

## **Tennessee State Veterans Homes**

There are more than 503,000 Tennessee Veterans and more than 218,000 are over the age of 65 years old which is 43% of the state's Veteran population.

There are currently four Tennessee State Veterans Homes (TSVH) to serve the aging Veteran population.

The Tennessee Department of Veterans Services serves as the liaison between the state and the Homes. The Governor appoints the members of the Tennessee State Veterans Home Board (TSVHB). TDVS Commissioner and the Commissioner for Finance and Administration serve as ex-officio voting members of the Board.

## **History of Tennessee State Veterans' Homes**

Public hearings by the Joint Select Committee on Veterans Affairs were held across the state in the fall of 1985 to identify the concerns of Tennessee's veterans. Long-term health care was clearly a priority concern and the Tennessee Department of Veterans Affairs recommended that a system of State Veterans Homes be established.

The governing body for the Tennessee State Veterans Homes is the Tennessee State Veterans Homes Board with responsibility for oversight of the day-to-day management and operations vested in the Executive Committee of the Board.

Members of the Board are appointed by the Governor to serve a 3-year term. The Executive Committee exercises its authority for planning, implementation, and operation of the State Veterans' Homes through the Executive Director and his or her staff. Administrators at each facility are responsible for the day-to-day operation of the facilities.

The first home opened in Murfreesboro on June 10, 1991. Located on a seven-acre lot, deeded to the Board by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, adjacent to the Alvin C. York V.A. Medical Center, this is a 140-bed facility offering intermediate and skilled levels of nursing care in a one-story building encompassing 69,278 square feet. Legislation passed by the General Assembly in 1993 provided for construction of a second facility in Humboldt Tennessee. Also, a 140-bed facility offering intermediate and skilled levels of nursing care, this one-story building encompassing some 74,870 square feet opened February 7, 1996. The third home in Knox County opened in December 2006. This 140-bed facility, offers intermediate and skilled levels of nursing care in a spacious 73,065 square foot, one-story building. In each of the three facilities, 20 of the beds are located in a secure, special needs unit.

On March 11, 2016, the State of Tennessee accepted 28.29 acres located at 1960 Westland Drive in Cleveland, Tennessee for the future Bradley County Tennessee State Veterans Home. The land formally accepted from Robert Wright, Steve and Thomas Williams and American Legion Post 81 were donated for the future project. The future 23,221 square foot facility includes 108 beds and is estimated to cost \$40,345,020 to build. Local and state funding is combined to fund 35 percent of the construction project and 65 percent is funded through federal dollars. The City of Cleveland and Bradley County have each donated \$2,010,010. State appropriations for the project are \$7,100,000. An anonymous donor

contributed \$3,000,000 for the project. Representative Kevin Brooks and the Southeast Tennessee Veterans Home Council maintain an unwavering commitment to continue to raise local awareness and funding. An estimated \$26,225,000 in federal funding is needed to begin construction. Federal funding was allocated for the home in April 2018.

On June 29, 2016, the Tennessee Department of Veterans Services (TDVS) purchased 28.65 acres at 11293 Memphis-Arlington Road in Arlington, Tennessee through an interdepartmental payment of \$380,000 between TDVS and the Department of Intellectual Developmental Disabilities. The future facility is planned to include 144 beds and is expected to cost \$70,000,000 to build. Senate Majority Leader Mark Norris has been a lead partner raising local awareness, local funding and state support. Local, state and federal funding are pending.

### **Funding and Relationship with the Tennessee Department of Veterans Services**

The Tennessee Department of Veterans Services serves as a liaison between the Tennessee State Veterans Homes Board and the state. The Tennessee State Veterans Homes Board (TSVHB) oversees the management of the four existing homes. The Governor appoints the board members. Commissioners from the Tennessee Department of Veterans Services and Finance and Administration are ex-officio voting members of the TSVHB. To create a new State Veterans Home, the department works with local community members to increase local awareness, support and to recommend a proposed site. The community members also collect local funding. Federal funds provide 65 percent of the design and construction of the site, but state and local funding must provide for the full cost of land acquisition. State and local funding also pay for 35 percent of the design and construction of the proposed State Veterans Home.

During the conceptual, design and construction phase, the TDVS Commissioner presents the plans and developments to the State Building Commission (SBC). All four of the current State Veterans Homes are self-sustaining and do not require state funding. TDVS Commissioner continues to monitor operations, contract agreements, capital planning, accomplishments, violations and operating budget after admissions begin. TDVS Commissioner also provides recommendations for board member appointments to the Governor. Department executive leadership increase awareness of the award-winning facilities by offering tours to legislators and partnering with the State Veterans Homes for community outreach events as well as free claims assistance for residents. TDVS also offers communication support and marketing consultation for the State Veterans Homes.

The Tennessee State Veterans Homes Board is authorized by its establishing legislation to receive and manage contributions to the Tennessee State Veterans Homes for the purpose of supporting the homes, their residents and activities. These contributions have been used to support such programs as the Eden Alternative through which pets (dogs, cats, rabbits, birds, fish, and other small animals) are brought into the facilities for our residents.

Facility-specific contributions are disbursed to the designated facility for those activities or services that provide a direct benefit to our residents. General funds are retained for the benefit of and are disbursed to the facilities on the basis of need.

## Residential Care

The central purpose and role of Tennessee State Veterans' Homes are to:

- Provide quality care and quality of life for our veterans.
- Rehabilitate residents to the maximum attainable level of independent functioning by utilizing all necessary governmental and community services and therapies, and to provide a comfortable, safe, sanitary environment conducive to personal happiness.
- Make available to residents, social and cultural activities of personal interest designed to foster feelings of dignity and self-respect.
- Meet the individual needs of each resident to the greatest extent possible.

TSVH believes in the inherent right of each elderly or handicapped person to receive the highest quality of healthcare available. TSVH believes in recognizing that these residents have made many valuable and worthwhile contributions to society and therefore deserve the highest degree of respect and dignity that can be provided. TSVH believes in maximum independence, the attainment of each resident's full potential and in the hope that the opportunity to explore new interests will contribute to each resident's health and happiness. TSVH believes quality resident care in every area must be our primary goal, and that our trained, dedicated staff of professionals of every level are actively involved in maintaining the highest standards, ethics, and performance in the long-term care industry.

All residents are cared for in such a manner and in such an environment as to promote the enhancement of their quality of life without abridging the safety and rights of other residents. An interdisciplinary team approach to resident life is utilized to assure the quality of life. Residents and family members are involved in the care planning process, and resident participation is encouraged through a functioning resident council. Residents' rights are posted and enforced as delineated in current federal and state standards.

Recreation and Activities Activities and programs at the Tennessee State Veterans Homes are provided to promote physical skills and social interaction, as well as increase each resident's emotional well-being. Recreational, cultural, and intellectual activities are planned on a daily basis for both individuals and large groups. The activities are based on the interests and capabilities of the residents.

Plants, gardening, and other activities that promote a home-like atmosphere are also supported. Holiday celebrations, day trips, and special in-house activities are funded, and needed services (i.e., dental care, wheelchairs, etc.) are provided for.

Residents, staff, and families participate in community events such as the annual Humboldt Strawberry Festival and Parade, Nursing Home Olympics, Veterans Day Celebrations, Nursing Home Week, and much more.

We offer a resident council which encourages residents to participate in the governing of each facility. It ensures residents' input into the quality of life issues as they pertain to individual and group interests and concerns.

## Rehabilitation Services

Tennessee State Veterans' Homes offer rehabilitation programs for our Veterans requiring short-stay skilled or long-term care services. Therapists and support staff are selected based on their ability to meet our specific quality standards and the unique needs of our Veterans while embracing a holistic treatment approach.

They share a commitment to ensure the Veterans achieve their highest level of function and independence. We offer a wide range of therapy services within the Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy and Speech Therapy programs:

- Physical Therapy
- Occupational
- TherapySpeech
- Therapy Cost

The daily long-term care bedroom and board rates are \$230.00 per day plus the cost of medications. The VA assists with a per diem of \$103.61, bringing the veterans' portion to \$126.39 per day for a long-term care bed, plus the cost of medications. The rate for a non-veteran (spouse) is the full rate of \$230.00 for a long-term care bed per day, plus the cost of medications. Current payment sources are Medicare, Medicaid, Private Insurance and Private Pay. Please contact the Admissions department for additional details.

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers two per diem programs to state homes that provide nursing home care to eligible veterans. The per diem programs are available only to eligible veterans and not to spouses, widows/widowers, or gold star parents.

### A. Basic Per Diem

The basic per diem rate paid by the VA to the TSVH for each eligible veteran is \$103.61. This per diem is in addition to any Medicaid or Medicare payment. For veterans who pay privately for their care, the TSVH subtracts the basic per diem rate from the daily room rate.

### B. Per Diem

Based on Service-Connected Disabilities Alternatively, the VA will pay a facility recognized as a State home for nursing home care a different per diem for a veteran:

- who is in need of nursing home care for a VA adjudicated service-connected disability, or
- who has a singular or combined rating of 70 percent or more based on one or more service-connected disabilities or a rating of total disability based on individual un-employability and is in need of nursing home care.

Payment for care under this second option constitutes payment in full for all routine nursing home care provided to the veteran in the state nursing home. As a condition for receiving this per diem, the

veteran must receive medications through the state nursing home rather than from the VA. The veteran must also utilize the VA for any services not provided by the nursing home, such as hospital care, hearing aids, and eyeglasses. If the veteran chooses to utilize other service providers, the veteran will be responsible for payment for those services.

### **Medication Program**

- In addition to the per diem payments discussed above, the VA will also furnish drugs and medicines to a facility recognized as a state veteran home that is ordered by a duly licensed physician as specific therapy in the treatment of illness or injury for a veteran receiving care in a state home if the veteran:has a singular or combined rating of less than 50 percent based on one or more service-connected disabilities and is in need of such drugs and medicines for a service-connected disability and is in need of nursing home care for reasons that do not include care for a VA adjudicated service-connected disability; or
- has a singular or combined rating of 50 or 60 percent based on one or more service-connected disabilities and is in need of such drugs and medicines and is in need of nursing home care for reasons that do not include care for a VA adjudicated service-connected disability.

The drug or medicine must be included in the VA's national formulary unless the VA determines a non-formulary drug or medicine is medically necessary.

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

What is the Tennessee State Veterans Homes and what do they do?

The purpose of the Tennessee State Veterans Homes is to provide optimal quality of care for our veterans, through rehabilitating residents to the maximum attainable level of independent functioning and providing 24-hour clinical oversight. Our goal is to enhance each Veterans quality of life by clinical care, promoting socialization and participation in our activity programs. TSVH exceed the needs of those we serve by providing individualized care to the resident. The resident and their family have an interactive role in making decisions.

Why is the quality of the Homes here in Tennessee catching the attention of other states?

Several states have visited or inquired as to TSVH's high quality and successful operations. TSVH has helped states revise their strategic plan, enhance clinical quality, increase operational efficiency and become Medicare and Medicaid Certified. TSVH is a self-funded political subdivision of the state. No operational funding is drawn from the state budget. This is very attractive to state's that draw from their state's budget.

What is the admissions process?

Admission is available to Veterans who were Honorably Discharged from Active Service and who also meet at least one of the below additional requirements:

1. Resident of Tennessee at time of admission.
2. Veteran who was born in Tennessee.
3. Entered the U.S. Armed Forces in Tennessee.
4. Tennessee address is official Home of Record on Veteran's Military Record.
5. Has an immediate family member who would serve as primary caregiver and resident of Tennessee.
6. Spouse or Gold Star Parent may also be eligible for admission on a space available basis.

Upon meeting the eligibility requirements, the applicant's name will be placed on our Potential Admissions Wait List if an appropriate bed is not available. Complete and provide a copy of the veteran's discharge papers (DD214); if the applicant is not the veteran, additional information will be requested.

Does TDVS allow admission of eligible dependents?

Yes, qualifying Veteran spouses, surviving spouses and Gold Star Parents are eligible for admission.

Is there a waitlist?

Yes, however residents who are being discharged from a hospital and need immediate placement are given priority. This is how TSVH receives the majority of its admissions. To be put on the waitlist Veteran only needs to contact the desired Home to make the request.

How can a County Service Officer or Veterans Resource Coordinator assist a Veteran who is interested in being admitted to TSVH?

If a Veteran needs long term care or short term rehabilitation the Tennessee State Veterans Homes are their best choice. Veterans who desire admission should be put in contact with one of the Homes admission staff. The TSVH admission staff are skilled and experienced at qualifying and facilitating the Veteran's admission.

How does payment, VA benefits and insurance work for your residents?

The TSVH accepts private payment, Medicare, Tennessee Medicaid, most Private Insurance, and VA higher per diem for long term care room and board and billable ancillary cost. Ancillary costs are those billed to private pay residents and to Medicare Part B and include therapy, pharmacy, laboratory, and radiology services.

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The TSVHB receives a basic per diem rate, currently \$109.73, from the VA for each eligible veteran. For eligible qualified veterans who pay privately for their care, The TSVHB applies the VA basic per diem towards the veterans private pay resident's bill, reducing the out-of-pocket daily room rates as follows:

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers a higher per diem program to state homes that provide nursing home care to eligible veterans. The higher per diem program is only available to eligible veterans and not to spouses, widows/widowers, or gold star parents.

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## **Certification of Documents**

### **Certifying Proof of Service by Service Officer**

According to the provisions of 38 CFR 3.203, service organization representatives who have completed a VA-prescribed training course on military records are authorized to copy official documents and certify the photocopy as a true copy of the original for purposes of service verification.

### **Certification Process**

VA accepts photocopies of original documents that confirm a Veteran's military service if the Veteran's service department issued the original document and:

- a public custodian of records certifies the photocopy is a true and exact copy of a document in his/her custody
- an accredited agent, attorney, or service organization representative who has successfully completed VA-prescribed training on military records certifies the authenticity of the photocopy by:
  - stamping the photocopy with the statement:
    - "I [name, title, organization] certify that I have completed the VA-prescribed training on certification of evidence or proof of service and that this is a true and exact copy of either an original document or of a copy issued by the service department or public custodian of record"
    - signing and dating the statement Once successfully completing VA-prescribed training, each service organization representative must purchase and possess an individual stamp stating the above-mentioned certification language. The stamp should be affixed to a blank portion of the DD-214 (or other document verifying service and character of discharge) so as not to cover or obscure the data on the form, and then be signed by original signature of the person listed on the stamp.

Remember, this certification authority ONLY pertains to documents verifying service and character of discharge. It does NOT extend to medical, dependency, or any other document or evidence in the claims process.

### Evaluating the Document in Question

Current technological advances have greatly enhanced the photocopy process, thus creating the opportunity for virtually undetectable alterations of official documents such as DD-214s. You should be aware of the potential and be on the lookout for suspicious documents furnished to you by your clients. Common examples of alterations include, but are not limited to the following:

- Different type fonts on the same DD-214
- A short period of active service (less than 1 year) with multiple decorations
- Combat decorations (particularly Purple Heart) with no foreign service shown
- A short period of active service (1 year or less) with a significant high rank (E-5 or above)
- Lengthy periods of service with a significantly low rank (Below E-3) {Suggestive of court-martial with punitive discharge}
- Decorations not matching the branch of service (i.e., AF decorations showed on Army D-214, Combat Action Ribbon is shown on Army DD-214 [should be Combat Infantryman Badge CAR is USMC]), etc.
- Date of birth not consistent with service date shown (would make Veteran less than 17 or over 30 at the date of the first enlistment)
- Character of service not centered in the block (i.e., original character was "under conditions other than honorable"; by deleting or "whiting out" the phrase "under conditions other than", the remaining "honorable" would be at the far right-hand end of the block, rather than centered in the case of a true "honorable" discharge)

### Important Considerations When Certifying Evidence

Remember that, by affixing the certification stamp and service organization representative's signature to the copy, you are attesting to the veracity of the document. Certifying service verification documents that are not original or certified copies equates to making false statements and could lead to severe penalties.

Warning- if the document provided to you for certification by the claimant is in any way suspect, you should decline to certify it and submit it with the claim as is. If you KNOW that the document is false or altered, you should decline to assist the claimant. Submitting fraudulent documents to the VA could result in criminal prosecution.

You should not initiate a request for service verification documents directly to NPRC (by means of an SF-180 or any other method) in conjunction with the filing of a claim. By doing this, NPRC will pull the record to fulfill the request; then when VA requests the same verification of service, the record will NOT be in the file, so VA's request will be delayed accordingly. You should only request official records for claimants who want them for personal reasons NOT involved with the filing of a claim or appeal. To do so merely delays the process unnecessarily.



## Reminder

VA has the final word on acceptable proof of service. If VA is not satisfied with the document(s) submitted, they will request verification of service through official channels such as Personnel Information Exchange System (PIES) or Defense Personnel Records Image Retrieval System (DPRIS).

## NA Form 13075

If in response to VA's request for service verification, NPRC is unable to identify the Veteran based on the information provided, they will request that the claimant complete an NA Form 13075. This form solicits additional specific information that will aid NPRC in their search. You should encourage your client to be specific and complete when completing this form if requested.

## Important Information

You should never initiate a request for service or medical records directly to NPRC (by means of an SF-180 or any other method) in conjunction with the filing of a claim. By doing this, NPRC will pull the record to fulfill the request; then when VA requests the same service records or STRs, the record will NOT be available, so VA's request will be delayed accordingly. You should only request official records for claimants who want them for personal reasons NOT involved with the filing of a claim or appeal. To do so otherwise in an effort to support the claim merely delays the process unnecessarily.

Additionally, you should NOT request (or submit) copies from VA of STRs or other evidence contained in the claims folder for purposes of filing additional claims. That evidence is already OF RECORD. The re-submission of duplicate evidence is an ineffective use of time, as duplicate evidence received will merely be returned to the claimant and the evidence has already been considered.

Remember, service officer representatives (assuming that they are NOT federal government employees) are not entitled to access records information without the signed, written consent of the Veteran.

## The Service Officer's Role in Service Record Development for VA Claims

In a typical scenario, the Veteran or Claimant will come to you seeking compensation benefits or submit a claim for additional benefits. In these cases, the key evidence that will ultimately substantiate the claimant's entitlement to benefits will include service records or federal records verifying his or her military service.

In your interview with the Veteran, you are going to want to make sure that you pinpoint the most accurate and complete information surrounding these pertinent records.

The following keys to success may help you fulfill your obligation to your client.

- Ideally, the claimant would not have his or her original service records in their possession and those records would be housed by the proper federal records custodian(s). However, if the

claimant does have these original records, you can ask the client to gather the evidence and bring it to you so the evidence can be submitted to support the claim.

- Identify the types of service-related evidence the Veteran needs to have considered with his or her claim.
- Assist the Veteran with completing and signing an authorization release form that is sufficient to have those identified records released to the VA.
- Be sure to include essential information if requested to complete additional forms in order for VA to obtain pertinent service records.
- The goal in any claim is to get all of the relevant and complete evidence pertinent to the claimant in order to support entitlement to the claimed benefits. VA will only consider the evidence that it has been made aware of and can obtain. Any effort you can make to assist in this effort will help your client and the decision-maker.