

You have some important rights in your claim with VA. You don't have to handle your case by yourself, and you don't have to deal with us only through the mail. On this page we'll tell you about your right to have your own representative. We'll also explain your right to a personal hearing.

### WHAT IS A REPRESENTATIVE?

A representative is a person who helps you tell us your side of the story. The representative can help you with written materials you send us. He or she can also go with you to a hearing if you decide you want one.

### WHO CAN BE MY REPRESENTATIVE?

There are three kinds of representatives. Each is explained below.

- You can choose an employee of a veterans organization or other service organization which is recognized by VA. On the back of this page we have a list of some service organizations that could represent you free of charge.

OR

- You can get a lawyer. The lawyer might work in private practice or for Legal Aid.

OR

- You can get an agent. An agent is anyone other than a lawyer or a service organization who is authorized by VA to speak for you or help you tell your side of the story.

If you don't have a representative and would like one, tell us who you want to represent you. Then we'll send you the forms and information you'll need to name your representative.

### WHAT IS A PERSONAL HEARING?

A personal hearing is a meeting where you can talk to us about a decision we have made or a decision we are going to make. In most cases, the person who "hears" your claim will be the person who makes the decision. You should bring evidence to help us understand your side of the story.

### CAN I BRING SOMEONE TO THE HEARING?

Yes. Besides your representative, you can bring witnesses. A witness is anyone who has personal knowledge about your claim and can give us useful information.

If you don't want a representative, but still want someone to help you at the hearing, one of our Veterans Services Representatives (VSRs) can go to the hearing with you. However, you will need to tell us ahead of time so that the VSR can study your case.

### WHAT DOES VA PROVIDE FOR THE HEARING?

Generally the hearing is held at the Regional Office which has your records. We'll provide the room and tape the hearing. Where available, your hearing can also be held at a local VA hospital through a closed circuit TV system. These services are free. ***We will not be able to pay for your travel, meals, or other expenses.***

### HOW CAN I REQUEST A HEARING?

If you'd like a personal hearing, simply write to us and tell us you want one.

### WHEN MUST I REQUEST A HEARING?

If we receive your request for a hearing **within 30 days** from the date of our letter, we will not make any decisions until we hold the hearing and review the hearing testimony and any evidence presented.

**After 30 days** you may request a hearing, but we may have already made a decision as explained in our letter.

## RECOGNIZED SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

Here is a list of national organizations which are approved to help people with their claims. You don't have to belong to one of these organizations to get their help, and they won't charge you a fee. If you're looking for one of these organizations and you can't find them in your phone book, you can call us toll free at 1-800-827-1000.

African American PTSD Association	Marine Corps League
American Legion	Military Order of the Purple Heart
American Red Cross	National Amputation Foundation, Inc.
American Veterans Committee	National Association of County Veterans Service Officers, Inc.
AMVETS	National Veterans Legal Services Program
American Ex-Prisoners of War, Inc.	National Veterans Organization of America
American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor, Inc.	Non Commissioned Officers Association of the USA
American GI Forum, National Veterans Outreach Program	Navy Mutual Aid Association
Army and Navy Union, USA	Paralyzed Veterans of America, Inc.
Army and Air Force Mutual Aid Association	Polish Legion of American Veterans, U.S.A.
Blinded Veterans Association	Swords to Plowshares, Veterans Rights Organization
Catholic War Veterans of the U.S.A.	The Retired Enlisted Association
Disabled American Veterans	United Spanish War Veterans of the United States
Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association	Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States
Fleet Reserve Association	Veterans of World War I of the U.S.A., Inc.
Gold Star Wives of America, Inc.	Veterans of the Vietnam War, Inc. & the Veterans Coalition
Italian American War Veterans of the United States, Inc.	Vietnam Era Veterans Association
Jewish War Veterans of the United States	Vietnam Veterans of America
Legion of Valor of the United States of America, Inc.	

Although agency titles vary, the following States and possessions maintain veterans service agencies which are recognized to help people with their claims. You can look in the **state government** pages of the phone book under "veterans" to see if your state has a Department of Veterans Affairs or Veterans Affairs Commission.

Alabama	Illinois	Nevada	Puerto Rico
American Samoa	Kansas	New Hampshire	Rhode Island
Arizona	Kentucky	New Jersey	South Carolina
Arkansas	Louisiana	New Mexico	South Dakota
California	Maine	New York	Tennessee
Colorado	Maryland	North Carolina	Texas
Connecticut	Massachusetts	North Dakota	Utah
Delaware	Minnesota	Northern Mariana Islands	Vermont
Florida	Mississippi	Ohio	Virginia
Georgia	Missouri	Oklahoma	Virgin Islands
Guam	Montana	Oregon	Washington
Hawaii	Nebraska	Pennsylvania	West Virginia
Idaho			Wisconsin

### Points to Remember:

- If you want a representative, you should let us know who you want. We can send you the necessary forms to appoint your representative.
- If you want a personal hearing, you should write and tell us.