

Improved Pension Program

for Veterans, Their Surviving Spouse, and Dependent Children

What is the Improved Pension Program (IPP)?

Department of Veterans Affairs pays IPP to veterans who:

- served during a period of “war” AND
- are “permanently and totally disabled” from a “nonservice-connected disability” OR are over age 65

We explain more below.

Who can get IPP?

- Eligible veterans.
- Their dependents.
- Their surviving spouses.

Who is eligible?

You must be a veteran and meet **all** these:

1. You served in the active military: Army, Navy, Air Force, or Marines. Veterans also include persons who served in the National Guard, Coast Guard, U.S. Merchant Seamen who served on Blockships, WWII American Merchant Marine, WWII Civilian Navy IFF Technicians, Public Health Service, Coast and Geodetic Survey and its successor agencies the Environmental Science Services Administration and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.
2. You served at least one day during a period of war and were discharged or released from that service for a “service-connected disability;” OR you served at least 90 days,

and at least one day during a period of war;
OR you served for a total of 90 days or more during at least one period of war.

3. Your discharge was under other than dishonorable conditions.
4. You are 65 or older, OR you are “permanently and totally disabled” from a non-service connected disability not due to your “willful misconduct.”
5. You meet the financial need requirement.
6. If you enlisted after September 8, 1980, generally you must have served either 24 months in a row of active duty OR the full period for which they ordered you to active duty. Some exceptions apply.

I am still uncertain about my eligibility after reading this. Should I apply anyway?

Yes. There is no cost to apply. **Answer all questions honestly.**

What are the allowable periods of war for purposes of eligibility?

- Persian Gulf War –starting August 2, 1990, until the President or law declares the war’s end.
- Vietnam Era August 5, 1964 through May 7, 1975. If you served in the Republic of Vietnam, then February 28, 1961 through May 7, 1975.
- Korean Conflict – June 27, 1950 through January 31, 1955.

- World War II – December 7, 1941 through December 31, 1946. If you were in the service on December 31, 1946, continuous service before July 26, 1947 counts as World War II service.
- World War I – April 6, 1917 through November 11, 1918.

What is a nonservice-connected disability?

It means that when you left the service you were healthy. After that, you got a disability unrelated to injury or illness you had while in the military.

To be eligible for IPP, your disability may not be the result of willful misconduct. Alcoholism or addiction to illegal drugs may be “willful misconduct.”

What does “permanently and totally disabled” mean?

This disability makes it impossible for you to work AND is likely to last the rest of your life. They may consider age in determining the degree of disability.

What is the financial need requirement?

The VA reviews your income and net worth. If you have a spouse or dependents, the VA also considers their income and net worth.

You must report all income. The VA looks at all your income. They count only some types. Some **examples** of “countable income” are:

- Disability.
- Retirement.
- Dividends and interest.

- Earned income.

Some **examples** of income the VA does **not** count:

- Welfare or public assistance.
- SSI.
- Maintenance provided by a friend or relative.
- VA pensions.
- Reimbursement for casualty loss.
- Profit from the sale of real or personal property.
- Funds in a joint account acquired from the other joint owner’s death.

The VA can deduct some of your unreimbursed medical expenses. Some education expenses may be deductible.

What is my net worth? Why does it matter?

The value of things you own, such as property, financial accounts, stocks and bonds, and so on, is your net worth. When countable income plus your and your spouse’s net worth is enough that you could spend some of your assets on veteran’s maintenance, the VA may deny you IPP.

How does the VA decide if I could spend some assets on veteran’s maintenance?

Here are some things the VA considers:

- If you can convert property into cash at no substantial sacrifice.
- Life expectancy.
- How many dependents you have.

- The potential rate of depletion of the asset, including unusual medical expenses.

How much of a cash benefit can I get?

The VA subtracts your countable income from the Maximum Annual Pension Rate (MAPR). Congress sets this pension amount each year. The amount left is your IPP cash benefit. If your countable income is more than the MAPR, the VA will deny you IPP.

The 2018 MAPR for a veteran on pension without a spouse or child is \$13,166 yearly.

A veteran who is married or has dependents has a higher MAPR rate. The VA adds the spouse and dependents' income to the veteran's income, and deducts it from MAPR for the pension amount.

Housebound Benefits

MAPR is more if you are "**housebound**." You may be eligible for these benefits if:

- You have a single permanent disability evaluated as 100-percent disabling and, due to such disability, you are permanently and substantially confined to your immediate premises OR
- You have a single permanent disability evaluated as 100-percent disabling, and another disability, or disabilities, evaluated as 60 percent or more disabling

The 2018 MAPR for a veteran without dependents on housebound benefits is \$15,773 yearly.

Aid and Attendance Benefits

MAPR is more if the veteran needs "**aid and attendance**." You may need this if:

- You are blind or nearly blind
- You are in a nursing home because of medical or physical incapacity
- You cannot dress or keep clean, need frequent adjustments to special prosthetic appliances, cannot attend the wants of nature, or need regular help to protect from hazards of the daily environment

The 2018 MAPR for a veteran without dependents on aid and attendance is \$21,962 yearly.

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- ❖ Congress typically raises IPP cash benefit amounts each December.
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What is the Improved Death Pension for low-income surviving spouses and surviving dependent children?

A deceased veteran's surviving spouse or dependent might be eligible for cash benefits. The veteran must have met the eligibility requirements of items 1 and 2 above for IPP. The surviving spouse or dependent child does not have to be disabled.

A veteran's widow or widower must qualify as a surviving spouse for basic entitlement to the death pension. There must be proof of marriage. The spouse must also show they were living together or otherwise the veteran's dependent. The 2018 maximum cash benefit (MAPR) for a surviving spouse is \$8,830 yearly if there are no children; \$11,557 yearly with one child; and \$2,250 yearly for each additional child.

What if the surviving spouse is housebound or in need of aid and attendance?

A veteran's surviving spouse who meets housebound or aid and attendance requirements may qualify for additional assistance. The 2018 yearly cash amount for a surviving spouse who qualifies for Housebound benefits is \$10,792, and for Aid and Attendance is \$14,113.

How do I apply for the Improved Pension Program?

Call your local VA office or 1-800-827-1000. Ask to apply. You can also apply online at <http://www.va.gov/>. You must fill out VA Form 21-526. Many veterans' organizations help with these applications.

They denied me Improved Pension benefits. Can I appeal?

Yes. You appeal by filing a *Notice of Disagreement* with the Board of Veterans Appeals. You can have a lawyer or an accredited representative of a veterans' service organization represent you.

What if I need legal help?

If you live in King County, call 211. If you live outside King County, you can apply for legal help by calling our CLEAR hotline at 1-888-201-1014 (M-F 9:15 am to 12:15 pm) or by using the [online application](#).

There is more info on legal resources for veterans at nwjustice.org/veterans.

This publication provides general information concerning your rights and responsibilities. It is not intended as a substitute for specific legal advice.

This information is current as of October 2018.

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