



# Military Caregiving Guide

**For Veterans, Service Members and their Families**

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**Look inside for:**

5 Key Issues to Address in Your Caregiving Journey

Facts about Veteran and Military Caregivers

Helpful Resources and Caregiving Checklists











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## WELCOME

Being a military or veteran family caregiver likely will be one of the most important and challenging roles you will ever have. Your caregiver journey may begin in various ways, depending on whether the person you care for is active duty, retired, ill, wounded, or disabled. It may start slowly with driving your loved one to get groceries or to a doctor's appointment or you may notice their behavior changing over time. It may progress to managing medications, providing emotional and physical support, preparing meals, assisting with daily bathing and dressing, handling bills and insurance matters, advocating for proper treatment and care, or taking time off from your job. Those who are caring for an active-duty service member are considered "military caregivers"; those who care for a veteran are "veteran caregivers."

No matter where you are in the journey, having a good road map will make the process easier. Remember that whether you're a military spouse caring for an active-duty service member, a child caring for a parent who's a veteran, an adult caring for a sibling service member or a parent caring for a wounded child, government and nonprofit support services are available.

In this guide, you'll find information, a glossary of terms to know, resources (identified with an asterisk and listed throughout the guide), and checklists to help you organize and find the support that you might need. The guide outlines five key areas that family caregivers face.



**TALK IT OUT.** Conversation is essential when taking care of a veteran or service member. If the service is recent, you probably discussed vital issues about health care and finances before he or she left for deployment or active duty; if you are caring for an older veteran, you may never have discussed care-related issues. It's essential to start—or continue—the conversation now. After all, circumstances, wishes and needs can change.

**TEAM UP.** The support of family, friends and colleagues, as well as fellow caregivers and service providers, is critical. You don't have to face the responsibilities of caregiving alone.

**MAKE A PLAN.** Knowing how you will respond to needs as they arise will provide peace of mind for you and your service member or veteran. But remember to build in flexibility so the course of action can change as your loved one's needs shift or evolve.

**SEEK SUPPORT.** Some issues will require additional information and resources. There are organizations and professionals with experience helping military or veteran caregivers—don't hesitate to reach out to them.

**CARE FOR YOURSELF.** Sustaining your energy and maintaining your health is critical, too. Mapping out how to care for yourself is as important as creating a caregiving plan for your service member or veteran.

## THE FACTS BEHIND MILITARY AND VETERAN CAREGIVING



- There are 5.5 million military and veteran caregivers in the U.S.
- Voluntary, uncompensated caregivers provide \$14 billion in service for wounded warriors per year.
- Military caregivers consistently experience worse health outcomes, greater strains in family relationships, and more workplace problems than non-caregivers.
- Post-9/11 caregivers are four times more likely to be at risk for major depressive disorder than non-caregivers; pre-9/11 caregivers are two times more at risk.
- Most programs offering services to military caregivers are focused on the care recipient. Only 15 percent of the programs surveyed support caregivers as a targeted population.





## TALK IT OUT

You know your loved one best, so you probably have a sense of how best to discuss various topics. Depending on the challenges your service member or veteran is facing, these conversations can address his or her values and preferences, health care wishes, or the handling of legal and financial matters—before a crisis occurs.

If service was recent, you probably talked about some crucial issues such as power of attorney, which authorizes someone to act on his or her behalf for health and other matters, if he or she is unable to before leaving for deployment or active duty. If you are caring for an older veteran, it may be the first time this has been discussed. It's essential to continue those conversations even if the topics make the care recipient uncomfortable. That way, you'll be able to determine what services you and your military member need.

**START THE CONVERSATION.** Perhaps an article you've read or a story you saw on a news program could jump-start a conversation about your loved one's care. Once started, move into concerns, based on your military member's age and stage of service. A few ways to begin:

- Ask about information that was provided in post-deployment classes that could be helpful for navigating the reintegration process, as well as your caregiver journey.
- Mention that some health education and readjustment counseling classes are available at local Veterans Affairs (VA) centers. Offer to check them out on your own or with your veteran.



- Point out that many veteran service organizations offer support and aid to veterans, their families and caregivers. Discuss which ones sound most useful.
- If your service member or veteran seems unusually distant, ask if he or she would like to talk about it or go see a counselor together; your offer may help him or her feel more comfortable about going to counseling.
- If your loved one experiences an increase in the frequency or intensity of pain or the onset of new physical or mental/behavioral symptoms, suggest that you go to a doctor together to get these issues checked out.

Try not to anticipate what the care recipient might say or how he or she will react. Just get the conversation started. It will likely unfold over time. Express your love and concern and, most importantly, listen. Empower your loved one to speak freely, then discuss his or her preferences so you can find the best course of action together.

**BE MINDFUL.** Let conversation and the expressed wishes of the person who's receiving the care be your guide, but create care plans based on what's best for the service member or veteran. A plan should never be made without his or her participation, knowledge and consent. (A person with a cognitive impairment, such as TBI or PTSD, should participate as much as possible.)

Once you've started talking, consider bringing your support system into the conversations. Everyone involved should understand the care recipient's needs, circumstances, desires and goals.

In a team conversation, decide who is going to be the primary caregiver. In most families, one person assumes the main or sole role because he or she lives nearby, has a close relationship with the person being cared for or simply has a take-charge personality. Expect that conflicts may arise, and don't be afraid to talk them through. It's better to talk before a time of crisis.

Sometimes it's helpful to use an outside facilitator, such as a social worker or minister, to help everyone stay focused, manage potential disagreements and effectively discuss difficult subjects during a caregiving meeting.

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**MANAGE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS.** When you broach tough subjects, your veteran might say, “I just don’t want to talk about it.” It’s also hard for some to admit they need help. If your first conversation doesn’t go well, try again. Start small by discussing just one aspect of your concerns. If your veteran shuts you out, ask a trusted member of your support system, a prior service member or military unit member, a doctor or a faith leader to approach your loved one about his or her unease.

## WHERE TO FIND HELP

### **Department of Veterans Affairs:**

**[va.gov](https://www.va.gov) or 1-800-MyVA411 (1-800-628-2411)**

The federal agency responsible for providing VA health care, benefits, and services, to eligible U.S. military veterans and family members, as well as a Caregiver Support Program that offers peer support mentoring, caregiver training programs and a support line.

### **Military OneSource:**

**[militaryonesource.mil](https://militaryonesource.mil) or 1-800-342-9647**

A Department of Defense (DOD) program that provides resources and support to active-duty, National Guard and Reserve service members and their families.

### **Office of Warrior Care Policy (WCP):**

**[warriorcare.dodlive.mil](https://warriorcare.dodlive.mil)**

The DOD proactively supports wounded, ill and injured service members in their recovery and reintegration or transition to civilian life. Visit its website to find its Caregiver Resource Directory.



## SENSITIVE TOPICS: MONEY & HEALTH

**Money.** Money is often at the heart of many decisions you'll make with your loved one about housing, health care and other expenses. Conversations about finances can be particularly complicated when you add service-related benefits to the picture.

Many nonprofit organizations and military/veteran service organizations provide financial counseling services. Don't be afraid to ask for help. But first, ask your veteran to discuss these issues and review bank accounts, investments, insurance coverage and outstanding loans with you. Know, too, that the benefits and support that are available to you and/or your service member or veteran might fluctuate or change over time—be prepared for that.

Find various financial planning services for veterans (such as the Beneficiary Financial Counseling Service) through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. If you're caring for a service member or a member of the National Guard or Reserve, consider seeking Financial Management Awareness Program classes on your nearest installation, advice through the Office of Warrior Care Policy or support resources from Military OneSource.

**Health and care.** Getting real about how your veteran or service member is feeling physically and emotionally may be more difficult than talking about money. Find out whether he or she has or qualifies for long-term care insurance, which can pay part of the cost of care received in the home, assisted living residences, nursing home and other designated services, as well as funds or assets that can be used to cover potential care that may be needed.





## TEAM UP

Caregiving is a big job but know that you do not have to do it alone. Indeed, trying to do everything solo may lead to burnout and problems with your own physical and emotional well-being. It can feel as if no one really understands your situation, which can lead to strained relationships with family and friends, withdrawal from social activities and extreme isolation. It doesn't have to be this way. Reach out to friends, family members and community resources to form a larger network of people who can assume responsibilities for part of your loved one's care.

**CAST A WIDE NET.** Military caregivers can get support from family, neighbors, other military members and the care recipient's friends and other caregivers who understand the unique challenges of caring for a veteran or service member. Your loved one can help you identify people who'd be willing to help but who you may not know, such as acquaintances from clubs or religious organizations.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Nationwide, more than 50 organizations offer peer support to military caregivers, either in person or online; yet only 21 percent of post-9/11 military caregivers, and even fewer pre-9/11 military caregivers, make use of these valuable resources, according to the Rand Corp., a nonprofit organization that helps improve policy and decision-making through research and analysis.

Remember that to be of value, supporters need not live nearby or have large blocks of time to help. Those who live at a distance or have limited free time can pitch in with “behind the scenes” work such as meal organizing, shopping, bill paying or financial assistance.

**ASK FOR HELP.** You may feel hesitant to request help, but remember that asking for it is the first step to recruiting reinforcements. Some people may need only a little encouragement to take on a task—and they may even feel left out if they’re not invited to participate. There are many resources at your disposal—including those listed at the end of this guide—to help you provide care for your friend or family member, regardless of the severity of his or her injury or illness.

If you are feeling alone on this journey, peer-based social support is one of the best ways to address your own isolation and to both acquire and share valuable information that can enhance your caregiving skills, reduce any anxiety and, most importantly, help you build a support system and a sense of community.

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## **ALL MEMBERS OF THE CARE SUPPORT TEAM SHOULD CONSIDER:**

- What am I prepared and not prepared to do to help?
- How much time can I give to caregiving and/or caregiver support?
- What are my own feelings about the situation?
- What are my goals or what’s the best outcome I can envision as a result of the help I provide?





## MAKE A PLAN

The most effective military caregiving plans are made with the person who's being cared for at the center of the discussion. Armed with the information you gather from going through the checklists in this guide, you can begin to explore the support and service options that are available in your community and solicit others to help manage the work ahead.

**SIZE UP THE SITUATION.** Figuring out what the care recipient's priorities are—and the nature of the care that's needed—will help you determine the next steps. Doing this also can help you find resources before they're truly needed. Keep in mind that he or she may be resistant to making changes or to sharing the details of his or her finances or health, so approach your care recipient with respect and explain your intentions. Transparency is key; clearly state why you need to know and how you can help. Having power of attorney can be beneficial, but it depends on your loved one's approval and situation.

**DIVVY UP TASKS.** Once you have a sense of who's willing to help out, figure out who will do what task. Ask your caregiving collaborators about what jobs they'd like to take on and how they feel about the division of labor. For instance, some team members might be more comfortable handling financial affairs, while another member might be better suited to managing medical appointments. You might assign specific tasks during a face-to-face team meeting or a conference call, or through a series of emails. Among the tasks you might assign: maintaining the home (including cleaning and tidying up, doing laundry, mowing the lawn), shopping for groceries and personal care items, managing medications (including keeping track of what time to take them) and providing respite care, when a person or service comes in and

allows a caregiver to take a temporary break from providing care—so you can devote some time to yourself and your family.

**INVOLVE CHILDREN.** If there's a possibility that younger children may inherit caregiving responsibilities in the future, it may be a good idea to get them involved now. Depending on their age and maturity, kids may be able to help with chores around the house, yard work, errands or food preparation. Bringing them in early will help normalize the caregiving process and teach necessary skills they will need if they eventually take over the caregiving responsibilities.



**KNOW YOUR RIGHTS.** As a family caregiver to a service member or veteran, you may need to deal with many different health care providers across various health care systems. It's essential to let each of these providers know that you are the primary caregiver and that you need information about the treatment plan.

Some professionals may be reluctant to share information, but most medical offices have a form that you and your veteran can sign, giving providers permission to discuss the person's care with you. If your loved one has an up-to-date release-of-information form or durable power of attorney for healthcare, be sure his or her medical providers have a copy in their medical files. If you run into roadblocks with care providers or administrative staff. Instead, ask the primary care physician, case manager, or whomever you trust most to help you become integrated into all aspects of your loved one's health care team.

Also, ask for training if you are expected to do procedures at home. For videos on how to perform some of these tasks yourself, go to [aarp.org/nolongeralone](https://aarp.org/nolongeralone).

If you believe that you or your veteran qualify for a benefit or service that you are not receiving, consider reaching out to a military service organization or veteran service organization (MSO or VSO) or another case management program; they are experienced in navigating the complex world of benefits and care. (See more resources section at the back of this guide.)



The Caregiver Advise, Record, Enable (CARE) Act, which recently passed in many states, generally requires hospitals to:

- Provide your loved one the opportunity to designate a family caregiver when admitted.
- Inform you when he or she is to be discharged to another facility or back home.
- Give you explanations and live instructions for the medical tasks—such as medication management, wound care and transfers—that the military caregiver will perform at home.

**BE FLEXIBLE.** A caregiving plan doesn't have to be extensive or fancy. It's impossible to anticipate every detail or possible scenario, so the plan should focus on the person's immediate needs as well as known plans for the future. For example, if your loved one wants to move in the next year, a family member can research suitable locations and facilities, while someone else might be willing to spend some weekends helping the service member or veteran sort through his or her belongings.

Use the checklists to guide you—change it up as new challenges arise. (See sample caregiving plan beginning on page 38.) Having a written summary of the plan can reinforce your loved one's wishes and needs and keep communication clear with everyone involved. A written plan is also necessary in case the primary caregiver falls sick or is unable to carry out caregiver duties. As the point person, it's important to stay well organized, track details and work through conflicts between members of the support system. It's also essential to be open to modifying the plan as the situation and other people's ability to help change.

## DID YOU KNOW?

More than 40 states have passed the Caregiver Advice, Record, Enable (CARE) Act. Is yours one of them? Learn more about the CARE Act (known by different names in some states), check our state list, and get a free informational wallet card to keep with your health insurance card. Visit [aarp.org/walletcards](https://aarp.org/walletcards).



## SEEK PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

It's OK to admit you need help. If you could use a little more time for yourself explore respite care options. And if you feel isolated or lonely in your caregiving journey, consider joining an in-person or online peer support group where you can connect with other military caregivers.

**LOCATE COMMUNITY RESOURCES.** Throughout the United States, a variety of support services are available for military and veteran caregivers and their families. For information about resources in your community, visit your area's agency on aging or contact your local VA center. Also, visit [HiddenHeroes.org/resources](https://HiddenHeroes.org/resources) for a simple-to-search list of more than 200 carefully vetted resources that are available specifically for military caregivers

**CONSULT A PROFESSIONAL.** Oftentimes a veteran's needs can be complex, especially when health, emotional and financial issues come into play. In the VA system, a veteran's case manager or caregiver support coordinator can help determine what is needed, find services, and arrange and monitor the care, similar to the way a nurse or social worker does in the civilian system. Good resources to start with: The VA's Care Management and Social Work programs ([patientcare.va.gov/caremanagement.asp](https://patientcare.va.gov/caremanagement.asp)) and the VA Caregiver Support website and support line. It also may be a good idea to seek emotional support for yourself, as a caregiver, through an organization such as Give an Hour.



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## Respite care can give you a much-needed break from your caregiving responsibilities, which can ease your stress and help rejuvenate you.

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**CONSIDER OUTSIDE CARE.** If you see that your care recipient needs extra help with daily activities, you can explore the range of home care services that are available. Some of these offer housekeeping, meal preparation, laundry, shopping and other support. Others provide more hands-on assistance with bathing, dressing and transferring the person from one position to another, which usually requires special training, a license or certification, depending on the laws in your state.

The VA Caregiver Support Program offers a stipend for eligible individuals, while the Veteran-

Directed Home & Community Based Services Program, a service of the Administration for Community Living (ACL), may provide funds so that veterans and their caregivers can hire outside help. Talk to a case manager or social worker within the VA system to find options that suit your needs and offer payment assistance if required.

In addition, respite care can give you a much-needed break from your caregiving responsibilities, which can ease your stress and help rejuvenate you. For more information on finding respite care for you and your loved one, download the respite care toolkit at [hiddenheroes.org/take-action](https://hiddenheroes.org/take-action) or contact your local agency on aging.

## WHERE TO FIND HELP

### **Administration for Community Living (ACL):**

[acl.gov](https://acl.gov)

The federal agency responsible for focusing attention and resources on the needs of older Americans and people with disabilities.

### **Give an Hour:**

[giveanhour.org](https://giveanhour.org)

A national nonprofit organization with a large network of mental health professionals who offer free counseling to those in need.

### **VA Caregiver Support:**

[caregiver.va.gov](https://caregiver.va.gov) or 855-260-3274

The program offers training, educational resources, support services and multiple tools to help military caregivers.

# HOW TO MANAGE CAREGIVING FROM A DISTANCE

Coordinating care when all those involved don't live in the same community can be time-consuming, expensive and frustrating. The following resources and strategies can help:

- My HealtheVet, a portal on the Veteran Affairs website, offers tips and tools to help military caregivers partner with their veteran's health care team so that you can work together to manage his or her health and your own. This is especially important for those who do not live with the person they're caring for and need to travel to fulfill their caregiving duties.
- VA Telehealth Services ([telehealth.va.gov](https://telehealth.va.gov)) helps veterans connect with their care team through interactive video visit, and in-home and mobile monitoring.
- Technology is transforming caregiving. A personal emergency response system—an electronic device with a call button that a care recipient can use to summon help in an emergency—remote monitoring devices and mobile apps with medical records will help you juggle your many tasks and can provide some peace of mind.
- Maintain a list of all contact information for doctors, insurance companies and neighbors. Keep a list of their medications with you, too. (See checklist on page 34.)





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## Look into the variety of housing options with support options that may be available in your community.

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### FIND HOUSING WITH SUPPORTIVE SERVICES.

If you and your veteran decide it's best for him or her to be cared for in a new residence that combines housing with support services, look into the variety of housing options that may be available in your community, including the VA's 133 nursing homes located across the country. Begin by making a list of criteria, such as location, group dining, laundry services and other features that are important to both of you.

### DID YOU KNOW?

According to the VA, suicide is the 10<sup>th</sup>-leading cause of death in the United States, and veteran suicide is a national concern. If you or a loved one is in need of help, there are trained professionals available 24/7 for confidential support: Veterans Crisis Line (call **1-800-273-8255**, **press 1** or text **838255**), White House VA Hotline (**1-855-948-2311**), Vets 4 Warriors Hotline (call **1-855-838-8255** or text **732-333-3634**).



If you choose to keep your loved one at home but he or she develops difficulty with mobility or experiences declines in vision, hearing or balance, some simple changes can make the home easier to navigate and make the environment safer and more comfortable. The AARP HomeFit Guide at [aarp.org/homefit](https://aarp.org/homefit) offers solutions that range from simple fixes to improvements that require skilled expertise.

The VA also provides grants to service members and veterans with certain permanent service-connected disabilities that will help them purchase or construct an adapted home or modify an existing home to accommodate their disabilities. Two grant programs to check out: the Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) grant and the Special Housing Adaptation (SHA) grant. A number of nonprofit organizations assist eligible veterans, their families and caregivers in paying for temporary or permanent housing as well. You can find a list in the Resources section.

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## CARE FOR YOURSELF

Military caregivers often say the most difficult part of caregiving is the demand on their time. Balancing caregiving with work and other family obligations can be stressful and exhausting. Because stress can take a toll on your health, well-being and ability to provide care, it's critical to get help from others and schedule regular time for yourself to engage in activities that matter to you.

**OWN YOUR FEELINGS.** The way you assumed the role of caregiver can influence how you feel about the experience. Perhaps you've always been close to your veteran and you see this as your chance to return the loving care he or she gave to you and your family. Or maybe you were the only person who could take responsibility for caring for the veteran, in which case you may feel anxious because you're unprepared or overwhelmed with your own work, children and other responsibilities. Others enter the caregiving journey reluctantly but discover it's a chance to mend a broken or distant relationship and experience healing. However you arrived at this role, it's helpful to acknowledge your feelings honestly, both the positive and the negative ones.

**TEND TO YOUR NEEDS.** Be sure to take care of your own needs, such as regular exercise, sleep and healthy eating. Find ways to reduce your stress and take time to have fun in ways that appeal to you, whether that's as simple as meeting a friend for dinner or taking your kids to the park. And allow yourself bigger breaks on a regular basis.

# 10 QUESTIONS TO ASK A RESPITE CARE PROVIDER

One of the best ways to support your loved one is to take good care of yourself, including setting aside time for activities that restore your emotional well-being and taking advantage of respite care opportunities. Using respite care is like the saying about putting on your own oxygen mask before assisting others with theirs. Giving yourself a break also helps boost your stamina for continuing care. To ensure that your veteran or service member is in safe hands with a respite care provider, ask the following questions when vetting a home care or respite care agency:

1. How are the workers selected and trained?
2. Are background checks performed, and are respite workers licensed and bonded?
3. What tasks can a respite worker perform? Can he or she administer medications or assist with personal care needs (such as bathing, dressing or using the toilet)?
4. Do your respite workers have experience handling \_\_\_\_\_  
[insert your veteran's special needs]?
5. Will the respite provider engage in or offer activities or companion services that the veteran requests (such as taking a walk to the park, playing cards or providing social stimulation)?
6. What hours and days are services available?
7. Is the veteran eligible for the services you provide?
8. What are the fees, and how are they paid?
9. How are emergencies and problems handled?
10. Are references available?







There are many different retreats for caregivers or the entire family that allow you to get away, regroup and rejuvenate. If you know other caregivers, ask them what retreats they have enjoyed and why. **HiddenHeroes.org** is a great resource for finding such getaways. So are the Independence Fund and the National Military Family Association. Look for a retreat that includes a follow-up program that will give you tools to help you cope at home. If you take time to care for yourself, you'll often return to your responsibilities feeling renewed and better able to provide care.

**BALANCE WORK AND CAREGIVING.** Many of those who are caring for a wounded, ill or injured veteran or service member also have a full-time or part-time job. While many organizations (such as Hiring Our Heroes) have developed hiring strategies aimed at bringing veterans on board, some companies are now including policies and programs to support military caregivers and spouses as well. If you need to return to the workforce, talk to employers about taking advantage of flextime or working from home to help you juggle caregiving duties. If you are working and need additional time off, consider asking whether you are covered by the Family and Medical Leave Act—a law that requires some employers to allow military caregivers unpaid time off work (up to 26 workweeks) to care for a covered servicemember with a serious injury or illness. While many people are eligible, if you work for a small company or haven't worked for your employer for long, you may not qualify for this program.

**NETWORK WITH OTHER CAREGIVERS.** To boost your coping capacity, also consider tapping into social networks such as Facebook and AARP's online caregiving community for support, where you can share your caregiving story with others at **[aarp.org/caregivingcommunity](https://aarp.org/caregivingcommunity)**. There's comfort in knowing that others are experiencing the same ups and downs that you are. You also may get ideas about other strategies you can use and other resources that are available to help lighten your load. At times, you may feel guilty about needing time off or help with understanding complex information. But remember that your loved one also may benefit from having a wider circle of care. Consider finding services and support groups in your community through the Eldercare Locator.

# TAKE CARE OF YOUR FUTURE

It can be difficult to think about what life will be like when you're no longer a caregiver for your service member or veteran. But it's smart to make sure you're planning for your own future. Here are a few questions to help you start thinking about caring for yourself:

- **How is my financial health?** Many military and veteran caregivers report experiencing financial strain due to the costs of providing care and the loss of income and wages. It's important to understand these costs and how they affect your future, both in the short term and long term. Consider speaking to a financial adviser about how to protect your own financial health when the time comes to stop caring for your loved one. This is particularly important for non-spouse or dependent caregivers (such as parents, siblings or friends) who may not qualify for certain assistance programs based on their relationship with the veteran.
- **If I were no longer a caregiver tomorrow, would I be ready for what's next?** It's wise to have your personal affairs in order so that if an emergency occurs, you're as ready to deal with it as you possibly can be. Do you have important legal documents such as your birth certificate and Social Security card in a secure, easily accessible place? You probably have a copy of your care recipient's medical history, but do you have your own medical history readily accessible? Use the checklists in the back of this guide to start making a list of what you might need for yourself.
- **Am I practicing healthy self-care on a regular basis?** It's easy to neglect your own health and well-being when you're focused on making sure your service member or veteran receives the proper care. But it's very important that you take good care of yourself—with a healthy diet, regular exercise, enough sleep, stress management, positive social support and preventive screening tests—with the same dedication that you show your loved one. Besides helping to make you a better caregiver now, regular self-care also will ensure you have sufficient energy and support when you need it most.







**SAVOR THE REWARDS.** Caregiving is demanding, intense and intimate work that presents frequent challenges to the partners, parents, siblings, friends and neighbors who are involved in it. It also may be one of the most loving and rewarding roles you will play in the life of a veteran or military service member. Still, relationship dynamics will shift, needs will evolve and what's considered "normal" will change.


This guide and the many formal sources of help listed are meant to open up avenues of support and get ideas flowing. But how you, your military service member or veteran, and your circle of support decide to do things must be right for all of you.

## WHERE ARE YOU ON YOUR JOURNEY?

Military and veteran caregivers face a series of unique challenges and emotions along their caregiving journey, and far too often face them alone or without a clear picture of what lies ahead.

To empower and connect caregivers to necessary services and support, the Elizabeth Dole Foundation, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and Philips created a Military and Veteran Caregiver Experience Map to document journey and its impact on caregivers' physical, psychological, financial, and social wellbeing. The map identifies common obstacles, emotions, and needs that they will experience while caring for their veteran or service member.

Developed with support from Wounded Warrior Project, the map provides an online interactive guide and video testimonials for caregivers as they take on this important responsibility. [caregiverjourney.org](https://caregiverjourney.org)

A photograph of Elizabeth Dole, a woman with blonde hair wearing a red blazer, leaning in to greet a group of veterans. One veteran in the foreground is wearing a red baseball cap and a dark jacket. Other veterans are visible in the background, some wearing military-style caps. The scene is outdoors with trees in the background.

Elizabeth Dole  
greeting veterans.

## YOUR MILITARY CAREGIVING EXPERTS

### **AARP FAMILY CAREGIVING WEBSITE:**

**[aarp.org/caregiving](https://aarp.org/caregiving) or 877-333-5885 toll-free**

AARP's Family Caregiving website is your one-stop shop for tips and tools to help you care for a loved one. It has valuable information about handling medical issues, health records and advance directives, home safety, financial and legal issues, caregiver life balance and much more. (For Spanish resources, go to **[aarp.org/cuidar](https://aarp.org/cuidar)** or call **888-971-2013** toll-free.) You'll also have the opportunity to join our community and connect with other caregivers like you at **[aarp.org/caregivingcommunity](https://aarp.org/caregivingcommunity)**.

### **ELIZABETH DOLE FOUNDATION:**

**[elizabethdolefoundation.org](https://elizabethdolefoundation.org)**

Created to help American military caregivers, the Elizabeth Dole Foundation offers programs to provide military and veteran caregivers with the support they need at the local, state and national levels. The foundation's Hidden Heroes campaign seeks to raise awareness and provide solutions for the challenges military caregivers face every day. At **[HiddenHeroes.org](https://HiddenHeroes.org)**, you'll find personal stories from military caregivers, a vetted directory of valuable resources, an online support group and ways to get involved in your community.



# GLOSSARY

## **DD214: CERTIFICATE OF RELEASE OR DISCHARGE FROM ACTIVE DUTY**

A document of the United States Department of Defense, issued upon a military service member's retirement, separation, or discharge from active duty in the Armed Forces of the United States.

## **AID AND ATTENDANCE (A&A)**

An increased amount that may be added to your monthly pension if you meet certain requirements.

## **ARMED FORCES HEALTH LONGITUDINAL TECHNOLOGY APPLICATION (AHLTA)**

An electronic medical record used by the Department of Defense (DoD).

## **CAREGIVER SUPPORT COORDINATOR**

A licensed professional working within a VA Medical Center who matches needs with services you're eligible for and provide valuable information about resources.

## **CIVILIAN HEALTH AND MEDICAL PROGRAM (CHAMPVA)**

A comprehensive health care benefits program in which the VA shares the cost of covered health care services and supplies with eligible beneficiaries.

## **COMMUNITY BASED OUTPATIENT CLINIC (CBOC)**

VHA utilizes CBOC's to provide common outpatient services, including health and wellness visits.

## **CONSERVATOR**

A person appointed by a court to handle someone's affairs when that person cannot handle them himself or herself. A conservator usually handles only financial affairs.

## **DEFENSE ENROLLMENT ELIGIBILITY REPORTING SYSTEM (DEERS)**

A database for service members, military retirees, 100% VA disabled veterans, dependents, DoD active Contractors, and others worldwide who are entitled to Public Key Infrastructure and TRICARE eligibility.

## **DEFENSE FINANCIAL AND ACCOUNTING SERVICES (DFAS)**

DFAS provides payment services to the Department of Defense.

## **DURABLE POWER OF ATTORNEY FOR FINANCES**

A legal document that allows people to give authority to another trusted person to make financial decisions on their behalf. The "durable" designation means that it will stay in effect if they become unable to manage their own financial affairs.

## **EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP)**

Offered by many employers, EAPs are intended to help employees deal with personal issues that affect their job performance, health and well-being. They generally include short-term counseling and referral services for employees and their household members.

## **HEALTH CARE POWER OF ATTORNEY (HEALTH CARE PROXY)**

A special kind of durable power of attorney in which people appoint another person to make health care decisions for them in the event that they become unable to do so.

## **HEALTH INSURANCE PORTABILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT (HIPAA)**

A federal law that gives people rights over their health information and sets rules and limits on who can look at and receive it. It also permits the release of personal health information that's needed for patient care.

## **HOME HEALTH AGENCY**

An agency often certified by Medicare to provide health-related services in the home, such as nursing, social work and/or personal care, and occupational, speech or physical therapy.

## **LONG-TERM CARE INSURANCE**

Insurance that can pay part of the cost of care received in the home, assisted living residences, a nursing home and other designated services, depending on the policy.

# GLOSSARY

## **MILITARY SERVICE OFFICER/ORGANIZATION (MSO)**

Provides professional assistance to active duty military and their family members by helping them obtain benefits and services they have earned through military service.

## **NON-MEDICAL ATTENDANT (NMA)**

One person designated by the soldier is authorized to serve as an NMA and provides support as the soldier recovers, rehabilitates and transitions to civilian life.

## **PATIENT ADVOCATES**

Professionals who can resolve concerns about any aspect of your health care experience, particularly those that cannot be resolved at the point of care.

## **PATIENT ALIGNED CARE TEAM (PACT)**

Team-based care in which health professionals, led by a provider, works with the patient to provide for the patient's healthcare needs—or coordinates care with other qualified professionals.

## **REQUEST FOR AND AUTHORIZATION TO RELEASE MEDICAL RECORDS FORM**

VA Form 10-5345 requests the release of health information by a VA Medical Center. The veteran must provide signed, written authorization before the center can share these records.

## **TRICARE**

TRICARE provides comprehensive coverage, including health plans, special programs, prescriptions, and dental plans for uniformed service members, retirees, and their families. Most TRICARE health plans meet the requirements for minimum essential coverage under the Affordable Care Act.

## **VA'S FIDUCIARY PROGRAM**

Protects veterans and other beneficiaries who, due to injury, disease or age, are unable to manage their financial affairs. VA will only determine this after receipt of medical documentation or if a court of competent jurisdiction has already made the determination.

## **VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION (VBA)**

A component of the Department of Veteran's Affairs that is responsible for administering programs that provide financial and other forms of assistance to veterans, their dependents, and survivors.

## **VETERAN'S HEALTH ADMINISTRATION (VHA)**

A component of the Department of Veteran's Affairs that implements the healthcare program of the VA through the numerous VA Medical Centers (VAMC), Outpatient Clinics (OPC), Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC), and VA Community Living Centers (VA Nursing Home) Programs.



# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## AMERICAN LEGION

[legion.org](http://legion.org)

The nation's largest wartime veterans service organization, committed to mentoring youth and sponsorship of programs in our communities, advocating patriotism and honor, promoting strong national security, and continued devotion to our fellow servicemembers and veterans.

## ARCH NATIONAL RESPITE NETWORK AND RESOURCE CENTER

[archrespite.org](http://archrespite.org)

A service that helps people locate respite services near them.

## BLUE STAR FAMILIES

[bluestarfam.org/for-mil-families/wellness](http://bluestarfam.org/for-mil-families/wellness)

Committed to strengthening military families by connecting them with their neighbors. Includes a specific program that allows caregivers to connect with other caregivers and resources in their community.

## CAREGIVERS ON THE HOMEFRONT

[caregivers-homefront.org](http://caregivers-homefront.org)

Provides caregivers of veterans and first responders with hopefulness, a sense of togetherness, and a firm foundation of resiliency through education, support groups, advocacy, and retreats.

## CODE OF SUPPORT FOUNDATION

[codeofsupport.org](http://codeofsupport.org) or 571-418-6339

Provides one-on-one assistance to service members, veterans and their families with complex needs.

## DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS (DAV)

[dav.org](http://dav.org)

A nonprofit charity that provides benefits assistance and claims help, along with other programs to assist veterans, their families and caregivers.

## FAMILY CAREGIVER ALLIANCE

[caregiver.org](http://caregiver.org) or 800-445-8106

Tools and resources for caregivers, including the Family Care Navigator, a state-by-state list of services and forms of assistance that are available.

## FISHER HOUSE

[fisherhouse.org](http://fisherhouse.org)

An organization that builds comfort homes at military and VA medical centers around the world, and where military and veteran families can stay free of charge while a loved one is in the hospital.

## HEARTS OF VALOR

[heartsofvalor.org](http://heartsofvalor.org)

A network of people caring for wounded, ill or injured service members that was created and is maintained by Operation Homefront.

## HOME BASE

[homebase.org](http://homebase.org) or 617-724-5202

The goal of the organization is to heal the “invisible wounds”—post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injury, depression—for veterans, service members and their families, regardless of financial or discharge status.

## HOPE FOR THE WARRIORS

[hopeforthewarriors.org](http://hopeforthewarriors.org)

Provides support services to military and veteran caregivers of post-9/11 service members or veterans that have been physically or psychologically wounded.

## MILITARY AND VETERAN CAREGIVER NETWORK (MVCN)

[milvetcaregivernetwork.org](http://milvetcaregivernetwork.org)

MVCN offers peer support and services to connect those providing care to service members and veterans who are living with wounds, illnesses and/or injuries.

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR CAREGIVING

[caregiving.org](http://caregiving.org)

This organization is dedicated to improving the quality of life for caregivers and those they care for through research, innovation, and advocacy.

## NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR HOME CARE & HOSPICE

[nahc.org](http://nahc.org)

Consumer information on how to select a home care provider or hospice.

## NATIONAL HOSPICE AND PALLIATIVE CARE ORGANIZATION

[nhpco.org](http://nhpco.org) or 800-646-6460

Free consumer information on hospice care and services that puts the public in direct contact with hospice programs.

## PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

[pva.org](http://pva.org)

A veteran service organization that offers expertise on the special needs of veterans who have experienced spinal cord injury or dysfunction.

## QUALITY OF LIFE FOUNDATION

[woundedveteranfamilycare.org](http://woundedveteranfamilycare.org)

or 855-765-7650 toll-free

The foundation's Wounded Veteran Family Care Program addresses the needs of families that provide daily substantial care for severely wounded, ill or injured veterans in their homes.

## SEMPER FI FUND

[semperfifund.org](http://semperfifund.org)

Provides immediate financial assistance and lifetime support to post-9/11 combat-wounded, critically ill and catastrophically injured members of all branches of the U.S. Armed Forces and their families during recovery and the transition back to their communities.

## U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

[va.gov](http://va.gov) or 1-800-MyVA411 (1-800-628-2411)

The federal agency responsible for providing VA health care, benefits, and services to eligible U.S. military veterans and family members

## VETERANS CRISIS LINE

[veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/chat](http://veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/chat) or 800-273-8255

Free, confidential support available 24/7 for veterans in crisis.

## WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT

[woundedwarriorproject.org](http://woundedwarriorproject.org)

A charity and veteran service organization that offers a variety of programs, services and events for wounded veterans of the military actions following Sept. 11, 2001.

## YELLOW RIBBON FUND

[yellowribbonfund.org](http://yellowribbonfund.org)

Provides practical support for wounded, ill and injured service members and their caregivers, including housing and transportation, to keep families together during the critical recuperation phase.



## GENERAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT

(One for each individual who will need care)

Area of Need	Types of Possible Tasks	Point Person
Home Maintenance and Living Situation	_____ Home repairs/modifications	
	_____ Home maintenance	
	_____ Pay VA home loan, mortgage or rent	
	_____ VA home accessibility modifications	
	_____ Safety and security	
	_____ Grocery shopping & meal preparation	
	_____ Lawn care	
	_____ Pet care	
	_____ Housekeeping	
	_____ Research alternative living situations	
	_____ Other:	
	_____	
Financial Affairs	_____ Pay bills	
	_____ Keep track of financial records	
	_____ Manage assets	
	_____ Apply for and supervise public benefits	
	_____ Leave earnings statement	
	_____ Military compensation statement	
	_____ VA caregiver stipend program bills	
	_____ Use GI Bill for education or for a dependent	
	_____ File claim with VA	
Transportation	_____ Driving decisions	
	_____ Coordinate rides	
	_____ Locate transportation services	
Personal Care	_____ Coordinate personal care activities	
	_____ Help with daily grooming and dressing	
	_____ Rides to hair stylist	
	_____ Clothes shopping	



## GENERAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT

(One for each individual who will need care)

Area of Need	Types of Possible Tasks	Point Person
Health Care	<input type="checkbox"/> Enroll in healthcare <input type="checkbox"/> Transition to TRICARE (if retiree) <input type="checkbox"/> Monitor and record physical and emotional symptoms <input type="checkbox"/> Arrange medical appointments, transportation, and someone to accompany as needed <input type="checkbox"/> Submit medical insurance and bills <input type="checkbox"/> Explain medical decisions <input type="checkbox"/> Medication management (fill prescriptions, fill pill boxes, give reminders and dispense medications) <input type="checkbox"/> Perform medical tasks (wound care, injections, and catheter) <input type="checkbox"/> Obtain medical bracelet and/or medical alert system if needed	          
Communications	<input type="checkbox"/> Keep family caregiving team informed <input type="checkbox"/> Coordinate team visits <input type="checkbox"/> Daily check-in <input type="checkbox"/> Obtain cell phone and/or Internet to enhance communication	    
Socialization	<input type="checkbox"/> Send greeting and thank-you notes <input type="checkbox"/> Arrange for visitors <input type="checkbox"/> Arrange outings <input type="checkbox"/> Join local veterans group	    
Adaptive Devices	<input type="checkbox"/> Order, maintain and pay for adaptive devices <input type="checkbox"/> Train on how to use devices <input type="checkbox"/> Get educated on process to secure devices and get them maintained by VA <input type="checkbox"/> Other	    





## PERSONAL INFORMATION CHECKLIST

(One for each individual who will need care)

NAME

X	Personal Information	Contact Info	Notes
	Address		
	VA Disability Letter		
	Military Records branch of service VA ID#: discharge papers: medical:		
	Social Security Card		
	Birth Certificate		
	Marriage Certificate		
	Death Certificate (for deceased spouse)		
	Divorce Papers		
	Drivers' License/Organ Donor Card		
	Passport/Citizenship Papers		
	Address Books (names and addresses of friends and colleagues)		
	Lists of church & community memberships and contact information		
	Information on waiting lists or contracts with retirement communities or nursing homes		
	End of life planning		
	Pet Care: Vet, Sitter, Walker		
	Lawyer		
	Other		



## HOME MAINTENANCE CHECKLIST

X	Home Item	Contact Info	Notes
	Mortgage Company Name: Amount due:		
	Rental Management Company: Amount due:		
	Rental/Real Estate Agent:		
	Gas/Electric/Water Company:		
	Cable/Internet/Telephone:		
	Home Security Company:		
	Neighbor's Contact Information		
	Homeowners Insurance Agent: Insurance Policy #: Homeowners Premium:		
	Garbage Service/Garbage Pickup Day is: <b>M T W Th F</b> (circle) Recycle Service Pickup Day is: <b>M T W Th F</b> (circle)		
	<b>Home Services:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handy person</li> <li>• Lawn care</li> <li>• Appliances</li> </ul>		
	<b>Passwords</b> Computer(s) password clue(s) Voicemail password clue Cell phone Security system		





## HEALTHCARE CONTACTS

**PHARMACY Name**

**PHONE #**

**LOCATION**

**PHARMACY Name**

**PHONE #**

**LOCATION**

**DOCTOR Name**

Specialty:

**PHONE #**

**ADDRESS**

**DOCTOR Name**

Specialty:

**PHONE #**

**ADDRESS**

**DOCTOR Name**

Specialty:

**PHONE #**

**ADDRESS**

**DOCTOR Name**

Specialty:

**PHONE #**

**ADDRESS**

**DENTIST Name**

**PHONE #**

**ADDRESS**

**HOME CARE AGENCY**

**PHONE #**

**ADDRESS**



## HEALTHCARE CONTACTS (continued)

X	Item	Contact Name	Notes
	Medicare Original or Medicare Advantage (company name): ID Number:		
	Medical Health Record		
	Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage (company name): ID Number: <i>(does not apply to an Advantage plan with drug coverage)</i>		
	Other Health Insurance Policy (Medigap): Company: Premium: Payment schedule:		
	My Health Vet (myhealth.VA.gov)		
	Veterans Health System: ID #:		
	Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) Order:		
	Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST) form— if available in your state		
	Living Will/Advance Directives		
	Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care		



## MEDICATION CHART

[illegible]

List Allergies:



## TRANSPORTATION CHECKLIST

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

X	Item	Notes	Where Is It Kept?
	Auto(s):	Make(s):	
	Auto Loan Information:	Model(s):	
	Title for Car(s):		
	Auto Insurance Company:		
	VA Transportation		
	Rideshare Services (such as ACCESS van, local cab service, Lyft, Uber):		
	Recreational Vehicles:  Title:  Insurance:		



## FINANCIAL CHECKLIST

X	Item	Contact Info	Notes
	Bank Records (checking/savings accounts) Pin number clues— online banking and accounts with passwords and clues		
	Trusts		
	Will		
	Durable Power of Attorney for Finances		
	Any Rental Agreements or Business Contracts		
	Complete List of Assets & Debts		
	List of Routine Household Bills		
	Federal & State Tax Returns (past 3-5 years): Tax Preparer:		
	Records of Any Personal Loans Made to Others:		
	Financial Planner or Broker:		
	Fiduciary or Other Financial Program Officer		
	VSO Case Manager		
	VA Life Insurance		
	VA Death Benefits (care for spouse, burial, taps, etc.)		
	Life Insurance Policy or Policies:		
	Disability Insurance (long- and short-term):		
	Long-Term Care Insurance:		
	Safe Deposit Box(es):	Location(s): Number(s): Keys:	



## PUBLIC BENEFITS CHECKLIST

Your loved one may have or be eligible for help with paying for food, heating bills, property taxes and more. Use **AARP BenefitsQuickLINK**, [aarp.org/quicklink](https://aarp.org/quicklink), to find out about programs in your state.

X	Item		
	Food Assistance (i.e., SNAP/FNS)	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Low Income Home Energy Assistance (LIHEAP)	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Supplemental Security Income (SSI)	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
	VA/DOD Benefits	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Property Tax Assistance/Exemption	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Extra Help Paying for Medicare Part D (prescription drug coverage)	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Medicare Parts A, B, and D Premium Support	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Medicaid (help with long-term care and medical care) Number & Identification Card	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
	Transportation Assistance	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO





## SAMPLE DETAILED WEEKLY CAREGIVING PLAN

For daily tasks or those done on a regular routine, try something like this weekly schedule (it can be made into a daily or monthly schedule):

### Caregiving Week of:

Day	Tasks	When/ Where	Person Responsible/ POC	Notes
Example Day	1. Check whether medications have been taken	End of day	Daughter Mary	Call and review pill box
	2. Go to doctor's appt	1:00 p.m.	Daughter Ann	Drive to appt, get prescriptions, set in pill box
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				





This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.





# Military Caregiver Resources

Visit AARP's Veterans & Military Families website for additional information, tools, and free resources on caregiving and much more at [aarp.org/veterans](https://aarp.org/veterans) or call **1-877-333-5885**.

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For Spanish resources visit [aarp.org/cuidar](https://aarp.org/cuidar) or call **1-888-971-2013**.



601 E Street, NW | Washington, DC 20049  
AARP Caregiving Support: **1-877-333-5885**  
[aarp.org/caregiving](https://aarp.org/caregiving)



**Elizabeth Dole Foundation**  
CARING FOR MILITARY FAMILIES