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Disability Compensation for Conditions Related to Military Sexual Trauma (MST)

Disability Compensation

Some Veterans experience MST during their service. These traumas can affect mental and physical health, even many years later. If you experienced MST during service and suffer physically or mentally because of trauma, you may qualify for treatment. VA has free health care services available to help you recover from mental or physical health conditions related to your experiences of MST. Veterans can apply for disability compensation for any current health conditions that were caused by or worsened because of their military service, including conditions related to MST.

If you file a claim for disability compensation and VA determines you have disabilities related to your military service, you could receive:

- Monthly nontaxable compensation
- 10-point hiring preference for federal employment
- VA healthcare services
- Other important benefits

Ask your VA representative or Veterans Service Organization about:

- Disability compensation
- Pension
- Health care
- Caregiver program
- Career Services
- Educational assistance
- Home loan guaranty
- Insurance

You can also contact a Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) MST Outreach Coordinator to help with the claim process. All local VBA Regional Offices have MST Outreach Coordinators. Visit www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/mstcoordinators.asp to locate one near you.

Please note that applying for disability compensation is separate from eligibility for free MST-related healthcare services through VA. You do not need to apply for disability compensation to receive MST-related treatment and do not need to have reported your experience at the time the event occurred. You may be able to receive MST-related treatment even if you are not eligible for other VA care. To learn more, visit www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome/index.asp or contact your local VA medical facility and ask to speak to the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) MST Coordinator.

MST Definition

VA uses the term MST to refer to sexual assault or sexual harassment experienced during military service. Examples include:

- Being pressured or coerced into sexual activities, such as with threats of negative treatment if you refuse to cooperate or with promises of better treatment in exchange for sex
- Someone having sexual contact with you without your consent, such as when you were asleep or intoxicated
- Being physically forced to have sex
- Being touched in a sexual way that made you uncomfortable
- Comments about your body or sexual activities that you found threatening
- Unwanted sexual advances that you found threatening

To receive disability compensation from VA, you must have a current health condition related to these experiences.

Evidence Needed for A Disability Claim Based on MST

MST impacts each Veteran differently, and you can file a disability compensation claim for any health condition you have because of your MST.

For any VA disability compensation claim to be successful, there must be:

- A current physical or mental condition that affects your body or mind; and
- An event, injury, or illness that happened while you were serving in the military; and
- A link between your current disability and the event, injury, or disease that happened during your military service.

For MST-related claims, you can use any of the items listed below to support your disability claim.

- Any service medical or personnel record documenting that the MST event occurred
- Department of Defense (DoD) sexual assault or harassment reporting forms •
- Investigative reports completed during military service

In addition to service records or DoD reports, Veterans who have current posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) related to their experiences of MST can also submit alternative sources of evidence. Although these sources of evidence may not directly document the occurrence of the MST event, they may corroborate the occurrence of event. Examples of alternative sources of evidence include, but are not limited to:

- A chaplain or clergy
- A counseling facility or health clinic
- A rape crisis center or center for domestic abuse
- A faculty member
- Civilian police reports
- Family members or roommates
- Fellow service members
- Medical reports from civilian physicians or caregivers who treated the Veteran immediately following the incident or sometime later
- Personal diaries or journals.

When service records or alternative sources of evidence are not available, indirect sources of evidence may be used to establish the occurrence of an MST stressor. These may be behavioral events, patterns of changed behavior or circumstances that provide clues supporting your report of the trauma. They do not have to show definitive evidence that it did. Some examples are:

- Change in work performance at the time

- Episodes of the following without clear cause:
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
 - Panic attacks
- Pregnancy tests
- Relationship issues, like divorce
- Requests for transfer to another military duty assignment
- Sexual dysfunction
- Substance abuse
- Tests for sexually transmitted diseases
- Unexplained social or economic behavior

VA may request a medical examination and opinion to help determine how all of the available evidence relates to the MST and any current PTSD or other diagnoses. VA will schedule an appointment for you to meet with a clinician who will conduct the examination and provide the requested medical opinion. If you prefer to meet with a clinician of a certain gender for this appointment, VA will make every effort to meet this need. Please make this request during the scheduling of your appointment.

Recent Improvements to Our Claims Process

In an effort to continuously improve our service to Veterans, VA has made several recent changes to improve how MST-related claims are processed and decided. VA now provides special training to staff who work on MST-related claims. This is to make sure they have the specialized knowledge needed to evaluate these claims properly.

If you filed an MST-related claim before August 2018 and received a denial, VA encourages you to refile so that your claim can be reviewed by staff who have received this training. You can request a re-evaluation by contacting an MST Outreach Coordinator at your local VA Regional Office or by going online: www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/mstcoordinators.asp.

When you request a re-evaluation, you may submit new or additional evidence with your claim. Veteran Service Officers (VSOs), MST Outreach Coordinators and other VA staff can help you with submitting your claim.

Applying for Disability Compensation

There are many ways to apply.

- Apply online at www.va.gov.
- Appoint an accredited VSO to help file your claim.
- Complete VA Form 21-526EZ, Veteran's Application for Compensation and/or Pension. Find this form online at www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/VBA-21-526EZ-ARE.pdf
- Contact a VBA MST Outreach Coordinator to help you with the claim process. Female and male VBA MST Outreach Coordinators are available at all local regional offices. Visit www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/mstcoordinators.asp or call 1-800-827-1000 to locate one near you.

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