



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

Choose VA

# Getting Started with Vet Center Services

Vet Centers are community-based counseling centers located in easily accessible neighborhoods near Veterans, Service members, survivors and their families. Vet Centers are located separate from VA organizational sites to ensure confidential counseling and reduce barriers to care.

## What are Vet Centers?

There are 300 Vet Centers and 83 Mobile Vet Centers (MVCs) across the country that provide a broad range of counseling, outreach and referral services. Services are also available in the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Guam and American Samoa. Vet Centers are community-based counseling centers that provide social and psychological services, including professional readjustment counseling, to eligible Veterans, active duty Service members, Reserve components and their families.

## What is readjustment counseling?

Readjustment counseling is offered to assist in making a successful transition from military to civilian life or after a traumatic event experienced in the military. Services include:

- Individual and group counseling for Veterans, Service members and their families
- Marital and family counseling for military-related readjustment issues
- Bereavement counseling for families who experience an active duty death
- Military sexual trauma counseling and referral
- Post Deployment Health Reassessment assistance
- Substance abuse assessment and referral
- Employment assessment and referral
- VA benefits explanation and referral
- Screening and referral for medical issues including TBI, depression, etc.

## Who is eligible to receive services at Vet Centers?

Any Veteran or active duty Service member, to include members of Reserve components, are eligible if any of the following applies:

- Have served on active military duty in any combat theater or area of hostility
- Experienced military sexual trauma
- Provided direct emergent medical care or mortuary services, while serving on active military duty, to the casualties of war
- Served as a member of an unmanned aerial vehicle crew that provided direct support to operations in a combat zone or area of hostility
- Vietnam era Veterans who have accessed care at a Vet Center prior to January 2, 2013
- Family members of Veterans and service members, to include members of Reserve components, who require:
  - Assistance coping with deployment
  - Bereavement counseling after experiencing an active duty death
  - Assistance helping their Veteran or Service member readjust from military to civilian life or after a traumatic event in the military

## WHAT ARE THE COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH USING VET CENTERS?

*Services are provided at no cost, without time limitation, to eligible individuals.*

## DO I HAVE TO BE ENROLLED IN VA HEALTH CARE TO RECEIVE VET CENTER SERVICES?

*You do not have to be enrolled in VA Healthcare or have a service connected disability.*

## HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE TO BE SEEN?

*Anyone who walks into a Vet Center will be seen that day and a plan to obtain further services will be discussed. You may also call and schedule an appointment at a time that works for you, including non-traditional hours.*

## Do I need to bring any documentation?

A Vet Center team member will look for one or more of the following: discharge documents (such as a DD214), receipt of certain awards or pay stubs. If these documents are not readily available before you visit, someone will help you obtain these when you come in.

## What is Bereavement Counseling?

Bereavement counseling is assistance and support to eligible individuals with emotional and psychological stress after the death of a loved one. Bereavement counseling includes a broad range of transition services including outreach, counseling and referral services to family members.

## What is Military Sexual Trauma Counseling?

Military sexual trauma counseling may include individual or group counseling, marital and family counseling, referral for benefits assistance, liaison with community agencies or substance abuse information and referral to help you deal with the emotions of military sexual trauma and regain confidence in your everyday life. Any eligible Veteran who was sexually traumatized while serving in the military is eligible to receive counseling regardless of gender or era of service. Assessment and referral for sexual trauma counseling is available at all Vet Centers. Onsite counseling is available at Vet Centers across the country.

## Will Vet Centers share my information with VA or the Department of Defense (DoD)?

Confidentiality is very important. Vet Centers are safe places to discuss feelings or emotions that may arise after transitioning out of the military, experiences endured while serving in combat, or from sexual assault or trauma that occurred while serving. Vet Center records are not linked to any mental or behavioral health records and will not be shared with VA Medical Centers or the DoD without a signed release of information from the Veteran or Service member.

## Contact a Vet Center:

You can visit your local Vet Center to find out what is available to you or call the Vet Center Call Center and talk to a counselor 24/7 about any questions or concerns. The number is 1-877-WAR-VETS (1-877-927-8387).

## Where are Vet Centers Located?

Vet Centers are community based to be more accessible in areas where you live. To locate a Vet Center near you visit <http://www.va.gov/find-locations>.

## OTHER QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE

### Will staff provide assistance outside of the Vet Centers?

In addition to the 300 Vet Centers, staff provide counseling, outreach and referral services at several outstations and community access points. This assistance can range from a few times a week to a couple times per month. Services may be offered in universities, community centers, churches and other locations

### Are any additional services or activities offered?

In addition to the services mentioned, Vet Centers also offer opportunities to build community and connect with men and women who have shared similar experiences. They are designed and created to meet the unique needs of those in the community they serve. Some common group activities offered at Vet Centers across the country, or through their community partners include:

- Gardening
- Music groups
- Creative writing classes
- Yoga
- Tai Chi
- Mindful Meditation
- Potluck dinners and holiday gatherings
- Painting
- Photography
- Outdoor activities
- Community service projects
- Guest speakers and other educational opportunities