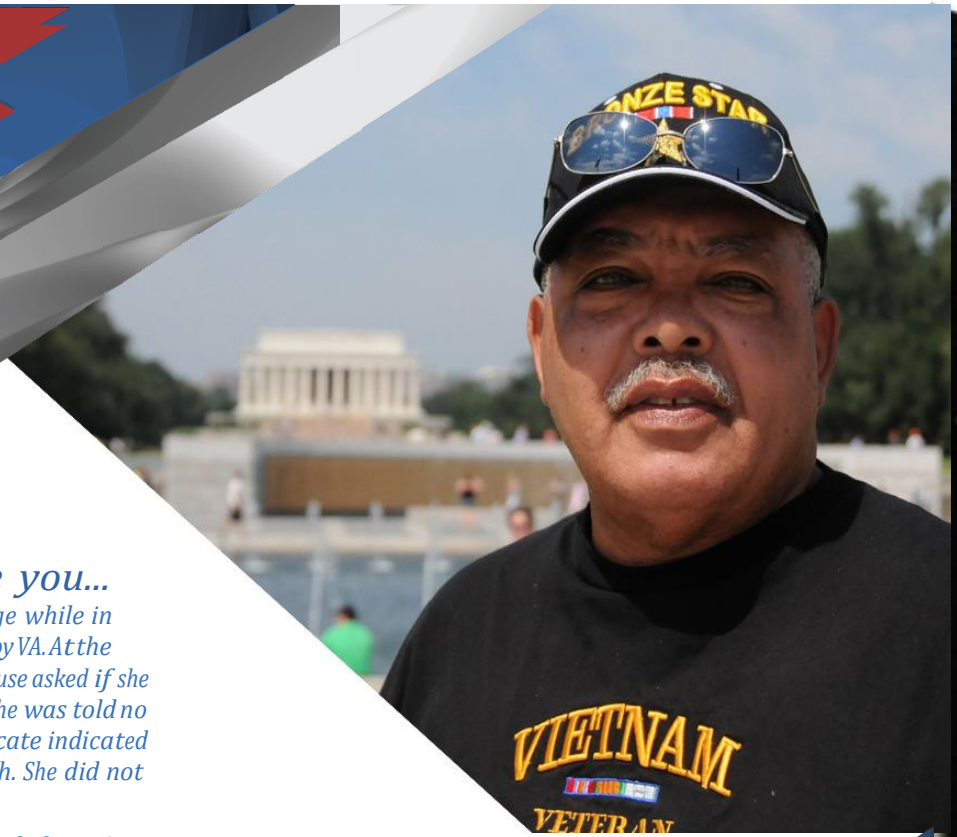
This could be you...

A veteran exposed to Agent Orange while in Vietnam was determined disabled by VA. At the time of his death, his surviving spouse asked if she was eligible for any VA benefits. She was told no because her husband's death certificate indicated a heart attack was the cause of death. She did not file a claim with VA at that time.

Ten years later, the widow attended a VA outreach seminar and learned she was eligible for benefits, with evidence of the service-connected disability that contributed to the veteran's death. A VA Service Officer contacted the physician who signed the death certificate on her behalf, but the physician refused to amend the death certificate to include the service-connected heart disease as a contributing factor to the death.

Not giving up, the VA Service Officer took the file to a Florida physician who had served at James Haley VA Hospital in Tampa and had knowledge of service-connected disabilities. The physician wrote a letter stating, " The service-connected disability (ischemic heart disease) was absolutely a contributing factor in the veteran's death."

A couple of months later the surviving spouse received a retroactive payment of more than $25,000 from the VA and now gets a monthly DIC benefit in excess of $1,000.



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

(800) 827-1000
www.VA.gov

Florida HEALTH

FDVA
FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS
www.FloridaVets.org

UNITY OF PURPOSE

VIETNAM AND ALL VETERANS OF FLORIDA, INC. STATE COALITION

FLORIDA VETERANS FOUNDATION INC. SERVING FLORIDA'S VETERANS

VA Service-Connected Disabilities

What Families, Physicians and Funeral Directors Should Know

What is a VA service-connected disability?

A VA service-connected disability is an injury or disease that was incurred in or aggravated, beyond normal progression, during active military service. Service-connected disabilities can apply to both physical and mental health conditions.

How does a physician know if the veteran had a service-connected disability?

Veterans and their spouses should provide copies of the veteran's VA Disability Rating Letter to all of their non-VA physicians. Physicians should add the letter to the veteran's medical record.

What is a VA Rating Letter?

This is a vital document in the VA system used to identify service-connected disabilities or possible contributing factors to a veteran's death. To obtain a VA Disability Rating Letter contact your nearest VA office.

Why is it important to list a VA service-connected disability on the death certificate?

If a service-connected disability was a contributing factor in the veteran's death, the surviving spouse and dependent children may be eligible for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC). A death certificate indicating the cause of death was service-connected is evidence needed by survivors when applying for the DIC benefit.

Veterans and Families

Veterans and their spouses need to be proactive when dealing with physicians if they are currently receiving service-connected disability benefits. They should:

- Provide the physician with a copy of the VA Disability Rating Letter so it is in the medical file. This should be done for all physicians they see.
- Review the disability with the physician so they are personally familiar with it.
- If the veteran dies, the family should remind the physician and the funeral director that the veteran had service-connected disabilities.
- Maintain the VA Disability Rating Letter in a safe place so it is available whenever it might be needed.
- Please visit your nearest VA office for a copy of your VA Disability Rating Letter or if you have any questions.

Funeral Directors

Funeral directors should remember to ask:

- Was the decedent a U.S. veteran?
- Was there a service-connected disability?
- Was the decedent receiving VA benefits for a service-connected disability?
- If there was a disability, does the family have the VA Disability Rating Letter?
- Did the family provide a copy of the VA Disability Rating Letter to the certifying physician?
- If there was a service-connected disability, the funeral director should review the Cause of Death section of the death record to see if the physician referenced the disability as a contributing factor.

Physicians

Service-connected disabilities that were a direct or underlying cause of death should be listed in Part I of the Cause of Death section on the death record.

A service-connected disability that may be a significant condition contributing to the death but not resulting in the underlying cause given in Part I, should be listed in Part II of the death record.