



## **What To Do Before - and After - a Veteran Dies**

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The following material was taken from the **Veterans Administration website, The American Legion national website, funeral home material, AARP**, and common sense and experience.

There are many links scattered throughout this booklet that will take you to further detail. Be sure to click on the blue text to access it.

You will find some areas of duplication especially in the material provided by the VA. This has been left as it is because not everyone will need to read through the entire document, others may need to see the material in a different context. The information is too important to be missed.

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The following information from the *Veterans Administration* is important to know before any end-of-life planning is done.

## Eligibility for burial in a VA national cemetery

Veterans, service members, and some family members may be eligible for burial in a VA national cemetery. Find out if you, or a person you're planning a burial for, can get this benefit.

### **Who's eligible for burial in a VA national cemetery?**

Veterans, service members, spouses, and dependents may be eligible for burial in a VA national cemetery, as well as other benefits, if they meet one of the requirements listed below.

#### **One of these must be true. The person qualifying for burial benefits is:**

- A Veteran who didn't receive a dishonorable discharge, or
- A service member who died while on active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty for training, or
- The spouse or minor child of a Veteran, even if the Veteran died first, or
- In some cases, the unmarried adult dependent child of a Veteran

### **Eligibility information for specific groups**

#### **U.S. citizens who served in the armed forces of any government allied with the United States during a war**

A U.S. citizen who served in the armed forces of a U.S. ally during wartime may be eligible if they meet both of the requirements listed below.

#### **Both of these must be true. The service member:**

- Ended their last active service honorably by death or otherwise, **and**
- Was a U.S. citizen at the time they entered their last active service and at the time of their death

#### **Members of Reserve components or ROTC**

National Guard and Reserve members

A National Guard or Reserve member may be eligible if they meet any of the requirements listed below.

#### **At least one of these must be true. The National Guard or Reserve member:**

- Met their legal minimum active-duty service requirements, was called up to active duty and served their full term of service, and didn't receive a dishonorable discharge, **or**
- Was entitled to retirement pay at their time of death, or would have been entitled to retirement pay if they weren't under 60 years of age at the time of death, **or**
- Died while hospitalized or getting treatment at the expense of the U.S. for an injury or illness that occurred while they were performing active-duty services for training or inactive-duty training under honorable conditions, **or**
- Became disabled or died from a disease or injury caused—or made worse—by their active-duty service during a period of active duty for training, **or**
- Became disabled or died from an injury or certain cardiovascular disorders caused—or made worse—by their active-duty service during a period of inactive-duty training

Members of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps of the Army, Navy, or Air Force

A member of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps may be eligible if they meet any of the requirements listed below.

#### **One of these must be true. The officer died under honorable conditions while:**

- Attending an authorized training camp or on an authorized cruise, **or**
- Performing authorized travel to or from a training camp or cruise, **or**
- Hospitalized or getting treatment at the expense of the United States for an injury or illness that occurred while they were attending or traveling to a training camp or cruise under honorable conditions

#### **Commissioned Officers of National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

A commissioned officer of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration may be eligible if they meet any of the requirements listed below.

At least one of these must be true. The officer:

- Served on full-time duty on or after July 29, 1945, **or**
- Served before July 29, 1945, and was assigned to an area of immediate military hazard (as determined by the secretary of defense while in time of war or by a national emergency as declared by the president), **or**
- Served in the Philippine Islands on December 7, 1941, and continued to serve there until their death

#### **Commissioned Officers of the Public Health Service**

A commissioned officer of the Public Health Service may be eligible if they meet at least one of the requirements listed below.

**One of these must be true:**

**The officer served on full-time duty on or after July 29, 1945.** If their service was considered active duty for training, they must have become disabled or died from a disease or injury caused or made worse by their service.

**The officer performed full-time duty prior to July 29, 1945:**

- In time of war, **or**
- On detail for duty with the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard, **or**
- While a part of the military forces of the United States by executive order of the president

**The officer served on inactive-duty training, and their death resulted from an injury caused or made worse by their service.**

#### **WWII Merchant Mariners**

A WWII Merchant Mariner may be eligible if they meet at least one of the requirements listed below.

**One of these must be true. The Merchant Mariner:**

- Had oceangoing service during the period of armed conflict from December 7, 1941, to December 31, 1945, **or**
- Had oceangoing service during the period of armed conflict from December 7, 1941, to December 31, 1946, and died after November 11, 1998, **or**
- Served on blockships in support of Operation Mulberry during World War II

**To get a DD214 documenting this service, mail an application to:**

- Commandant (G-MVP-6)  
United States Coast Guard  
2100 2nd Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20593

#### **Philippine Armed Forces Veterans**

A Philippine Armed Forces Veteran may be eligible if they meet the requirements listed below.

**Both of these must be true. The Philippine Veteran was:**

- A citizen of the United States or an alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence in the United States at the time of their death, **and**
- Residing in the United States at the time of their death

**And one of these must be true. The Philippine Veteran:**

- Served before July 1, 1946, in the Philippine military (including recognized guerrilla forces), while these forces were in the service of the Armed Forces of the United States, and died on or after November 1, 2000, **or**
- Enlisted between October 6, 1945, and June 30, 1947, with the Armed Forces of the United States with the consent of the Philippine government, and died on or after December 16, 2003

#### **Hmong Veterans**

A Hmong Veteran may be eligible if they meet all of the requirements listed below.

**All of these must be true. The Hmong Veteran:**

- Died on or after March 23, 2018, **and**

- Resided in the U.S. at the time of death, **and**
- Was naturalized under Section 2(1) of the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000 (also called the 2000 Act)

What burial benefits do Hmong Veterans qualify for?

Hmong Veterans are eligible for burial in a national or private cemetery. They're also eligible for a headstone or marker, but not for other memorial items (like a burial flag or Presidential Memorial Certificate) or for military funeral honors (like the playing of "Taps").

**Spouses and surviving spouses of Hmong Veterans aren't eligible** for interment or any other burial benefits, even if they were naturalized under the 2000 Act.

What's Public Law 115-141?

Public Law 115-141 allows eligible Hmong Veterans to be buried in a national cemetery. Be sure to refer to it when requesting burial benefits.

**When you call the National Cemetery Scheduling Office in your time of need**, tell the scheduler you're requesting interment under PL115-141.

**When you're filling out a VA Form 40-10007** Application for Pre-need Determination of Eligibility for Burial in a VA National Cemetery, write "PL115-141" in Block 5. Write the Certification of Naturalization Registration "A" number in Block 6 and select Other in Block 13.

**When requesting a headstone or marker for burial in a private cemetery using VA Form 40-1330**, write "PL115-141" and the Certification of Naturalization Registration "A" number in Block 33.

### Individuals who aren't eligible

Read about Veterans, service members, and family members who aren't eligible for burial in a VA national cemetery

#### Certain family members

These family members aren't eligible:

- A former spouse who isn't also a Veteran whose marriage to an eligible Veteran or service member ended by annulment or divorce
- Family members of a Veteran convicted of subversive activities (unless the Veteran receives a pardon from the President of the United States)
- Other family members who don't meet the eligibility requirements

#### Individuals who were drafted but then discharged before entering military service

Individuals aren't eligible if they were ordered to report to an induction station but were discharged at that point and never actually entered military service.

#### Veterans with a certain character of discharge

Veterans aren't eligible if they:

- Separated from the Armed Forces under dishonorable conditions, **or**
- Have a character of service that disqualifies them

A VA regional office determines eligibility in cases where the Veteran has:

- An undesirable, bad conduct, and any other type of discharge other than honorable, **or**
- Multiple discharges of varying character

#### Veterans found guilty of a capital crime

Veterans aren't eligible if:

- They've been convicted of a federal or state capital crime and may receive a sentence of imprisonment for life or the death penalty—and the conviction is final, **or**
- Clear and convincing evidence shows that they've committed a federal or state capital crime, but they couldn't have a trial due to flight to avoid prosecution or death

These Veterans also don't qualify for a Presidential Memorial Certificate, burial flag, headstone, or marker.

### *Veterans convicted of certain sex offenses*

Veterans aren't eligible if they were convicted of a Tier III sex offense and sentenced to a minimum of life imprisonment—and the conviction is final.

These Veterans also don't qualify for a Presidential Memorial Certificate, burial flag, headstone, or marker.

### *Veterans convicted of subversive activities*

Veterans aren't eligible if they were convicted of subversive activities after September 1, 1959, unless they've received a pardon from the President of the United States.

### **What should I do if I received an other than honorable, bad conduct, or dishonorable discharge?**

If you've received one of these discharge statuses, you may not be eligible for VA benefits.

There are 2 ways you can try to qualify:

Find out how to apply for a discharge upgrade - <https://www.va.gov/discharge-upgrade-instructions/>

Learn about the VA Character of Discharge review process - <https://www.va.gov/discharge-upgrade-instructions/#other-options>

More about VA burial benefits and planning

Can I be buried in Arlington National Cemetery? - <https://www.va.gov/resources/can-i-be-buried-in-arlington-national-cemetery>

What does burial in a VA national cemetery include? - <https://www.va.gov/resources/what-does-burial-in-a-va-national-cemetery-include>

Can I plan ahead for my burial in a VA national cemetery? - <https://www.va.gov/resources/can-i-plan-ahead-for-my-burial-in-a-va-national-cemetery>

Other VA benefits for survivors

- VA dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC) - <https://www.va.gov/disability/dependency-indemnity-compensation>  
Learn about getting VA disability benefits for a surviving spouse or a dependent child or parent.
- How to apply for a Veterans burial allowance - <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/veterans-burial-allowance>  
Learn how to apply for a burial allowance to help pay for a Veteran's funeral services, burial, and transportation costs.
- VA Survivors Pension - <https://www.va.gov/pension/survivors-pension>  
Find out if you're eligible and how to apply for VA pension benefits as a surviving spouse or child of a deceased Veteran with wartime service.
- [Health care for spouses, dependents, and family caregivers](https://www.va.gov/health-care/family-caregiver-benefits) - <https://www.va.gov/health-care/family-caregiver-benefits>  
See if you qualify for VA medical benefits as a spouse, surviving spouse, dependent child, or caregiver.
- VA education benefits for survivors and dependents - <https://www.va.gov/education/survivor-dependent-benefits>  
Find out if you're eligible for Veteran dependent or survivor education benefits through a GI Bill program.
- VA home loan programs for surviving spouses - <https://www.va.gov/housing-assistance/home-loans/surviving-spouse>  
Find out if you're eligible and how to apply for a VA home loan COE as the surviving spouse of a Veteran or the spouse of a Veteran who's missing in action or being held as a prisoner of war.

Last updated: March 18, 2021 [www.VA.gov](http://www.VA.gov)

## **Burial in a private cemetery**

Learn about the burial benefits available to a Veteran buried in a private cemetery.

### **Memorial items**

### **Is a Veteran buried in a private cemetery eligible for memorial items?**

Yes. Veterans buried in a private cemetery may be eligible for these memorial items:

- Headstone, marker, or medallion
- Burial flag
- Presidential Memorial Certificate

Learn about eligibility for a memorial item - <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/memorial-items/headstones-markers-medallions>

Is a spouse or dependent child buried in a private cemetery eligible for memorial items?

No. A spouse or dependent child buried in a private cemetery isn't eligible for VA memorial items. Only an eligible Veteran can receive a headstone, marker, or medallion for burial in a private cemetery.

### **Will VA pay for the inscription of a spouse's or dependent child's information on a Veteran's headstone in a private cemetery?**

Yes. If the family meets the eligibility requirements listed here, we'll pay to have a spouse's or dependent child's name, along with their dates of birth and death, inscribed on a Veteran's headstone or marker in a private cemetery.

#### **Both of these must be true:**

- The Veteran died on or after October 1, 2019, **and**
- The spouse or dependent child is eligible for burial in a VA national cemetery (but isn't buried there)

Learn about eligibility for burial in a national cemetery - <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/eligibility>

#### **To apply for an inscription:**

Add the inscription information in block 18 of the Claim for Standard Government Headstone or Marker (VA Form 40-1330). When you submit the form, please include documents that show the spouse or dependent relationship (like a marriage license or birth certificate).

[Download VA Form 40-1330 \(PDF\)](#)

**Note:** If a Veteran who died on or after October 1, 2019, already has a government headstone or marker, we'll pay for a replacement to add an inscription for an eligible spouse or dependent child. Use VA Form 40-1330 to request a replacement. The family will need to pay all fees to remove the original and install the replacement headstone or marker.

### **If I'm planning in advance for my own burial in a private cemetery, how can I find out which memorial items I'm eligible for?**

- You can fill out a pre-need eligibility application to determine if you can get a VA headstone or marker. Learn more about pre-need eligibility. - <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/pre-need-eligibility>

**Note:** In their time of need, when a family member files a claim for a headstone or marker, they should include this note in block 27: "Decedent has a VA pre-need decision letter."

### **Private cemetery burial costs**

#### **How much does a burial in a private cemetery cost?**

It depends. We provide memorial items related to the burial to you and your family at no extra cost. But a private cemetery may charge setting, placement, maintenance, or other fees. We recommend that you ask about these additional costs when planning a burial in a private cemetery.

#### **Can VA help with the cost of a Veteran's burial in a private cemetery?**

Yes. If a Veteran is eligible, we may be able to help you with some of the cost of their burial.

Learn more about burial allowance and find out how to apply. - <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/veterans-burial-allowance>

#### **How do I request a memorial item for a private cemetery burial?**

1. Fill out a claim for a memorial item

**For a headstone, grave marker, or niche cover,** fill out a Claim for Standard Government Headstone or Marker (VA Form 40-1330).

[Download VA Form 40-1330 \(PDF\)](#)

**Note:** If this is your second request, or if you're requesting a replacement, please explain this in block 27 of the form.

**For a medallion to be placed on a privately purchased headstone or marker,** fill out a Claim for Government Medallion for Placement in a Private Cemetery (VA Form 40-1330M).

[Download VA Form 40-1330M \(PDF\)](#)

**Note:** If you're requesting an MOH medallion, check "Other" in block 11 of the form and write "MOH."

2. Make a copy of the Veteran's DD214 or other discharge documents  
Prepare a copy of the Veteran's DD214 or other discharge papers to send to us. Don't send the originals since we can't return them.  
Learn more about which discharge documents we'll accept - <https://www.va.gov/records/discharge-documents>
3. Submit your documents  
Send us these documents:
  - Your completed claim for a memorial item
  - A copy of the DD214 or other discharge papers

By mail

Memorial Products Service (41B)  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
5109 Russell Road  
Quantico, VA 22134-3903

By fax

Fax the documents to [800-455-7143](tel:800-455-7143).

**Note:** Only the National Cemetery Administration can inscribe a memorial item. This is to protect the condition and consistency of memorial items. We don't allow private or local contractors to inscribe memorial items.

Find out more about requesting memorial items - <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/memorial-items/headstones-markers-medallions>

Get help applying for a headstone, marker, or medallion by calling [800-697-6947](tel:800-697-6947). We're here Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. ET.

More information about burial in a private cemetery

**What questions should I ask to prepare for a private cemetery burial?**

If you're planning a burial in a private cemetery, you may want to ask these questions to the cemetery you're working with:

- If the private cemetery is offering a free gravesite for Veterans, will I be required to buy a gravesite in addition to the free Veteran gravesite?
- If I have to buy an additional gravesite, what will it cost? Where will it be located?
- Can I get a written list of the services my family and I will get from the private cemetery during the burial process?
- Can I get a written list of the information or resources I need to give the private cemetery in order to plan the burial?
- What type of trust fund does the private cemetery have to protect buyers?
- Are there any requirements or restrictions on headstones or grave markers in the private cemetery?
- Do I need to buy a special marker base before ordering a VA headstone?
- Will I have to pay to place, set, or take care of a VA headstone or marker? If yes, will this cost more than if I buy a private headstone or marker?
- Do I need to buy an outer container (sometimes called a "vault" or a "grave liner") to surround the casket? If yes, how much will this cost?



**What should I do if I applied for a memorial item for a Veteran buried in a private cemetery, but the grave is still unmarked?**

**If the Veteran's grave is still unmarked and more than 30 days have passed since you filed your claim,** call us at [800-697-6947](tel:800-697-6947) to make sure we received your claim. We're here Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. ET.

**If you know we've received your claim and more than 60 days have passed,** contact the cemetery, funeral home, or other party responsible for accepting delivery of the headstone, marker, or medallion. If they haven't received it, please call us at the number above.

**What can I do if I have a complaint about a private cemetery?**

If you have a complaint about a private cemetery policy, there are organizations that can help you resolve it. Get help resolving your complaint (PDF) - [https://www.cem.va.gov/docs/factsheets/Consumer\\_Affairs.pdf](https://www.cem.va.gov/docs/factsheets/Consumer_Affairs.pdf)

Other helpful information

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- Schedule a burial - <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/schedule-a-burial>  
Find out what steps to take to plan a burial for a Veteran, spouse, or dependent family member.
- Pre-need eligibility - <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/pre-need-eligibility>  
Find out in advance if you can be buried in a VA national cemetery.
- Request Veterans headstones, markers, and medallions - <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/memorial-items/headstones-markers-medallions>  
Find out how to apply for a headstone, marker, or medallion to honor a Veteran or eligible family member.
- How to apply for a Veterans burial allowance - <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/veterans-burial-allowance>  
Learn how to apply for help paying for a Veteran's burial and funeral costs.
- Compensation for surviving spouse and dependents - <https://www.va.gov/disability/dependency-indemnity-compensation>  
Find out if you can get a tax-free monetary benefit called Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (VA DIC).

Last updated: April 29, 2021 [www.VA.gov](http://www.VA.gov)

## Burial at sea

Learn about the Navy's Burial at Sea program and find out if you can plan a burial at sea for a Veteran.

**Is burial at sea provided by the Navy or the National Cemetery Administration?**

The U.S. Navy provides burial at sea. The National Cemetery Administration can't perform this type of committal service.

**Learn more about the Navy's Burial at Sea program** - <https://www.mynavyhr.navy.mil/Support-Services/Casualty/Mortuary-Services/Burial-at-Sea/>

For information, call the U.S. Navy Mortuary Affairs office at [866-787-0081](tel:866-787-0081). We're here Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. ET.

**Can I get a memorial item for a Veteran who's already been buried at sea?**

Yes. Active-duty service members and Veterans who were buried at sea may be eligible for a headstone or marker.

**Learn more about eligibility for memorial items** - <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/memorial-items/headstones-markers-medallions>

Other helpful information

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- Request Veterans headstones, markers, and medallions - <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/memorial-items/headstones-markers-medallions>  
Find out how to apply for a headstone, marker, or medallion to honor a Veteran or eligible family member.
- How to apply for a Veterans burial allowance - <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/veterans-burial-allowance>  
Learn how to apply for help paying for a Veteran's burial and funeral costs.

- Compensation for surviving spouse and dependents - <https://www.va.gov/disability/dependency-indemnity-compensation>

Find out if you can get a tax-free monetary benefit called Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (VA DIC).

Last updated: April 30, 2021 [www.VA.gov](http://www.VA.gov)

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Below are links to general information and regulation for both Idaho Veterans cemeteries and the Washington State Veterans Cemetery in Medical Lake.

**Boise:**

<https://veterans.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Cemetery-Information-2021.pdf>

**Blackfoot:**

<https://veterans.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Cemetery-Information-2021-Blackfoot.pdf>

**Washington State Veterans Cemetery - Medical Lake:**

<https://www.dva.wa.gov/veterans-their-families/cemetery>

## Compensation

### Burial Benefits

Effective July 7, 2014: VA is changing its monetary burial benefits regulations to simplify the program and pay eligible survivors more quickly and efficiently. These regulations will authorize VA to pay, without a written application, most eligible surviving spouses basic monetary burial benefits at the maximum amount authorized in law through automated systems rather than reimbursing them for actual costs incurred.

- Under the current regulations, VA pays for burial and funeral expenses on a reimbursement basis, which requires survivors to submit receipts for relatively small one-time payments that VA generally pays at the maximum amount permitted by law.
- The new burial regulations will permit VA to pay, at a flat rate, burial and plot or interment allowances thereby enabling VA to automate payment of burial benefits to most eligible surviving spouses and more efficiently process other burial benefit claims.
- The burial allowance for a non-service-connected death is \$300, and \$2,000 for a death connected to military service.

### Benefit

#### **Service-related Death:**

VA will pay up to \$2,000 toward burial expenses for deaths on or after September 11, 2001, or up to \$1,500 for deaths prior to September 11, 2001. If the Veteran is buried in a VA national cemetery, some or all of the cost of transporting the deceased may be reimbursed.

#### **Non-service-related Death:**

VA will pay up to \$796 toward burial and funeral expenses for deaths on or after October 1, 2019 (if hospitalized by VA at time of death), or \$300 toward burial and funeral expenses (if not hospitalized by VA at time of death), and a \$796 plot-interment allowance (if not buried in a national cemetery). For deaths on or after December 1, 2001, but before October 1, 2011, VA will pay up to \$300 toward burial and funeral expenses and a \$300 plot-interment allowance. For deaths on or after April 1, 1988 but before October 1, 2011, VA will pay \$300 toward burial and funeral expenses (for Veterans hospitalized by VA at the time of death).

An annual increase in burial and plot allowances for deaths occurring after October 1, 2011 began in fiscal year 2013 based on the Consumer Price Index for the preceding 12-month period.

#### **Eligibility Requirements**

- You paid for a Veteran's burial or funeral, **AND**
- You have not been reimbursed by another government agency or some other source, such as the deceased Veteran's employer, **AND**
- The Veteran was discharged under conditions other than dishonorable, **AND**
  - The Veteran died because of a service-related disability, **OR**
  - The Veteran was receiving VA pension or compensation at the time of death, **OR**
  - The Veteran was entitled to receive VA pension or compensation, but decided not to reduce his/her military retirement or disability pay, **OR**
  - The Veteran died while hospitalized by VA, or while receiving care under VA contract at a non-VA facility, **OR**
  - The Veteran died while traveling under proper authorization and at VA expense to or from a specified place for the purpose of examination, treatment, or care, **OR**
  - The Veteran had an original or reopened claim pending at the time of death and has been found entitled to compensation or pension from a date prior to the date of death, **OR**
  - The Veteran died on or after October 9, 1996, while a patient at a VA-approved state nursing home.

**NOTE:** VA does not pay burial benefits if the deceased:

- Died during active military service, **OR**

- Was a member of Congress who died while holding office, **OR**
- Was a Federal prisoner

#### Evidence Requirements:

- Acceptable proof of death as specified in [38 CFR 3.211.](#), **AND**
- Receipted bills that show that you made payment in whole or part, **OR**
- A statement of account, preferably on the printed billhead of the funeral director or cemetery owner. The statement of account must show:
  - The name of the deceased Veteran for whom the services and merchandise were furnished, **AND**
  - The nature and cost of the services and merchandise, **AND**
  - All credits, **AND**
  - The amount of the unpaid balance, if any

#### How to Apply

- You can apply [online at Vets.gov](#), **OR**
- To submit a paper application, download and [complete VA Form 21P-530, Application for Burial Allowance](#) and mail it to the [Pension Management Center](#) that serves your state, **OR**
- Work with an [accredited representative](#), **OR**
- You may also go to your [local regional benefit office](#) and turn in your application for processing.

#### Additional Information

Other information regarding VA burial benefits such as flags, headstones and markers is provided by the [National Cemetery Administration](#).

### Burial flags to honor Veterans and Reservists

We provide a United States flag to drape on a casket (or coffin) or place with an urn in honor of the military service of a Veteran or Reservist. Find out how to apply for this burial honor.

#### Am I eligible for a burial flag?

You may be eligible for a burial flag if you're the next of kin or a close friend of the Veteran or Reservist and one of the descriptions below is true for that person.

- One of these must describe the service of the Veteran or Reservist. They:
  - Served in wartime, or
  - Died while serving on active duty after May 27, 1941, or
  - Served after January 31, 1955, or
  - Served in peacetime and left military service before June 27, 1950, after serving at least 1 enlistment, or because of a disability that was caused—or made worse—by their active military service, or
  - Served in the Selected Reserves (in certain cases) or served in the military forces of the Philippines while in service of the United States and died on or after April 25, 1951. For more information on either of these situations, call [800-827-1000](#), Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. ET.

#### How do I get a burial flag to honor a Veteran or Reservist?

To get a burial flag, fill out the Application for United States Flag for Burial Purposes (VA Form 27-2008).

[Download VA Form 27-2008 \(PDF\)](#)

#### Bring the application form to:

- A funeral director, **or**
- [A VA regional office](#), **or**
- A United States post office. Call ahead to make sure your local post office has burial flags. If they don't, they can direct you to one that does.

## How do I care for the flag?

Follow these guidelines to care for the flag:

- To protect the flag from weather damage, don't leave it outside for long periods of time.
- Use and display the flag carefully so it can't be damaged in any way.
- Don't add or attach any words or symbols or other kinds of drawings to the flag.
- Don't use the flag to hold or carry anything.

On the last page of the Application for United States Flag for Burial Purposes, you can read more about how to care for a burial flag. You can also see how the flag will be displayed and then folded at a memorial service.

[Read more about burial flags on the last page of the application \(PDF\)](#)

What else should I know about burial flags?

The Veteran's family can donate the flag to a national cemetery that has an Avenue of Flags so it can be flown on patriotic holidays.

We can't replace flags that are lost, destroyed, or stolen, but some Veterans organizations may be able to help you get a replacement if something happens to the flag we gave you.

Last updated: September 24, 2020

## Presidential Memorial Certificates

A Presidential Memorial Certificate (PMC) is an engraved paper certificate signed by the current president. Find out how to request a certificate to honor the military service of a Veteran or Reservist.

### Am I eligible for a Presidential Memorial Certificate?

You may be eligible for a Presidential Memorial Certificate if you meet both of the requirements listed below.

#### Both of these must be true:

- The Veteran or Reservist is [eligible for burial in a national cemetery](#), and
- You're the next of kin, family member, or close friend of the Veteran or Reservist (or an authorized service representative for a family member or friend of the Veteran or Reservist)

Note: In 2020, we'll automatically present a PMC to a Veteran's next of kin at the burial, when the Veteran is buried in a national cemetery. If the family or close friends would like to request more than one PMC, they can apply for more copies using the Presidential Memorial Certificate Request Form (VA Form 40-0247).

[Download VA Form 40-0247 \(PDF\)](#)

If the Veteran is eligible for burial in a national cemetery, but is instead buried in a private cemetery, the family member or close friend can still apply to get a PMC. Fill out the Presidential Memorial Certificate Request Form (VA Form 40-0247); again, more than one PMC can be requested. To speed up the processing of the claim, submit the Veteran's military discharge documents and death certificate. Don't send original documents, as they won't be returned.

[Download VA Form 40-0247 \(PDF\)](#)

[See a list of military discharge documents](#)

How do I apply for a Presidential Memorial Certificate?

You can apply for a PMC in person, by mail, or by fax.

In person

You can apply at any VA regional office.

[Find your nearest VA regional office](#)

By mail

Fill out the Presidential Memorial Certificate Request Form (VA Form 40-0247).

[Download VA Form 40-0247 \(PDF\)](#)

Mail the form, along with copies of the Veteran's death certificate and [DD214 or other discharge documents](#), here:  
Memorial Products Service (41B)  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
5109 Russell Road  
Quantico, VA 22134-3903

Note: Please don't send original documents since we can't return them to you.

You can also fax the form to [800-455-7143](#). If you need help, call [800-697-6947](#).

If it's been 6 weeks since you applied for a PMC and you haven't received it yet, call us at [202-632-7300](#) to find out the status of your request. Please don't send a second application unless we ask you to.

## **Veterans' headstones, markers, and medallions**

Find out how to apply for a headstone, grave or niche marker, or medallion to honor a Veteran, service member, or eligible family member.

### **Eligibility**

Who can be honored with a headstone, grave marker, or niche marker?

Review eligibility requirements for:

#### **Veterans and active-duty service members**

A Veteran who didn't receive a dishonorable discharge or a service member who died while on active duty may be eligible for a headstone or marker if they meet the requirements listed below specific to when they served.

##### **Enlisted personnel who served before September 7, 1980, and officers who served before October 16, 1981**

**At least one of these must be true. The Veteran or service member:**

- Died on or after November 1, 1990, and their grave is currently marked with a privately purchased headstone, **or**
- Was buried in an unmarked grave, anywhere in the world

**Note:** If the Veteran or service member served before World War I, we require detailed documents, like muster rolls, extracts from state files, or the military or state organization where they served.

##### **Enlisted personnel who served after September 7, 1980, and officers who served after October 16, 1981**

**At least one of these must be true. The Veteran or service member:**

- Died on or after November 1, 1990, and their grave is currently marked with a privately purchased headstone, **or**
- Was buried in an unmarked grave, anywhere in the world

**And at least one of these must also be true. The Veteran or service member:**

- Served for a minimum of 24 months of continuous active duty, **or**
- Died while serving on active duty

**Note:** Hmong individuals who were living in the U.S. when they died are eligible if they were naturalized under the Hmong Veterans Naturalization Act of 2000 and died on or after March 23, 2018.

#### **National Guard members and Reservists**

A National Guard member or Reservist may be eligible for a medallion if they meet any of the requirements listed below specific to their type of service.

We provide 2 types of medallions. National Guard members and Reservists may be eligible for a bronze medallion. If they've received a Medal of Honor, they may also be eligible for a Medal of Honor medallion.

##### **National Guard members**

**At least one of these must be true. The National Guard member:**

- Was entitled to retirement pay at their time of death (or would have been entitled if they were over 60 years old), **or**
- Served in a federal status and for the period of time they were called to serve

##### **Reservists**

**At least one of these must be true. The Reservist:**

- Was entitled to retirement pay at their time of death (or would have been entitled if they were over 60 years old), or
- Was called to active duty for purposes other than training

**Note:** National Guard members or Reservists who have only limited active-duty service for training aren't eligible in most cases. They may be eligible in certain situations, such as if they died during or as the result of the training.

### **Commissioned officers**

A commissioned officer may be eligible for a medallion to be attached to a headstone or marker that was purchased at their or another person's private expense. The officer may be eligible if they served in active Public Health Service on or after April 6, 1917.

**Note:** Spouses and dependents aren't eligible for a medallion.

### **Applying for a memorial item**

#### **Can I apply for one of these memorial items?**

In most cases, you can apply for one of these memorial items if you're representing the deceased Veteran, service member, or family member in any of the below relationships or professional roles.

#### **One of these must describe your relationship to the deceased:**

- A family member, or
- A personal representative (someone who officially represents the deceased), or
- A representative of an accredited Veterans Service Organization, or
- An employee of a state or local government whose official responsibilities include serving Veterans, or
- Any person who's legally responsible for making arrangements for unclaimed remains or for details having to do with the deceased's interment or memorialization, or
- Any individual representing the deceased, if the Veteran's service ended before April 6, 1917

You must be a member of the deceased's family to apply for a memorial item if any of the below descriptions is true. The deceased's remains:

- Haven't been recovered or identified, or
- Were buried at sea, or
- Were donated to science, or
- Were cremated and scattered

#### **How do I apply for a memorial item?**

Fill out an application

For a headstone, grave marker, or niche marker, fill out the Claim for Standard Government Headstone or Marker (VA Form 40-1330).

[Download VA Form 40-1330 \(PDF\)](#)

**Note:** If this is your second request, or if you're requesting a replacement because of a mistake with the inscription or a damaged headstone or marker, be sure to explain this in block 27 of the form.

For a medallion to be placed on a privately purchased headstone or marker, fill out the Claim for Government Medallion for Placement in a Private Cemetery (VA Form 40-1330M).

[Download VA Form 40-1330M \(PDF\)](#)

Send us your application and supporting documents

Mail or fax your form, along with a copy of the Veteran's [DD214 or other discharge documents](#). Don't send the originals since we can't return them.

Fax the documents to [800-455-7143](tel:800-455-7143), or

Mail the discharge papers and the form to this address:

Memorial Products Service (41B)

Department of Veteran Affairs

5109 Russell Road  
Quantico, VA 22134-3903

If you need help with your application, please call us at [800-697-6947](tel:800-697-6947). We're here Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. ET.

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#### **More information about headstones and markers**

[Can I choose the type of headstone or marker?](#)

[What information goes on the headstone or marker, and who provides it?](#)

[When will the headstone or marker I requested arrive, and who sets it?](#)

[Does VA provide a headstone or marker if remains aren't available?](#)

[Can 2 Veterans who are married get separate headstones?](#)

[Can I request a replacement headstone?](#)

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#### **What do I need to know about burial in a private cemetery?**

As you're preparing for the burial or memorial item, you should know that:

You don't have to pay for the headstone or marker itself, but you're responsible for the cost of placing it (called a setting fee). And you'll need to make arrangements yourself to have the headstone or marker placed.

If you'd like, you can request a medallion to attach to a privately purchased headstone, marker, or niche cover in a private cemetery. You can choose from 3 different sizes. When you receive the medallion, it comes with a kit to help you attach it.

[Learn more about medallions and see what they look like](#)

You may have additional costs, restrictions on the type of headstone or marker you can use, and other requirements you should know about when preparing for burial in a private cemetery.

[Find out what to ask when planning a burial in a private cemetery](#)

If the grave remains unmarked for 60 days after you've applied for a memorial item:

If more than 60 days have passed and the grave still isn't marked, contact the cemetery, funeral home, or other party responsible for accepting delivery of the headstone, marker, or medallion. If they haven't received it, call us at [800-697-6947](tel:800-697-6947). We're here Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. ET.

If you have a complaint about a private cemetery:

There are organizations that can help you resolve the issue.

[Get help resolving your complaint \(PDF\)](#)

#### **About VA Dependency and Indemnity Compensation for spouses, dependents, and parents**

If you're the surviving spouse, child, or parent of a service member who died in the line of duty, or the survivor of a Veteran who died from a service-related injury or illness, you may be able to get a tax-free monetary benefit called VA (VA DIC). Find out if you can get VA benefits or compensation.

DIC eligibility for survivors of Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans

If we denied your Blue Water Navy Veteran's service-connected disability claim in the past, you may be eligible for DIC benefits based on the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019.

See [DIC eligibility information](#) and [how to apply](#).

Veterans who served on a Blue Water Navy vessel offshore of the Republic of Vietnam, or on another U.S. Navy or Coast Guard ship operating in the coastal waterways of Vietnam between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975, are now entitled to a presumption of [service connection for illnesses related to Agent Orange exposure](#). This is a result of Public Law 116-23, also known as the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019.



## **Am I eligible for VA DIC as a surviving spouse or dependent?**

### **As a surviving spouse**

You may be eligible for VA benefits or compensation for surviving spouses if you meet the requirements listed below. You'll also need to provide evidence with your claim showing that one of the descriptions below is true for the Veteran or service member. Evidence may include documents like military service records, doctor's reports, and medical test results.

#### **One of these must be true. You:**

- 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 either lived with the Veteran or service member without a break until their death or, if separated, weren't at fault for the separation

Note: If you remarried on or after December 16, 2003, and you were 57 years of age or older at the time you remarried, you can still continue to receive compensation.

#### **You'll also need to provide evidence showing that one of these descriptions is true for the Veteran or service member:**

- The service member died while on active duty, active duty for training, or inactive-duty training, or
- The Veteran died from a service-connected illness or injury, or
- The Veteran didn't die from a service-connected illness or injury, but was eligible to receive VA compensation for a service-connected disability rated as totally disabling for a certain period of time
- If the Veteran's eligibility was due to a rating of totally disabling, they must have had this rating:
  - For at least 10 years before their death, or
  - Since their release from active duty and for at least 5 years immediately before their death, or
  - For at least 1 year before their death if they were a former prisoner of war who died after September 30, 1999

Note: "Totally disabling" means the Veteran's injuries made it impossible for them to work.

### **As a surviving child**

You may be able to get compensation as a surviving child if you meet the requirements listed below. You'll also need to provide evidence with your claim showing that one of the descriptions below is true for the Veteran or service member. Evidence may include documents like military service records, doctor's reports, and medical test results.

All of these must be true. You:

Aren't married, and

Aren't included on the surviving spouse's compensation, and

Are under the age of 18 (or under the age of 23 if attending school)

Note: If you were adopted out of the Veteran's or service member's family, but meet all other eligibility criteria, you still qualify for compensation.

You'll also need to provide evidence that one of these descriptions is true for the Veteran or service member:

The service member died while on active duty, active duty for training, or inactive-duty training, or

The Veteran died from a service-connected illness or injury, or

The Veteran didn't die from a service-connected illness or injury, but was eligible to receive VA compensation for a service-connected disability that was rated as totally disabling for a certain period of time

If the Veteran's eligibility was due to a service-connected disability rated as totally disabling, they must have had this rating:

- For at least 10 years before their death, or

- Since their release from active duty and for at least 5 years immediately before their death, or
- For at least 1 year before their death if they were a former prisoner of war who died after September 30, 1999

Note: “Totally disabling” means the Veteran’s injuries make it impossible for them to work.

### **As a surviving parent**

If you qualify, you can get tax-free monetary benefits. The amount you receive depends on the type of survivor you are.

[DIC benefit rates for surviving spouses and children](#)

[DIC benefits for surviving parents](#)

### **What kind of benefits can I get?**

If you qualify, you can get tax-free monetary benefits. The amount you receive depends on the type of survivor you are.

[DIC benefit rates for surviving spouses and children](#)

[DIC benefits for surviving parents](#)

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### **How do I apply for compensation?**

First, you’ll need to fill out an application for benefits. The application you fill out will depend on your survivor status.

If you’re the surviving spouse or child of a service member who died while on active duty, your military casualty assistance officer will help you to complete an Application for DIC, Death Pension, and/or Accrued Benefits by a Surviving Spouse or Child (VA Form 21P-534a). The officer will help you mail the form to the correct VA regional office.

[Download VA Form 21P-534a \(PDF\)](#)

If you’re the surviving spouse or child of a Veteran, fill out an Application for DIC, Death Pension, and/or Accrued Benefits (VA Form 21P-534EZ).

[Download VA Form 21P-534EZ \(PDF\)](#)

If you’re a surviving parent, fill out an Application for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation by Parent(s) (VA Form 21P-535).

[Download VA Form 21P-535 \(PDF\)](#)

You can apply for this benefit in any of these ways:

Work with an accredited representative.

[Get help filing your claim](#)

Use the direct upload tool through AccessVA to upload your form online.

[Go to AccessVA to use direct upload](#)

Mail your form to this address:

Department of Veterans Affairs

Pension Intake Center

PO Box 5365

Janesville, WI 53547-5365

Go to a VA regional office and get help from a VA employee.

[Find a VA regional office near you](#)

Other VA benefits for survivors

[VA Survivors Pension benefit rates](#)

Find out if you’re eligible and how to apply for VA pension benefits as a surviving spouse or child of a deceased Veteran with wartime service.

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## Other useful information

- If the burial is at a military cemetery, you can request a “Military Funeral and Honor Guard” from the National Cemetery or local American Legion, VFW, DAV, or VVA group. This will help provide at least two uniformed representatives of your veteran’s branch of service to attend the funeral, play Taps, and assist as pallbearers if needed. Your local military recruiter may be helpful in finding you volunteers to serve as well.
- If you have been using VA-issued prosthetic equipment like a wheelchair, medical bed, or hearing aids, you can arrange to have them picked up from your home by calling the VA hospital’s Prosthetic Department.
- If the Veteran had G.I. Insurance, you may contact your County Veterans Service Officer for assistance in completing the forms.
- If the veteran is receiving the [Aid and Attendance pension benefit](#), you can pre-pay the funeral expenses using the benefit.

## **What to do before a Veteran Dies - courtesy of *The American Legion***

One of the eventualities in life...an unpleasant one to be sure, but one that the spouses and families of veterans must keep in mind. In the inevitable death of a veteran, to help ease the burdens on a newly deceased veteran's family during this emotionally trying time, certain preparations should be made in advance. Here are a few of the more important papers and useful information to have on hand.

### **Important Records:**

The first step to be accomplished by all families is to have easy access to the following papers and records.

- The veteran's discharge certificate (DD form 214).
- VA documents, if any, indicating a VA claim number.
- A copy of all marriage certificates and divorce decrees (if any previous marriages).
- A copy of the family will, living will (not required for VA benefits).
- Location of safety deposit boxes (not required by VA).
- Business address, email address, office and cell phone numbers for local service officer.
- Family life insurance policies and any VA or organization's insurance policies, including beneficiary designation.
- Birth certificates for all family members.
- VA documents, if any, indicating a VA claim number (after June 1974, the social security number is assigned as the claim number).
- A copy of all marriage certificates and divorce decrees, if any.
- Copies of any meritorious awards.

The American Legion has fully accredited Service Officers located in each VA Regional Office. These representatives are at your service to help develop and file claims and assist you and/or your dependents in applying for the various benefits to which you may be entitled. It is recommended that you list numbers and locations of the following noted items so that your family will have the details necessary to file for benefits if you are incapacitated or deceased. You should file this information in a safe place at home.

- Full Name
- Date of Birth
- Location and copy of Birth Certificate
- Social Security Number
- Military Service Number
- Branch of Service
- Place of entry into the Service
- Dates of Service
- Wars served, medals and honors received
- Highest rank
- Discharge Type

- Location of Discharge Certificates (DD214)
- Name/address of those you served with if available
- Duty stations
- VA Claim number
- County/state where discharge is recorded
- Spouse's full legal name
- Date/Place of any marriages
- Location of marriage certificates
- Death Certificates of any deceased spouse
- Divorce decrees
- Name of children
- Location of your children's birth certificates
- Final arrangements that have been made
- Veterans' Service Organization memberships, other organizations, with contact information
- Banking Information - accounts & balances, automatic payments
- Stocks, bonds, other income sources
- Family & friends contact list
- Accounts Payable, debts
- Credit card accounts with numbers
- Email & social media accounts & passwords
- Passwords for phones, computers, etc.
- Location of legal documents, will, trust, check book, any of the above documents

## Deceased Veteran Checklist for Family Members

- Burial** – Advise the funeral home if burial will be in a veteran or national veteran cemetery.
- Death Certificate** - Request additional copies of the death certificate, which is usually processed by the Funeral Home with State agencies. You may need 10 to 12 depending on how many insurance policies, organizations, bank accounts, etc. are associated with the veteran.
- Discharge** - Provide a copy of deceased veteran’s discharge document, form DD-214.
- Employer** - Notify the deceased veterans current or recent employer, if any, so that pension, medical plan, company savings plan, and insurance can be dealt with properly.
- Life Insurance** - Notify deceased veteran’s life insurance policy companies of death. Be sure to check for policies provided by veterans’ organizations and other groups to which the veteran may have belonged. Processing of death benefits cannot occur until death certificates have been issued.
- Military Honors** - Be sure to let the Funeral Home know if you’d like Military Honors for the deceased.
- Military Retirees** - Report death to the Defense Finance and Accounting Service if the veteran was retired from the Military and receiving a military pension. The number is 1-800-321-1080. Ask that Survivor Benefit Plan forms be sent to the surviving spouse to be completed and submitted to Defense Finance and Accounting Service. Note: DFAS will remove the last month’s retired pay to the deceased from his/her bank account normally within 48 hours of this notification.
  - Expect eight to 12 weeks for these forms be processed and the surviving spouse to receive their first SBP allotment. The back Survivor Benefit Plan pay will be part of the first allotment. Ensure surviving spouse has enough funds available to take care of required expenses during this processing time.
- Notices** - Notify any local or other locations’ newspapers of death so an obituary can be printed. Funeral home will often assist in the drafting of an obituary and submitting to the newspaper. Check to see if the veteran wrote an obituary during end-of-life planning.
- Presidential Memorial Certificate** – VA provides a presidential certificate to next of kin upon request. The funeral director can assist you with the application.
- Social Security** - Notify your Social Security. *Note:* Normally a telephone interview can be set up with a Social Security counselor to get information they need to process their paperwork. Social Security will request the ORIGINAL wedding license from the surviving spouse to be sent to them, NO copies. Social Security Office will send this back to the surviving spouse after their verification. The other option is to go to the local Social Security Office with the marriage license for their validation of marriage.
  - When contacting Social Security, the following documents may be required:
    - DD-214 Form
    - Record of marriage (as discussed above)
    - Proof of age and birth of children
    - Divorce papers (if applicable)
    - Adoption papers for dependent children (if applicable)
    - Note: Often the funeral director will help you with Social Security.
- VA Benefits** - Contact the County Veterans Service Officer, which provides support to veterans and their families in obtaining benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Survivor benefits and/or burial stipend may be available. Your county VSO can assist with applying for these benefits.
- Veteran Grave Marker** – VA provides veteran grave markers at no cost for eligible veterans. Advise the funeral director if you wish to order a veteran grave marker.

**This checklist should be used after the death of anyone.**

### **To Do Immediately After Someone Dies - courtesy of AARP**

#### **Get a legal pronouncement of death**

If your loved one died in a hospital or nursing home where a doctor was present, the staff will handle this. An official declaration of death is the first step to getting a death certificate, a critical piece of paperwork. But if your relative died at home, especially if it was unexpected, you'll need to get a medical professional to declare her dead. To do this, call 911 soon after she passes and have her transported to an emergency room where she can be declared dead and moved to a funeral home. If your family member died at home under [hospice care](#), a hospice nurse can declare him dead. Without a declaration of death, you can't plan a funeral much less handle the deceased's legal affairs.

#### **Tell friends and family**

Send out a group text or mass email or make individual phone calls to let people know their loved one has died. To track down all those who need to know, go through the deceased's email and phone contacts. Inform coworkers and the members of any social groups or church the person belonged to. Ask the recipients to spread the word by notifying others connected to the deceased. Put a post about the death on social media.

#### **Find out about existing funeral and burial plans**

"Ideally, you had the opportunity to talk with your loved one about his or her wishes for funeral or burial," writes Sally Balch Hurme, an elder law attorney and author of *Checklist for Family Survivors*. If you didn't, she advises you look for a letter of instruction in the deceased's papers or call a family meeting to have the first conversation about what the funeral will look like. This is critical if he left no instructions. You need to discuss what the person wanted in terms of a funeral, what you can afford and what the family wants.

### **Within a Few Days of Death**

#### **Make funeral, burial or cremation arrangements**

- Search the paperwork to find out if there was a prepaid burial plan. If not, you'll need to choose a funeral home and decide on specifics like where the service will be held, whether to cremate, where the body or ashes will be interred and what type of tombstone or urn to order. It's a good idea to research funeral prices to help you make informed decisions.
- If the person was in the military or belonged to a fraternal or religious group, contact the [Veterans Administration](#) or the specific organization to see if it offers burial benefits or conducts funeral services.
- Get help with the funeral. Line up relatives and friends to be pallbearers, to [eulogize](#), to plan the service, to keep a list of well-wishers, to write thank-you notes and to arrange the post-funeral gathering.
- Get a friend or relative who is a wordsmith to write an obituary.

#### **Secure the property**

Lock up the deceased's home and vehicle. Ask a friend or relative to water the plants, get the mail and throw out the food in the refrigerator. If there are valuables, such as jewelry or cash, in the home, lock them up. "You have to watch out for valuable personal effects walking out," Harbison says.

#### **Provide care for pets**

Make sure pets have caretakers until there's a permanent plan for them. Send them to stay with a relative who likes animals or board them at a kennel.

#### **Forward mail**

Go to the post office and put in a [forwarding order](#) to send the mail to yourself or whoever is working with you to see to the immediate affairs. You don't want mail piling up at the deceased's home, telegraphing to the world that the property is empty. This is also the first step in finding out what subscriptions, creditors and other accounts will need to

be canceled or paid. "The person's mail is a wealth of information," Harbison says. "Going through it is a practical way to see what the person's assets and bills are. It will help you find out what you need to take care of."

**Notify your family member's employer**

Ask for information about benefits and any paychecks that may be due. Also inquire about whether there is a company-wide life insurance policy.

## **Two Weeks After Death**

**Secure certified copies of death certificates**

Get 10 copies. You're going to need death certificates to close bank and brokerage accounts, to file insurance claims and to register the death with government agencies, among other things. The funeral home you're working with can get copies on your behalf, or you can order them from the vital statistics office in the state in which the person died.

**Find the will and the executor**

Your loved one's survivors need to know where any money, property or belongings will go. Ideally, you talked with your relative before she passed and she told you where she kept her [will](#). If not, look for the document in a desk, a safety deposit box or wherever she kept important papers. People usually name an executor (the person who will manage the settling of the estate) in their will. The executor needs to be involved in most of the steps going forward. If there isn't a will, the probate court judge will name an administrator in place of an executor.

**Meet with a trusts and estates attorney**

While you don't need an attorney to settle an estate, having one makes things easier. If the estate is worth more than \$50,000, Harbison suggests that you hire a lawyer to help navigate the process and distribute assets. "[Estates can get complicated](#), fast," he says. The executor should pick the attorney.

**Contact a CPA**

If your loved one had a CPA, contact her; if not, hire one. The estate may have to file a tax return, and a final tax return will need to be filed on the deceased's behalf. "Getting the taxes right is an important part of this," Harbison says.

**Take the will to probate**

Probate is the legal process of executing a will. You'll need to do this at a county or city probate court office. Probate court makes sure that the person's debts and liabilities are paid and that the remaining assets are transferred to the beneficiaries.

**Make an inventory of all assets**

Laws vary by state, but the probate process usually starts with an inventory of all assets (personal property, bank accounts, house, car, brokerage account, personal property, furniture, jewelry, etc.), which will need to be filed in the court. For the physical items in the household, Harbison suggests hiring an appraiser.

**Track down assets**

Part of the work of making that inventory of assets is finding them all. The task, called marshaling the assets, can be a big job. "For complex estates, this can take years," Harbison says. There are search firms that will help you track down assets in exchange for a cut. Harbison recommends a DIY approach: Comb your family member's tax returns, mail, email, brokerage and bank accounts, deeds and titles to find assets. Don't leave any safety deposit box or filing cabinet unopened.

**Make a list of bills**

Share the list with the executor so that important expenses like the mortgage, taxes and utilities are taken care of while the estate is settled.

**Cancel services no longer needed**

These include cellphone, iTunes, Netflix, cable, and internet.



**Notify the following of your loved one's death:**

- **The Social Security Administration:** If the deceased was receiving Social Security benefits, you need to stop the checks. Some family members may be eligible for death benefits from Social Security. Generally, funeral directors [report deaths to the Social Security Administration](#), but, ultimately, it's the survivors' responsibility to tell the SSA. Contact your [local SSA office](#) to do so. The agency will let Medicaid know that your loved one died.
- **Life insurance companies:** You'll need a death certificate and policy numbers to make claims on any policies the deceased had.
- **Banks, financial institutions:** If your loved one left [a list of accounts and online passwords](#), it will be much easier to close or change accounts. If the person didn't, you'll need a copy of the death certificate.
- **Financial advisers, stockbrokers:** Determine the beneficiary listed on accounts. Depending on the type of asset, the beneficiary may get access to the account or benefit simply by filling out appropriate forms and providing a copy of the death certificate (no executor needed).
- **Credit agencies:** To prevent identity theft, send copies of the death certificate to the three major firms: Equifax, Experian and TransUnion.

**Cancel driver's license**

This removes the deceased's name from the records of the Department of Motor Vehicles and prevents identity theft. Contact the local DMV for specific instructions, but you'll need a copy of the death certificate.

**Close credit card accounts**

Contact customer service and tell the representative that you're closing the account on behalf of a deceased relative. You'll need to provide a copy of the death certificate to do this, too. Keep records of accounts you close and inform the executor of any outstanding balances on the cards.

**Terminate insurance policies**

Contact providers to end coverage for the deceased on home, auto and health insurance policies, and ask that any unused premium be returned.

**Delete or memorialize social media accounts**

You can delete Facebook or Instagram accounts, but some survivors choose to turn them into a memorial for their loved one instead. A memorialized Facebook profile stays up with the word "Remembering" in front of the deceased's name. Friends will be able to post on the timeline. Whether you choose to delete or memorialize, you'll need to contact the company with copies of your ID as well as the death certificate.

**Close email accounts**

To prevent [identity theft](#) and fraud, it's a good idea to shut down the deceased's email account. If the person set up a funeral plan or a will, she may have included log-in information so you can do this yourself. If not, you'll need copies of the death certificate to cancel an email account. The specifics vary by company, but most require a death certificate and verification that you are kin or the executor.

**More on Home and Family**

[How to plan a meaningful memorial service](#)

[5 estate planning documents every family should have](#)

[Starting the conversation about end-of-life care](#)