VA Disability Claims: How to Find Free, Credible Assistance

You earned your benefits. Know where to find qualified help before paying anyone.

A Message From Mike

During my years in the Marine Corps, we learned to look out for one another. That responsibility does not end when we leave military service. Today, I want fellow veterans to know that navigating a VA disability claim does not have to mean paying someone to get started.

The claims process can be confusing, particularly when advertisements promise fast results or higher ratings. There are reputable professionals who can help, and many veterans can receive knowledgeable claims assistance completely free of charge.

1 | What is VA disability compensation?

VA disability compensation is a generally tax-free monthly benefit for eligible veterans with physical or mental health conditions connected to military service. A condition does not need to result from combat, and some qualifying conditions develop or become apparent years after service. The VA determines eligibility, service connection, disability ratings and effective dates.

Start with the official VA overview: va.gov/disability.

2 | Who can help you with a claim?

VA-accredited Veterans Service Organization (VSO) representatives can help gather evidence, prepare and submit claims, request decision reviews and communicate with the VA. Their claims representation services are always free. Disabled American Veterans (DAV) is one well-known organization with accredited representatives.

VA-accredited attorneys and claims agents may also assist. They generally cannot charge for work on an initial claim before VA has issued an initial decision, but may charge permitted fees for representation after that decision, subject to VA requirements and fee agreements. Paying a legitimate accredited professional in those circumstances is not inherently improper.

You may also file on your own. Working with a representative is a choice, not a requirement.

3 | Verify accreditation before sharing records

Do not assume a business or volunteer is accredited simply because it uses military imagery, has good reviews or says it works with veterans. Check the individual in the VA Office of General Counsel accreditation directory, and confirm the organization and representative you will actually work with.

Official directory: va.gov/ogc/apps/accreditation. Find help: VA accredited representative finder.

4 | Warning signs to watch for

Be cautious if someone guarantees approval or a particular disability rating; pressures you to sign immediately; asks for passwords or sensitive documents before verification; requests payment for initial-claim representation; or proposes an unusually broad contract or percentage of future benefits without a clear explanation. Read all agreements and ask questions before signing.

A private medical evaluation or other service may have separate costs; that is different from accredited claims representation. Confirm what you are purchasing and whether it is necessary.

5 | A practical way to get started

Step 1: Gather your DD Form 214, relevant medical records, treatment history and service documentation if available.
Step 2: Contact a VA-accredited VSO representative and ask for an appointment.
Step 3: Discuss the conditions you believe are connected to service, supporting evidence, and whether an intent to file is appropriate.
Step 4: Submit your claim through an official VA process, attend any required VA claim examinations and respond to requests for information.
Step 5: Review the VA decision carefully. If you disagree, ask about the appropriate decision-review options and deadlines.

VA filing guidance: va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim.

6 | Trusted resources

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: va.gov/disability
VA-accredited representative directory: va.gov/ogc/apps/accreditation
Disabled American Veterans: dav.org
South Carolina Department of Veterans Affairs: scdva.sc.gov

Thoughts From Mike

If you are a veteran trying to find the right place to begin, I am happy to introduce you to appropriate VA resources or accredited DAV representatives who provide free claims assistance. I am not a VA-accredited claims representative. I do not prepare, file or represent veterans in disability claims, and I receive no compensation for these introductions.

This is about veterans helping veterans. No pressure. No obligation. Just a willingness to point a fellow veteran toward qualified assistance.

Semper Fi,
Mike Carpenter
United States Marine Corps Veteran | Mike at the Beach

Be curious. Become informed. Have confidence.

Contact Mike: 202-999-2051 | carpentermichael.d@gmail.com | mikeatthebeach.com

Educational information only, not legal advice, a benefits eligibility determination or accredited claims representation. Confirm current VA rules and the accreditation of any representative. Sources: VA.gov accredited representative guidance and VA Office of General Counsel accreditation directory, accessed October 2026.