



Photo courtesy National Cemetery Administration

VETERANS BENEFITS

Pre-need eligibility offers peace of mind

Many veterans don't realize that their military service entitles them to be interred in a national cemetery at no cost to them or their families.

Even if you never received disability or any other benefit from VA, if you served on active duty and were discharged under conditions other than dishonorable, you are eligible. If you served in the National Guard or reserve and were mobilized or served long enough to earn a retirement, you are eligible. Yet most veterans and their families don't take advantage of this benefit, which would save them thousands of dollars. The best, most effective way to ensure you get the burial or memorial benefits you and your spouse have earned from military service is through a VA program called Pre-Need Eligibility (Pre-Need).

Pre-Need establishes eligibility for VA burial and memorial benefits before you die, so your family doesn't have to go searching for documentation at the time of your death. Simply fill out VA Form 40-10007 and mail it in to the St. Louis office indicated on the top of the form. You can print out a form or fill it out online at www.cem.va.gov/pre-need.

VA will review your application, and you will get a letter confirming or denying eligibility. If approved, place the letter in a safe location, inform your family and rest easy.

Pre-Need Eligibility provides veterans and their families with peace of mind. This information is particularly important for members of the National Guard and reserve, many of whom don't realize that their service entitles them to burial benefits.

There are some nuances for reservists, who may have to provide additional documentation if a mobilization isn't documented on their DD 214, so it is even more important for them to apply for Pre-Need.

Waiting for your family to try to establish your eligibility at the time of death can sometimes result in a non-eligible decision with little or no time to provide additional information. You owe it to your family to take care of this while you are still alive.

If a VA national, state or tribal veterans cemetery is

selected as the final resting place, a veteran will receive the following: gravesite, opening and closing of the grave, grave liner, and perpetual care of the gravesite. Also included are memorial benefits such as a headstone, marker or cover for a columbarium niche.

All are free, which means saving the veteran's family thousands of dollars. The veteran's spouse, as well as minor children and unmarried adult children who legally rely on the veteran for support, are also eligible for interment free of charge, typically in the same grave or columbarium niche as the veteran.

If the veteran chooses interment in a private cemetery, he or she can still have a free government-furnished headstone, marker or cover. If the veteran chooses to be buried in a private cemetery with a privately purchased headstone, marker or niche cover, the family may request a free bronze medallion with the word "Veteran" and the appropriate branch of service to attach to the headstone. Each veteran's family also receives a burial flag.

At many VA national cemeteries, NCA partners with local military units or veterans service organizations to provide deceased veterans with military funeral honors, including the playing of taps and presentation of the burial flag. Finally, upon request, the veteran's family will receive a Presidential Memorial Certificate signed by the president. Multiple copies can be requested.

VA encourages all veterans to take advantage of Pre-Need Eligibility to ensure that they, and their families, know their eligibility status in advance. While families can always apply for the benefit at the time of death, applying in advance brings peace of mind and can help resolve eligibility problems ahead of time, when the person who knows the most about his or her service – the veteran – is still around to answer questions.

– Office of Engagement and Memorial Innovations,
National Cemetery Administration (NCA)

Learn more about VA burial and memorial benefits:

 www.cem.va.gov