

Transition from Service

The VFW's Concern:

Leaving service is often complicated by service-related ailments, family needs, loss of identity and support networks, and the required training to enter a new career field. Sadly, the initial year following discharge also comes with increased suicide risk among veterans, heightening the need to ensure all transitioning service members are connected to post-service benefits and resources as quickly as possible.

One of the best resources to utilize during this period are the accredited representatives who can help with Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) claims. These representatives can be from the national, state, or local level. Through BDD, service members can file expedited claims and complete medical evaluations before leaving service, enabling VA to provide disability ratings upon discharge. Receiving accelerated claims decisions means BDD participants are better able to minimize gaps in essential care like mental health counseling and medication management once they officially leave service.

In early 2024, VA launched its improved curriculum of VA benefits and services covered during Transition Assistance Program (TAP) classes. TAP 6.0 includes having an accredited representative physically present to assist service members with filing their BDD claims. Data shows this initiative has been effective in increasing the number of transitioning service members receiving their benefits upon discharge. It also has the potential to positively affect factors that can contribute to the downward spiral toward suicide, thereby saving lives.

The VFW would like to see this practice codified into law and made permanent. Since this is a current VA program, we anticipate this legislative fix would be cost neutral.

The VFW Urges Congress to:

Pass legislation such as the *TAP Promotion Act* to codify VA's practice of including accredited claims representatives from national, state, and local organizations in TAP classes.