

SERVICE CONNECTED DISABILITIES: SUMMARY OF VA BENEFITS

- Veterans are entitled to disability compensation if they meet the following criteria:
 - They were discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable;
 - Their disease or injury was incurred or aggravated in the line of duty; and
 - The disability is not a result of their own willful misconduct or abuse of alcohol or drugs.
- In order to receive income compensation, the veteran must have a service connected disability rating of 0% - 100%. The rating will determine the amount of monthly income received (the higher the rating, the more income received).
- If a veteran has a rating of 100%, he or she is considered totally disabled and can also receive “special monthly compensation” in addition to disability compensation.
- When the VA receives a claim for service connected disability benefits, there is a 4 step determination process:
 1. The claim is submitted to the Regional Office in the state where the veteran resides;
 2. The Regional Office determines if the veteran meets the service and discharge requirements;
 3. The VA decides if the veteran meets the following three essential elements:
 - There must be a medical diagnosis of “current” disability;
 - There must be medical, or lay evidence, of in-service occurrence or aggravation of a disease or injury; and
 - There must be a nexus between the in-service occurrence or aggravation of a disease or injury and the current disability.If these three elements are met, the VA determines the severity of the service connected disability and assigns a disability rating.
 4. The VA will set an effective date for the award of benefits. The monthly compensation is then based on the disability rating and begins as of the effective date.
- Receipt of service-connected compensation may be affected based on a veteran’s employment. For example, a veteran seeking Total Disability Based on Individual Unemployability (TDIU) may not engage in “substantially gainful employment” (ie, a job that earns above the poverty level).
- VA disability compensation is tax-free income.