THE VA FILES

THE VA ACRONYM GUIDE

Every acronym in our books,
in plain English.

FREE — FROM THE VA FILES

Claims & Benefits · Medical · House Terms
Version 1.1 · Current as of November 2026

The VA Files

The VA Files / True North Paper Co.

Contents

How to use this guide

Part One — Claims & Benefits — page 3

Part Two — Medical — page 12

Part Three — House — The VA Files — page 17

A note on sources

How to use this guide

VA paperwork runs on acronyms, and nobody hands you the decoder. This guide is the decoder: every acronym that appears in any book in The VA Files library, spelled out and translated into one line of plain English. Keep it next to whatever letter VA just sent you.

It is a living book. When a new title joins the library, its acronyms are added to our register first, and this guide re-issues from that register every quarter — the version and date on the cover (Version 1.1, current as of November 2026) tell you how fresh your copy is. If a letter uses an acronym that is not here yet, it will be in the next issue.

Educational information only — this guide explains the words; it is not claims, medical, or legal advice, and The VA Files is not a VA-accredited claims agent or representative. Rates and rules change: confirm current figures at va.gov.

Part One

Claims & Benefits

The language of the claim itself — filing, exams, ratings, appeals, and the money programs around them.

A

AMA — Appeals Modernization Act · The 2017 law (live Feb 2019) that replaced the legacy appeals system with the HLR, supplemental-claim, and Board lanes.

B

BCMR — Board for Correction of Military Records · The service branch board that can correct errors or injustices in a service member's military record.

BDD — Benefits Delivery at Discharge · Program that lets separating service members file VA disability claims 90–180 days before leaving service.

C

C&P; — Compensation and Pension (exam) · The VA exam scheduled during a claim; its findings drive the rating decision.

CFR — Code of Federal Regulations · The published federal rules — Title 38 is where VA's rating and benefits regulations live.

COD — Character of Discharge · VA's own determination of whether a less-than-honorable discharge still allows VA benefits.

COE — Certificate of Eligibility · The VA home-loan document proving you have entitlement for a VA-backed mortgage.

COLA — Cost-of-Living Adjustment · The annual percentage increase applied to VA compensation and Social Security.

CPS — 10-Point Veteran Preference — Compensable, 30% or More · A federal hiring preference category (SF-15) for veterans with a service-connected disability rated 30% or more.

CRDP — Concurrent Retirement and Disability Pay · The rule that lets eligible retirees receive full military retirement pay and VA compensation at the same time.

CRSC — Combat-Related Special Compensation · Tax-free DoD pay restoring the retirement offset for retirees whose disabilities are combat-related.

CUE — Clear and Unmistakable Error · A rare, high-bar challenge claiming VA's past decision rested on an undebatable error of fact or law.

CWT — Compensated Work Therapy · VA programs that pair treatment with paid transitional work and supported employment.

D

DAV — Disabled American Veterans · A congressionally chartered VSO whose accredited representatives help file claims for free.

DBQ — Disability Benefits Questionnaire · The standardized form the C&P; examiner completes — the worksheet the rating is built from.

DD214 — DD Form 214 — Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty · The separation document that proves service; the key that unlocks most benefits.

DD215 — DD Form 215 — Correction to DD Form 214 · The correction sheet issued when a DD214 is amended after the fact.

DIC — Dependency and Indemnity Compensation · Tax-free monthly benefit for eligible survivors of a service member or veteran whose death was service-connected.

DPRIS — Defense Personnel Records Information Retrieval System · DoD's system for retrieving digitized service records, including DD214s, for VA and other agencies.

DRB — Discharge Review Board · The service branch board that reviews requests to upgrade a discharge characterization.

F

FAFSA — Free Application for Federal Student Aid · The federal form that opens student aid — filled out alongside GI Bill benefits for school.

FDC — Fully Developed Claim · A claim filed with all evidence up front so VA can decide without gathering more.

FHA — Federal Housing Administration · The federal agency whose insured loans are the common comparison — and fallback — next to VA home loans.

FOIA — Freedom of Information Act · The federal law for requesting government records — used to pull files and documents from agencies.

G

GI — GI Bill · The education benefits earned by service — Post-9/11 and Montgomery are the two big chapters.

GS — General Schedule · The federal pay-grade system (GS-5 through GS-15) most federal job postings are written in.

H

HISA — Home Improvements and Structural Alterations · VA grant for medically necessary home access changes (ramps, roll-in showers). Lifetime caps: $6,800 service-connected / $2,000 non-service-connected.

HLR — Higher-Level Review · An appeal lane: a senior reviewer re-checks the decision on the same evidence — no new evidence allowed.

HUD-VASH — HUD–VA Supportive Housing · The joint program pairing a HUD housing voucher with VA case management for homeless veterans.

I

IDES — Integrated Disability Evaluation System · The joint DoD/VA process that runs the MEB/PEB and a proposed VA rating before separation for wounded, ill, or injured members.

IEP — Individualized Education Program · The written plan for a child's special-education services — it moves with military kids under the interstate compact.

IMO — Independent Medical Opinion · A private doctor's written opinion linking a condition to service — evidence a veteran can add to a claim.

IRRRL — Interest Rate Reduction Refinance Loan · The VA streamline refinance that lowers an existing VA loan's rate with reduced paperwork.

ITF — Intent to File · A one-page notice that preserves your effective date for up to a year while you gather evidence.

IVAP — Income for VA Purposes · The countable-income figure VA pension math runs on — countable income after exclusions and medical-expense deductions.

J

JSRRC — Joint Services Records Research Center · The DoD center that researches unit records to verify stressor events for PTSD claims (now under DPRIS research requests).

K

KIA — Killed in Action · The casualty status for a service member killed by hostile action.

M

M21-1 — VA Adjudication Procedures Manual, M21-1 · The manual VA's claims staff follow — the rulebook raters actually work from.

MAPR — Maximum Annual Pension Rate · The income ceiling for VA pension: your pension tops countable income up to this rate, set by law and adjusted with COLA.

MEB — Medical Evaluation Board · The service-side board that decides whether a condition makes a member unfit and starts the IDES process.

MIC3 — Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission · The compact body that makes school enrollment, placement, and records transfer smoothly when military kids change states.

MSRRA — Military Spouses Residency Relief Act · The law letting a military spouse keep a chosen state of legal residence for tax and voting instead of changing with every move.

N

NPRC — National Personnel Records Center · The national archive holding older military service records — where pre-digital records requests go.

NUA — Net Unrealized Appreciation · The tax rule for employer stock in a retirement plan — the gain built up while the stock sat in the plan.

O

OMPF — Official Military Personnel File · Your complete official service record file — the personnel-side record set pulled for claims and corrections.

OOD — Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities · Ohio's state agency for disability employment services.

OPM — Office of Personnel Management · The federal HR agency — runs USAJobs policy, federal hiring rules, and retirement for federal employees.

OTH — Other Than Honorable (discharge) · An administrative discharge characterization below General — VA makes its own character-of-discharge call on benefits.

P

P&T; — Permanent and Total · The designation that a 100% disability is not expected to improve — unlocks additional benefits and protections.

PACT Act — Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act (2022) · The law that expanded VA care and benefits for toxic exposures (burn pits, Agent Orange, and more).

PCAFC — Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers · VA's enhanced caregiver program — stipend, training, and support for caregivers of seriously injured veterans (the Caregiver Support Program's top tier).

PDBR — Physical Disability Board of Review · The DoD board that re-reviews low disability separations (0–20%) from 2001–2009 for a possible retirement upgrade.

PDRL — Permanent Disability Retired List · The retirement list for members whose unfitting disability is permanent and rated 30% or more — a medical retirement.

PEB — Physical Evaluation Board · The board that decides fitness and the DoD disability percentage in the IDES process.

POA — Power of Attorney · The legal document letting someone you name act for you — used for filings, finances, and deployments.

POW/MIA — Prisoner of War / Missing in Action · The paired statuses honored by the POW/MIA flag and the September recognition day.

S

SAH — Specially Adapted Housing · VA's large housing grant (SAH, §2101(a)) for building or adapting a home for certain severe service-connected disabilities.

SBP — Survivor Benefit Plan · The DoD annuity a military retiree can elect so a spouse keeps income after the retiree's death.

SCRA — Servicemembers Civil Relief Act · The federal law pausing many civil actions — lawsuits, foreclosures, interest above 6% — while a member serves.

SF-15 — Application for 10-Point Veteran Preference · The federal form used to claim 10-point veteran preference in federal hiring.

SF-180 — Request Pertaining to Military Records · The standard form for requesting your (or a next-of-kin's) military records from the archives.

SHA — Special Housing Adaptation · VA's smaller housing grant (SHA, §2101(b)) for adapting a home for certain service-connected disabilities — SAH's sibling.

SMC — Special Monthly Compensation · Extra monthly pay above the standard rates for specific severe losses or needs (e.g., aid and attendance).

SMC-K — Special Monthly Compensation, subsection (k) · The SMC level for loss or loss of use of a creative organ or certain other specific losses.

SMC-L — Special Monthly Compensation, subsection (l) · The SMC level covering specified anatomical loss combinations — also the base rate for regular aid and attendance.

SMC-S — Special Monthly Compensation, subsection (s) · The 'housebound' SMC level — one disability at 100% plus others at 60%+, or substantially confined to the home.

SMC-T — Special Monthly Compensation, subsection (t) · The SMC level for traumatic brain injury residuals requiring regular aid and attendance.

SSA — Social Security Administration · The agency that runs retirement and disability benefits — separate from VA.

SSDI — Social Security Disability Insurance · Social Security's disability benefit, based on work credits; can be received alongside VA compensation.

SSI — Supplemental Security Income · Social Security's needs-based payment for people with limited income — different from SSDI and from VA pension.

SSVF — Supportive Services for Veteran Families · VA's grant program funding rapid re-housing and homelessness prevention for very low-income veteran families.

STR — Service Treatment Records · Your in-service medical records — the primary evidence of what happened to you medically during service.

T

TAP — Transition Assistance Program · The DoD's required separation runway — briefings and counseling in the last stretch of service.

TAPS — Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors · The national nonprofit providing peer support and resources to those grieving a military death.

TDIU — Total Disability based on Individual Unemployability · Paid at the 100% rate when service-connected disabilities keep a veteran from working, even if the combined rating is lower.

TDRL — Temporary Disability Retired List · The retirement list for members whose unfitting disability (30%+) might improve — re-evaluated until final disposition.

TRA — Temporary Residence Adaptation · A smaller SAH/SHA-funded grant to adapt a family member's home where a veteran temporarily lives.

U

UCMJ — Uniform Code of Military Justice · The federal law that is the military's criminal code — courts-martial and NJP run under it.

USFSPA — Uniformed Services Former Spouses' Protection Act · The federal law letting state courts treat military retired pay as property in divorce.

V

VA — U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs · The department that runs veterans' benefits and health care.

VACOLS — Veterans Appeals Control and Locator System · VA's legacy appeals-tracking system for Board appeals (being replaced by newer case systems).

VASS — VA Solid Start · VA's program that reaches out to newly separated service members across their first year (about 90, 180, and 365 days) to connect them to benefits and help.

VBA — Veterans Benefits Administration · The VA arm that runs compensation, pension, education, home loans, and VR&E.;

VBMS — Veterans Benefits Management System · VA's electronic claims system — where the modern claim file (eFolder) lives and raters work.

VCAA — Veterans Claims Assistance Act · The 2000 law behind VA's 'duty to assist' — VA must help gather records and notify you what's needed.

VDC — Veteran Directed Care · The VA program giving eligible veterans a flexible budget to hire their own home-care help, including family.

VEOA — Veterans Employment Opportunities Act · The law letting eligible veterans apply for federal jobs announced to federal employees only.

VERA — Visitor Engagement Reporting Application · VA's scheduling system for regional-office and virtual appointments with VBA staff.

VFW — Veterans of Foreign Wars · One of the large chartered VSOs — its accredited representatives help file claims for free.

VJO — Veterans Justice Outreach · VA specialists who work with courts and jails to connect justice-involved veterans to VA treatment.

VR&E; — Veteran Readiness and Employment (Chapter 31) · VA's employment program for veterans with service-connected disabilities. Formerly 'Vocational Rehabilitation.'

VRA — Veterans' Recruitment Appointment · A federal hiring authority letting agencies appoint eligible veterans without competition (up to GS-11).

VSO — Veterans Service Organization · Accredited organizations (DAV, VFW, American Legion…) — and their accredited representatives — who help file claims for free.

Part Two

Medical

Conditions, therapies, tests, and VA health care — the words on your medical records and rating decisions.

A

ADL — Activities of Daily Living · The basic self-care tasks — bathing, dressing, eating, toileting, transferring — that aid-and-attendance and caregiver decisions are measured against.

AUD — Alcohol Use Disorder · The clinical name for problem drinking that has become a diagnosable condition; VA treats it inside substance use care.

B

B12 — Vitamin B12 · The vitamin whose deficiency (common after gastric bypass) causes fatigue, nerve symptoms, and anemia — checked on post-bariatric labs.

BMI — Body Mass Index · The height-and-weight number used in program eligibility — including VA's bariatric and MOVE! thresholds.

BP — Blood Pressure · The reading at the center of a hypertension claim and rating — VA rates it under diagnostic code 7101.

C

CHAMPVA — Civilian Health and Medical Program of the VA · VA health coverage for eligible spouses and dependents of totally disabled or deceased veterans.

CPAP — Continuous Positive Airway Pressure · The bedside machine that treats sleep apnea — its required use is what supports a 50% OSA rating.

CPT — Cognitive Processing Therapy · A structured, evidence-based trauma therapy VA uses for PTSD — built around how the trauma is understood.

D

DM — Diabetes Mellitus · Diabetes — service-connectable directly or as a secondary condition; also an Agent Orange presumptive.

DSM-5-TR — Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, Text Revision · The standard diagnostic reference clinicians use to name mental-health conditions.

E

ECHO — Extended Care Health Option · TRICARE's program of extra services for family members with certain physical disabilities or extraordinary conditions.

EKG — Electrocardiogram · The heart-rhythm tracing used in cardiac workups and ratings evidence (also written ECG).

EMDR — Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing · An evidence-based trauma therapy VA offers for PTSD, using guided eye movements while recalling the event.

ENT — Ear, Nose, and Throat · The specialty (otolaryngology) behind tinnitus, sinus, and hearing claims and exams.

G

GAD-7 — Generalized Anxiety Disorder scale, 7 items · A short standard questionnaire used to screen and track anxiety symptoms.

GERD — Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease · Chronic acid reflux — a frequent secondary-condition claim, rated under the digestive codes.

GLP-1 — Glucagon-Like Peptide-1 (receptor agonist) · The drug class behind modern diabetes and weight-management medications (the weekly pens).

H

HBPC — Home Based Primary Care · VA's program bringing a full primary-care team to the homes of veterans with complex chronic needs.

I

IBS — Irritable Bowel Syndrome · A chronic gut condition — also a Gulf War presumptive undiagnosed-illness category; rated under the digestive codes.

IOP — Intensive Outpatient Program · Structured substance use or mental health treatment, more hours than weekly appointments, while living at home.

M

MAT — Medications for Addiction Treatment · The medicines (for example methadone, buprenorphine, naltrexone) VA uses to treat substance use disorders.

MRI — Magnetic Resonance Imaging · The scan most often used to document joint, spine, and brain conditions in claims evidence.

MST — Military Sexual Trauma · Sexual assault or harassment experienced during military service; VA treats it as an experience, not a diagnosis.

O

OSA — Obstructive Sleep Apnea · Breathing repeatedly stops during sleep; commonly rated at 50% when a breathing device is required.

OT — Occupational Therapy · The therapy focused on daily function — dressing, cooking, working — rather than strength alone.

OUD — Opioid Use Disorder · The clinical name for problem opioid use that has become a diagnosable condition; VA treats it inside substance use care.

P

PCM — Primary Care Manager · Your assigned TRICARE primary-care lead — the military-side counterpart of a PCP.

PCMHI — Primary Care–Mental Health Integration · VA's model that puts mental health clinicians inside primary care teams, so

help starts at a regular appointment.

PCP — Primary Care Provider · Your main doctor or care lead — the provider whose notes anchor most claims evidence.

PE — Prolonged Exposure · An evidence-based PTSD therapy built on gradually approaching trauma memories and reminders.

PSAS — Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service · The VA service that issues prosthetics, orthotics, and sensory aids — part of Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services.

PT — Physical Therapy · Rehab therapy for strength, motion, and pain — its range-of-motion notes often become rating evidence.

PTH — Parathyroid Hormone · The hormone controlling calcium — tracked after bariatric surgery because malabsorption can drive it up.

PTSD — Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder · A mental-health condition following traumatic events; one of the most-claimed VA disabilities.

R

ROM — Range of Motion · How far a joint moves in degrees — the measurement most joint ratings are built on at the C&P; exam.

S

SADI-S — Single Anastomosis Duodeno-Ileal Bypass with Sleeve Gastrectomy · A bariatric procedure pairing a sleeve stomach with a single intestinal reroute — sibling to the duodenal switch.

STD — Sexually Transmitted Disease · Infections whose treatment or test records can appear in MST and medical evidence files (also written STI).

SUD — Substance Use Disorder · The clinical term for addiction — ratable as secondary to a service-connected condition such as PTSD.

T

TBI — Traumatic Brain Injury · Brain injury from an external force — rated on cognitive, emotional, and physical residuals.

TMJ — Temporomandibular Joint (disorder) · Jaw-joint condition — limited jaw motion and pain; rated under the dental/oral codes.

V

VHA — Veterans Health Administration · The VA arm that runs VA hospitals and clinics.

Part Three

House — The VA Files

Our own shorthand: the names and lane terms used across The VA Files and its sister business.

A

AAR — After Action Review · The military's structured debrief after an operation — what happened, why it happened, and what to do next time. TVF borrows the name for the Peer Level AAR (PLA).

C

CPRS — Certified Peer Recovery Supporter · Ohio's peer-support credential for people in recovery who support others; earned through state training and exam, applied for via Ohio's eLicense portal.

E

EFU — EveryFollowUp · The sister business (follow-up systems for local service companies).

P

PLA — Peer Level AAR · TVF's letter-review product — your VA letter in plain English, with the verdict up front, your real deadline, and your next steps.

S

SVF — Servicemembers, Veterans, and Families · Shorthand for the whole audience TVF serves.

SWAN — Service Women's Action Network · The women-veterans organization — TVF's founding partner #1 (Elisa Cardnell, President & CEO).

T

TVF — The VA Files · The business and the library itself — plain-English VA benefits guides for SVF.

W

WA / WB — The two work lanes · The coordinating lanes that share the master status file — WA runs product, infrastructure, and the partner program; WB is the overview (Workstream B) lane.

A note on sources

Every expansion in this guide was checked against the authority that owns the term — VA's own glossaries and program pages, the Social Security Administration, the Department of Defense, or the IRS — before it earned a line here. Where an acronym in our books could not be verified to that standard, it was held out of this issue rather than guessed at; it joins the guide when it can be verified.

Found one we missed, or one VA just invented? It goes into the register and into the next quarterly issue — that is the whole point of a living guide.

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https://thevafiles.com/free-2027-rates-card.html

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You're in — want 6 credits today for $3.99/mo, or 12 for $7.99/mo?

Mission — $3.99/mo. 6 book credits today, +4 every month.
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https://thevafiles.com/join/command/

Scan a code to start — the Mission and Command codes open the join page, where you pick your tier; every code carries this book's tracking.



FREE



MISSION



COMMAND

New to a claim? Start with **The VA Claim Field Manual** — the master guide to the whole process, from first filing to final rating.

If this guide helped, a review on Etsy helps the next veteran find it.

Veterans Helping Veterans — our free peer community on GroupMe: https://groupme.com/join_group/115980264/ybQiopus

If you need help now: call 988 and press 1, text 838255, or chat at veteranscrisisline.net.

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