

## *Why Service Work For Veterans?*

The question is sometimes asked “why is it necessary for Veterans Service Officers to do service work – the filing of claims for entitlements from the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs – for veterans?” The laws restricts the VA from developing, presenting and prosecuting claims against itself. It is likewise restricted from procuring such needed evidence as statements from doctors, affidavits, birth records and the like, and will proceed to adjudicate claims in the absence of such evidence.

The Veterans’ Service officer assists the veteran in the development of the claim, accumulation of necessary evidence and follow through with the VA during the months required to process the claim. Veterans’ benefits are not automatic in any sense of the word. Veterans’ benefits must be applied for in accordance with Federal or State laws, rules and regulations.

Veterans Affairs estimates that the number of veterans in the United States is just over 20 million and of this number, 386,000 are residing in Massachusetts. The number of World War II veterans has declined dramatically in recent years and the Vietnam Era veterans, numbering 166,000 is now the largest group of veterans. Iraq War veterans constitute a growing block due to rotations through the National Guard and Reserves, as well as normal discharge rates for personnel in the regular military. These factors plus the peacetime veterans ensure that the total veteran population in the Commonwealth will remain constant for many years to come.

Projections indicate that as the Vietnam veteran population ages, there will be a significant increase in the number of veterans and their dependents seeking assistance from Veterans Affairs. The current veterans population, plus dependents and survivors,

totals 78.2 million people – one-third of America’s total population – who will all be potentially eligible for Veterans Affairs services or benefits. The Veterans’ Agents and Directors of Veterans Services must be ready to meet the demand for knowledgeable service work for these individuals. Presently, the Veterans’ Agents and Directors perform more service work than all other agencies combined and this will continue into the future as demand increases.

## *What are Service Work Dollar Returns?*

When federal entitlements are secured from Veterans Affairs, such entitlements reduce in most cases any subsistence aid the veteran may be receiving under State law such as financial aid under MGL Chapter 115. The VA’s summary of expenditures by city, town and county are a true indication of the actual service-connected disability income and non-service connected pensions granted by the VA. The summary by town for all towns in the Barnstable District for 2016 is as follows:

Barnstable	\$10,807,430
Bourne	\$ 5,973,650
Brewster	\$ 1,604,557
Chatham	\$ 1,374,008
Dennis	\$ 3,506,653
Eastham	\$ 1,138,096
Harwich	\$ 2,949,261
Mashpee	\$ 4,693,166
Orleans	\$ 1,294,376
Provincetown	\$ 440,265
Sandwich	\$ 5,367,367
Truro	\$ 395,942
Wareham	\$ 6,565,231
Wellfleet	\$ 434,945
Yarmouth	\$ 6,254,850
Total	\$52,799,798

The assistance rendered by Veterans’ Agents and Directors of Veterans’ Services not only assists the veteran in prosecuting the claim but is also fiscally valuable to the

town(s) which the VSO represents. Compensation and pensions obtained from the VA provide income to the veteran and widow and also represents a savings to the town due to a reduction in MGL Chapter 115 expenditures. A Veterans' Agent or Director of Veterans Services should be available full-time to assist the veteran, the dependent or survivor so that timely service work might be performed.

### *Who is in Charge of the Office?*

The person who is in charge of each local and district Department of Veterans' Services is known as the Agent or Director. Appointed locally by the Mayor's in cities, by the Board of Selectmen or Town Council in towns, and by District Boards in districts. Required by law, Agents-Directors must be veterans.

### *Agent's-Director's Responsibilities*

The partial listing of "Services and Benefits" within this booklet illustrates the technical nature of this highly-specialized field known as Veterans' Services. The VSO must have a whole-hearted interest and devotion to the work as well as the ability to cope with the requirements of the job.

He or she must acquire a general working knowledge of the many federal and state agencies serving the veteran, including many within the private sector. The Agents or Directors, as well as members of their staffs, must keep informed of the changes that take place as a result of changes of laws pertaining to veterans rights, those changes enacted by Congress or by the State Legislature, to protect the interests of the veteran and his or her dependents.

The Agent or Director must attend frequent training seminars and conferences held under the direction of the State Secretary of Veterans' Services for the benefit of the local VSO. They must also maintain a cooperative

liaison with all human service agencies as well as with employers within the VSO's area. The Director/VSO may also be called upon to attend meetings of allied groups.

### *One-Stop Center*

The Veterans' Service Department is a ONE-STOP center for veterans and the dependents of veterans. In addition to the duties to aid, assist and advise, as stated in Mass General Law Chapter 115, the Agents and Directors counsel, file claims and explore every avenue of resources and revenue available.

We are very proud of our record of service to our veterans and their dependents. The expertise of our Agents and Directors and their well-trained staff, plus the advantage of Home Rule, make for a very efficient operation that the veterans and the dependents find most satisfactory.

The members of the Department of Veterans Services are dedicated, conscientious individuals who are veterans in their own right, working within a field that they believe in. Our veterans deserve to be helped in a time of need in order to return as quickly as possible back into the mainstream of our society.

For those unable to return to part or full-time employment due to age or physical or emotional disability, we seek to secure a degree of financial stability that will allow the individual to maintain themselves with dignity.

### *State Staff and Resources*

The State Executive Office, through the Department of Veterans Services, maintains headquarters at 600 Washington Street, Boston. The office also provides contact officers at the VA regional offices in Boston and Providence to assist the VSO's in the filing and prosecution of claims with the Veterans Administration. These state offices are staffed by highly trained specialists who are ready and available to assist Veterans'

Agents and Directors in their effort to render prompt and effective service.

### *Burial Agents*

In each city and town the Veterans' Agent is also required by law to serve the Burial Agent. In this capacity, he must ensure that any veteran, spouse, widow or dependent child of a veteran who dies without sufficient means to defray the cost of a funeral, is properly and respectfully interred.

### *Care of Veterans' Graves*

Massachusetts law states that annually in April, the Mayor of every city and the Selectmen of every town shall appoint a resident of such city or town, who shall be a veteran as defined in clause Forty-three of Section 7 of Chapter 4, M.G.L. as a Veterans Grave Officer. It shall be the duty of the Veterans' Graves Officer to cause every veteran's grave within such city and town to be suitably kept and cared for. In cities and towns where there are cemeteries containing the remains of deceased veterans, such cities and towns shall cause to be placed on such veteran's grave a flag of the United States on every Memorial Day.

## **PROGRAMS**

### **PTSD and Other Counseling**

The VSO often recommends counseling at local VET Centers for returning combat veterans as a means of decompressing and readjusting to local routines. They also work with veterans of all previous wars who may have ignored or attempted to cope with PTSD on their own over the years. When a diagnosis of PTSD, sexual trauma or other psychological disability is determined, the VSO works with the counselors in the treatment centers to consolidate evidence and file a claim on the veteran's behalf with the VA.

### **Homeless Identification**

Assisting the homeless veteran has become a prime area of concern for the Department of Veterans' Services. The securing of low or moderate cost housing remains a major problem, but the Service Officer works with all federal and state agencies to develop solutions for housing problems to prevent evictions, which would result in having additional veterans and their families become "homeless".

### **Former Prisoners of War**

VSO's assist former prisoners of war by filing claims on their behalf for injuries and maltreatment at the hands of their captors including starvation, lack of medical care and inhumane treatment. They also refer POW's to the VA for detailed physical examinations, individual counseling, diet and fitness activities as well as group sessions.

### **Women are Veterans Too !**

Women are a growing segment of the veterans' population and currently represent 15 percent of active duty personnel. Like their male counterparts, they can be eligible for a variety of veterans' benefits. Veterans' Services assists women veterans and offers the same equal access to areas of assistance and benefits.

### **Alcoholic-Drug Treatment**

VSO's interact directly with inpatient and outpatient medical services available to those veterans who seek assistance with alcohol or drug abuse. These include detoxification programs, inpatient rehabilitation programs and continuing counseling. Proper attention is given in a manner which treats the veteran or his dependent with dignity and courtesy.

### **Veterans Employment & Training**

When veterans have difficulty with employment, the VSO's coordinate effort to find jobs with programs managed by the U.S. Department of Labor as well as with the veteran's representative at the Career Centers operated by the Commonwealth.

## Vocational Rehabilitation

If a veteran's service-connected disability makes it impossible for him to continue in his previous line of work, the VSO will coordinate with federal and state agencies to obtain training in an alternative career field which is not impacted by the disability.

## **SERVICES/BENEFITS**

### VA Compensation or Pensions

- Service-Connected Disabilities
- Low-income Pensions (War Vets)
- Widows' Benefits
- Aid and Attendance (VNA Care)
- Claims for Increase in Compensation
- VA Appeals

### Agent Orange Claims

Numerous diseases have been determined to be presumptively caused by exposure to defoliants in Vietnam including Diabetes II and many cancers including lung and prostate cancer. VSO's file thousands of claims each year with the VA for residents of the town who served on the ground in Vietnam.

### Armed Forces Retirees

- Retirement Pay
- Elimination of Payroll Offsets
- TRI-CARE questions
- Survivor Benefit Plans

### Bourne National Cemetery

Arrangements For Burial of Veteran,  
Spouse or Eligible Dependent Child

## Discharge Difficulties

- Obtaining Military Records
- Corrections to Records
- Certificates in lieu of Lost Discharges
- Review of Discharges for Up-Grading

## Education/Vocational Benefits

- GI Bill benefits
- Educational Benefits for Dependents
- Vocational Rehabilitation

## Employment

- Contacts with Employers
- Re-employment Rights Procedures
- Unemployment Compensation problems
- Linkage with State Career Centers
- Linkage with U. S. Department of Labor

## Gold Star Parents

- Rights and Benefits
- Filing Claims- State and Federal

## Hospital and Domiciliary Care

- Assist with Application for Clinics
- Emergency Medical Care
- Veterans Affairs Medical Centers
- State Hospitals and Soldiers Homes
- Other Federal Hospitals

## Housing

- Veterans Affairs Loan Guaranty
- Certificate of Eligibility
- F.H.A. Loans
- Federal and State Housing
- Assistance in obtaining shelter

## Industrial Accident Cases

- Assist and advise

## Insurance Matters

Applications for:

- U.S. Indemnity Insurance – Conversions
- Service-Disabled Life Insurance
- National Service Life Insurance
- Mass Health Issues

Filing One-Sum Life Insurance Claims

## Photostatic Work

Copies of all types of Documents

## Recording of Service Records

According to State Law

## Reference Material

Acquiring copies of all State and Federal references pertaining to veterans' rights, benefits, and where same may be obtained.

## Retirement Matters

- Employees Compensation Bureau
- Retirement – State, Local, and County
- Laws and Procedures
- General Information and Assistance

## Selective Service Information

## Social Security Matters

- Social Security Assistance
- Disability Assistance
- Supplemental Security Income [SSI]
- Medicare

## State Bonus Payments

Assist MA veterans of ALL wars with obtaining state bonus.

## Rehabilitation Matters

- Relating to Veterans
- Relating to Members of Family
- Veterans Affairs Program
- Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission
- Alcohol and Drug Abuse
- Other Federal and State programs
- Private Agency programs
- Industrial Programs

## Tax Benefits and Difficulties

- Property Tax Abatement
- Appeals
- Federal and State Exemptions
- Adjustments

## World War II Maritime Service

- Documents
- Eligibility for Veterans Benefits

**Entitlement to Veteran benefits is not automatic. Eligibility must be applied for and decided by the appropriate agency. It is the responsibility of the local Veterans' Agents and Directors of Veterans' Services to assist veterans and their dependents in securing the benefits and entitlements that they are entitled to receive.**