume from the date you are released, as long as the VA receives notice of release within one year. This includes placement in a community



treatment center or halfway house. **Remember, you must notify the VA when you are released to restart your payments.**

### **Help Seeking Benefits**

If you would like to get benefits or think you have a pending claim before the VA, it is best to get professional help to assist you.

- Check the blue pages of the phone book for the number of a **County Veteran Service Officer** in your area, or call your county government information line to see if there is one in your area.
- Many **Veterans Service Organizations** have trained staff who can help you with your VA claim, and can legally represent you before the VA. Some also help homeless and at-risk veterans find the support services they need. You can contact any VSO listed below to see if there is a service representative near you, or find a list of VA-recognized VSOs online at: [www.appc1.va.gov/vso/index.cfm](http://www.appc1.va.gov/vso/index.cfm).

#### **The American Legion**

National Headquarters, PO Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206  
1-317-630-1200 ♦ web: [www.legion.org](http://www.legion.org)

#### **AMVETS**

Natl. Service Officers, 4677 Forbes Blvd., Lanham, MD 20706  
1-877-726-8387 ♦ web: [www.amvets.org](http://www.amvets.org)

#### **Blinded Veterans Association**

Field Service Officers, 477 H. St., NW, Washington, DC 20001  
1-800-669-7079 ♦ web: [www.bva.org](http://www.bva.org)

#### **Disabled American Veterans**

Natl. Headquarters, 3725 Alexandria Pike, Cold Spring, KY 41076  
1-877-426-2838 ♦ web: [www.dav.org](http://www.dav.org)

#### **Jewish War Veterans**

1811 R St., NW, Washington, DC 20009  
1-202-265-6280 ♦ web: [www.jwv.org](http://www.jwv.org)

**Military Order of the Purple Heart**

5413-C Backlick Rd., Springfield, VA 22151  
1-703-354-2140 ♦ web: [www.purpleheart.org](http://www.purpleheart.org)

**Non Commissioned Officers Association**

Veterans Service Officers, NCOA National Capital Office,  
610 Madison St., Alexandria, VA 22314  
1-703-549-0311 ♦ web: [www.ncoausa.org](http://www.ncoausa.org)

**Paralyzed Veterans of America**

801 18th St., NW, Washington, DC 20006  
1-800-424-8200 ♦ web: [www.pva.org](http://www.pva.org)

**Veterans of Foreign Wars**

National Headquarters, 406 W. 34th St., Kansas City, MO 64111  
1-816-756-3390 ♦ web: [www.vfw.org](http://www.vfw.org)

**Vietnam Veterans of America**

8605 Cameron Street, Suite 400  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
1-301-585-4000 ♦ web: [www.vva.org](http://www.vva.org)

**Seeking Benefits on Your Own**

Although we encourage you to seek the aid of a service representative, you may choose to apply for VA benefits on your own. Write the VARO in your state or find the forms online at: <http://www.va.gov/vaforms.htm>. You can also apply for certain benefits online at: <http://vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp/main.asp>.

Below are brief descriptions of forms needed to file for certain VA benefits. Be sure you use a return address where mail will get to you as quickly as possible. Make photocopies of all forms for your records before sending your packet to the VARO nearest you.

**■ Military and Medical Records**

You will need your military discharge document (DD 214) when applying for any benefits. VA Form SF-180 is used to get copies of your military and medical records. Veterans may also complete a request online at: <http://vetrecs.archives.gov>.

- **Application for Compensation or Pension**  
 VA Form 21-526 must be filed to apply for compensation or pension. This form, along with your DD 214 and the following forms should be mailed directly to the VARO nearest your release destination 30 to 45 days before your release.
- **Statement in Support of Claim**  
 VA Form 21-4138 lets you explain why you deserve the benefits you are asking for because of your disability or disorder. It is best to have an experienced service representative help you complete the form.
- **Authorization for Release of Information**  
 If you have received medical or mental health care from anyone other than a VA Medical Center and feel it may be relevant to your claim, you need to fill out VA Form 21-4142 giving permission for release of medical records to the VA.
- **Enrollment for Medical Benefits**  
 VA Form 10-10EZ is used by the VA to determine if you can receive medical benefits. Complete the form and bring it with you to the VA medical facility where you will seek evaluation for treatment.
- **Vocational Rehabilitation for Disabled Veterans**  
 VA Form 28-1900 is needed to apply for the vocational rehabilitation program to help veterans who were disabled during their service reach maximum independence in daily living, to learn the skills needed to get a job, and to find and keep a job. Send Form 28-1900 to the VARO in your area 10 to 15 days before your release.
- **Request for and Consent to Release of Information from Claimant's Records**  
 VA Form 70-3288 is used to get records relevant to your claim from VA facilities (regional offices, medical centers, outpatient clinics, and vet centers). Request a fee waiver under section 38 C.F.R. Sec. 1.526 (h), which requires the VARO to provide a veteran with one set of his or her records free of charge.

## **SECTION IV REPLACING PERSONAL RECORDS**

There are certain personal records you must have to rent a place to live, apply for employment, open a bank account or to request assistance from government agencies and community-based organizations. The following are personal records you will need.

- **Photo ID** – Contact the homeless veterans coordinator at the nearest VA Medical Center for information on how to obtain a VA photo ID. State Motor Vehicle Departments provide ID photo services for a fee.
- **DD 214** – Homeless veterans are entitled to one copy of their service and medical records free of charge. Send requests to the National Personnel Records Center, Military Personnel Records, 9700 Page Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63132-5100. Homeless veterans, through their DVOP/LVER or case manager, may fax the request for records to 314-801-9201. Be sure to write “Homeless veteran case” clearly on the form.

Veterans discharged from the Navy after Dec. 31, 1994, and the Marine Corps after Sept. 30, 2001, should send requests to Navy Personnel Command, PERS 312E, 5720 Integrity Drive, Millington, TN 38055-3120. Veterans may also submit their requests online at <http://vetrecs.archives.gov>.

State Offices of Veterans Affairs often have military records of veterans who are state residents. Go to [www.nasdva.com](http://www.nasdva.com) for contact information in your state.

- **Birth Certificate** – Contact the appropriate office of the state government in your state of birth.
- **Social Security Card** – Apply at the nearest Social Security Office (check the blue pages of your local phone book under U.S. Government, Social Security Administration, or call 1-800-772-1213). Because of tightened security at some federal buildings, check with your local office to see if there are special procedures you must follow to apply. You may also apply for a replacement card online. Go to: [http://www.ssa.gov/replace\\_sscard.html](http://www.ssa.gov/replace_sscard.html).

**SECTION V**  
**DEPARTMENT OF LABOR**  
**PRISONER RE-ENTRY INITIATIVE**

The U.S. Department of Labor Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative provides grants to local government agencies, community and faith-based organizations that provide employment preparation and job placement services to men and women who are transitioning out of corrections and back into society.

These organizations work closely with homeless service providers and supportive services networks. While they are not designed to serve only veterans, they are a valuable referral resource to organizations and programs that help veterans in their service areas.

**Arizona**

The Primavera Foundation Inc.  
Tucson, AZ  
520-623-5111

Arizona Womens Education  
and Employment Inc.  
Phoenix, AZ  
602-223-4333

Mexican American  
Alcoholism Program Inc.  
Sacramento, CA  
916-394-2320

Fresno Career Development  
Institute Inc.  
Fresno, CA  
559-498-7155

**California**

Metro United Methodist Urban  
Ministry  
San Diego, CA  
619-285-5556

Allen Temple Housing &  
Economic Development Corp.  
Oakland, CA  
510-567-1490

**Colorado**

The Empowerment Program  
Denver, CO  
303-320-1989

**Connecticut**

Community Partners in  
Action Inc.  
Hartford, CT  
860-566-2030

**Florida**

OIC of Broward County Inc.  
Ft. Lauderdale, FL  
954-535-2178

**Iowa**

The Directors Council  
Des Moines, IA  
515-697-5704

**Illinois**

The Safer Foundation  
Chicago, IL  
922-4767

**Louisiana**

The Church United for  
Community Development  
Baton Rouge, LA  
255-753-2273, Ext. 255

Odyssey House Louisiana Inc.  
New Orleans, LA  
504-821-9211

**Massachusetts**

Span Inc.  
Boston, MA  
616-423-0750

**Maryland**

Episcopal Community Services  
Baltimore, MD  
410-467-1264

**Michigan**

Oakland Livingston Human  
Service Agency  
Pontiac, MI  
248-451-1770

**Missouri**

St. Patrick Center  
St. Louis, MO  
314-802-1953

Connections to Success  
Kansas city, MO  
314-333-4497

**New Jersey**

Career Opportunity  
Development Inc.  
Egg Harbor (Atlantic City)  
609-965-6871

**New York**

The Doe Fund Inc.  
Brooklyn, NY  
212-628-5207

Goodwill Industries of Greater  
New York and Northern New  
Jersey Inc.  
Astoria, NY  
973-481-2300, Ext. 222

Urban Youth Alliance  
International Inc.  
Bronx, NY  
973-481-2300, Ext. 222

**Ohio**

Talbert House  
Cincinnati, OH  
513-751-7747

**Oregon**

SE Works Inc.  
Portland, OR  
503-772-2302

**Pennsylvania**

Connection Training Services  
Philadelphia, PA  
267-977-3853

**Texas**

WABC Central City  
Comprehensive Community  
Center  
Houston, TX  
713-579-2728

Goodwill Industries of  
San Antonio  
San Antonio, TX  
210-924-8581

Urban League of Greater Dallas  
& North Central Texas  
Dallas, TX  
214-915-4600

**Washington**

People of Color Against AIDS  
Network  
Seattle, WA  
206-322-7061

**Wisconsin**

Word of Hope Ministries Inc.  
Milwaukee, WI  
414-447-1965

## **Checklists**

### **Using This Guide**

- Ask about classes or resources to help you plan for your release.
- Make a list of your needs.
- Make a list of who may be able to help you.
- Write letters and/or contact organizations by phone or email.
- Write down the steps you take so that you do not repeat them.

### **Help for Veterans**

- Know where to call toll-free for help.
- Contact organizations about what services they have to offer.
- Think about your housing needs and gather information about what is available locally.
- Learn about job resources and create a plan to find a job.
- Learn about health issues and what services are available.
- Learn about the resources available for substance abuse and mental health treatment in your area.
- Learn about your options to get financial help.
- Begin to take care of other legal issues.
- Learn about resources for women veterans.

### **Seeking Federal Benefits**

- If you are not currently receiving benefits, find out if you can or should be.
- If you are receiving benefits, notify the VA when you go to prison to avoid an overpayment.
- Contact a veteran service representative to represent you and help you file a claim.
- Apply for apportionment so that some of the money withheld may be given to eligible family members.



**Notes**

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**333½ Pennsylvania Ave., SE  
Washington, D.C. 20003-1148  
202-546-1969 Fax: 202-546-2063  
Toll-free: 1 800 VET-HELP  
Fax: 888-233-8582  
Email: [nchv@nchv.org](mailto:nchv@nchv.org)  
Website: <http://www.nchv.org>**