



VA Vision Care and Blind Rehabilitation Services

A Guide for Active Duty Service Members and Veterans

Vision Center of Excellence

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INTRODUCTION

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) includes (1) the Veterans Healthcare Administration (VHA), and (2) the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA).

- VHA covers medical and surgical services for service members and veterans. Care includes vision care and blind rehabilitation services. (Visit <https://va.gov>.)
- VBA covers non-health related benefits and services for service members, veterans and their family members. Services include adaptive equipment, life insurance, home loans, and mental health services. (Visit <https://benefits.va.gov/benefits/>.)



Photo by: U.S. Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Alejandro Sierras

APPLYING FOR VA HEALTH BENEFITS AFTER MILITARY SERVICE

If you have served in a uniformed service (Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and Space Force), you may apply for VHA Health Benefits.

- There is a standard enrollment application process. The VHA uses this to determine eligibility for benefits and services.
- A number of factors may qualify a Veteran for enrollment in the VHA.
- For detailed information, visit www.benefits.va.gov

How to apply

Online:

<https://www.va.gov/health-care/how-to-apply/>

By phone:

877-222-8387 or TTY 800-877-8339

In person:

- Complete an application and submit it at your local VA medical center (Form 10-10EZ)(https://www.va.gov/vaforms/medical/pdf/va_form_10-10ez.pdf)
- Locate your local VA medical center <https://www.va.gov/find-locations/>

Required Application Documents

- Copy of DD214
- Most recent tax returns
- Social Security numbers of the applicant and any dependents
- Account numbers for applicant's active private or public (Medicare or TRICARE) health insurance

EVALUATIONS FOR LEGAL BLINDNESS

You may receive a 'Catastrophic Disability' designation from the VHA if you have severely disabling injuries, disorders, or diseases which may permanently affect your ability to carry out normal activities of daily living. This is an important consideration when the VHA is determining if an applicant is eligible for VHA services. Legal blindness is one type of Catastrophic Disability. To determine if you are 'legally blind', VHA staff can perform a Catastrophic Disability Evaluation. A VHA Enrollment and Eligibility Specialist usually orders it. You, your family member, or someone representing you may request one.

You can learn more about this process by calling 1-877-222-VETS (8387) or by talking with any of the following individuals at your local VA medical center:

- VHA eye care provider (optometrist or ophthalmologist)
- Visual Impairment Service Team (VIST) Coordinator
- VHA Enrollment and Eligibility Specialist .

VHA VISION CARE

VHA offers medical and surgical eye care services to all its enrollees. This includes diagnostic and preventative services therapeutic eye care. The VHA may also pay for veterans eyeglasses and medically necessary contact lenses.

Receiving Eye Care in the VA

- If enrolled in the VHA, you can schedule an optometry appointment at your local VA medical center.
- If you need additional treatment or services, the optometrist may refer you to low vision, medical, or surgical specialists.

VHA BLIND REHABILITATION SERVICE

The Blind Rehabilitation Service of the VHA strives to increase the independence and improve the quality of life for visually impaired and blind veterans. It offers a variety of counseling, training, and medical services. It educates families and Veteran care-givers on the effects and implications of vision loss and blindness, empowering them to assist visually impaired persons.



Photo By: Air Force Airman 1st Class Samantha Meadors

Vision Rehabilitation Team

Eye care and blind rehabilitation specialists work together. They make sure patients with blindness or low vision get the appropriate technology and techniques. The goal is to enhance their remaining sight and facilitate their independence.

- Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialists (BROS) are outpatient specialists. They conduct training and teach skills in the veteran's home environment and/or local Veterans Affairs medical center.
- Visual Impairment Services Team (VIST) Coordinators are case managers. They are responsible for the coordination of services for visually impaired patients. To locate the nearest VIST Coordinator, visit <https://www.prosthetics.va.gov/BLINDREHAB/VIST.asp>
- Low Vision and Blind Rehabilitation Programs Available to VHA Patients:
 - Inpatient Blind Rehabilitation Centers (BRC)
 - Outpatient blind services
 - Visual Impairment Services Outpatient Rehabilitation (VISOR) programs
 - Visual Impairment Centers to Optimize Remaining Sight (VICTORS) programs, and Outpatient low vision clinics

Examples of Assistance Offered to Low Vision Patients

- Training in techniques that enhance remaining sight
- Ergonomic equipment (e.g., lighting and positioning devices)
- Using special equipment and new visual skills to read, write, cook, manage medications, and interpret signage

- Orientation and mobility training
- Computer access training to develop advanced technology skills
- Home safety evaluations and use of adaptive equipment

VHA SERVICES AVAILABLE TO ACTIVE-DUTY SERVICE MEMBERS

The VA has an agreement with the Department of Defense (DOD) to offer specialized rehabilitation for active-duty service members who are visually impaired and need specialized care. All the VHA low vision and blind rehabilitation services available to veterans can also be accessed by active-duty service members who are referred by their DOD health care providers for this specialized care. These referrals are managed through the TRICARE system.

VA Liaisons

VA liaisons are VA employees working on-site at many military treatment facilities to help separating service members transition from DOD health care to VA health care. They can also assist with the referral process when DOD providers want their active-duty patients to receive VHA low vision or blind rehabilitation care. Military treatment facilities that do not have VA liaisons will have DOD employees trained to assist with these referrals. You can learn more about the VA Liaison program here: https://www.socom.mil/care-coalition/Documents/05.%20VA%20Liaison_Fact%20Sheet_RCC_May%202014.pdf

Transition and Care Management Team

VA medical centers have teams to welcome combat and non-combat veteran's home and to help coordinate their care. You can learn more at Post-9/11 Transition and Case Management Home (va.gov). <https://www.va.gov/post-911veterans/>



Photo by: Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall PAO photos by Nell King

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