



# 5 Steps to Start a Mental Health VA Claim

A simple guide to help Veterans understand the process, organize their thoughts, and take the first step toward support.

## You Don't Have to Navigate This Alone

Filing a VA mental health claim can feel confusing, overwhelming, and emotionally heavy. Many Veterans aren't sure where to begin or what even "counts" as a mental health condition.

This guide is designed to help you:

- Understand the basic steps of a mental health VA claim
- Reflect on your symptoms and experiences
- Prepare yourself for the next stage of the process

This is not a diagnosis or a claim submission — it's a starting point.

You deserve clarity. You deserve support. And your experience matters.

# The 5 Steps Overview

## The 5 Steps to Starting a Mental Health VA Claim

1. Recognize Your Mental Health Condition
2. Connect It to Your Military Service
3. Gather Supporting Evidence
4. Reflect on Your Symptoms & Daily Impact
5. Seek Professional Guidance

Each step helps you move from uncertainty to readiness.



Created by Essential Veteran Services

# Step 1: Recognize Your Conditions

Mental health conditions don't always look the same for everyone. Many Veterans live with symptoms for years before realizing they may be service-connected.

You may notice:

- Changes in mood or personality
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- Emotional numbness or heightened reactions
- Withdrawal from others
- Persistent stress or anxiety

Acknowledging what you're experiencing is the first step toward healing and support.

Notes:

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# Common Mental Health Conditions

## Common Mental Health Conditions in VA Claims

Check any conditions that feel relevant to your experience:

- PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder)
- Anxiety Disorders
- Depression
- Adjustment Disorder
- Insomnia / Sleep Disorders
- Panic Disorder
- Social Anxiety
- Trauma-related Disorders
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

You do not need to self-diagnose – this list is for reflection and awareness.



# Physical & Medical Conditions Matter Too

Mental health and physical health are deeply connected.

For many Veterans, emotional stress, trauma, or long-term mental health challenges can contribute to physical or medical conditions over time.

Some Veterans experience:

- Chronic pain or unexplained symptoms
- Fatigue or sleep disturbances
- Gastrointestinal issues
- Headaches or migraines
- Muscle tension or inflammation

These physical conditions may exist alongside mental health symptoms and deserve attention and evaluation.

You do not need to know how everything is connected yet.

This page is simply to help you recognize what you may be experiencing in your body as well as your mind.

List any physical or medical conditions you are currently dealing with or have been diagnosed with:

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If known, note when these symptoms began or worsened:

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## Step 2: Connect Conditions to Service

A VA mental health claim must show a link between your condition and your military service.

Ask yourself:

- Did symptoms begin during or after service?
- Was there a specific event, stressor, or environment that impacted me?
- Did my role or experiences contribute to my mental health struggles?

This connection is often called a “Nexus” and represents a link between service and symptoms.



## Step 3: Gather Evidence (Checklist)

You may already have more evidence than you realize.

- Medical or mental health records
- Service records or deployment history
- Personal statements or notes
- Statements from family, friends, or coworkers
- Prior diagnoses or evaluations
- Therapy or counseling documentation

Every piece helps tell your story more clearly.



# Step 4: Symptom Reflection Page

When did these symptoms begin?

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How do they affect your daily life? (work, relationships, sleep, mood)

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What situations make symptoms worse?

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What support have you tried so far?

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What would you like help with most right now?

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This reflection can later support medical evaluations and professional reviews.



# Step 5: Seek Professional Guidance

Navigating VA mental health claims can be complex.

Many Veterans benefit from working with qualified professionals who understand mental health evaluations and VA documentation.

Professional guidance can help:

- Clarify your condition
- Organize your evidence
- Ensure your story is accurately represented
- Reduce stress and confusion

You do not have to figure this out on your own.



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# Need Help With Your Next Step?

Essential Veteran Services supports Veterans seeking clarity and guidance in mental health-related VA claims.

If you're ready to explore your options or want professional insight, we're here to help.

👉 Visit: [essentialveteranservices.com](https://essentialveteranservices.com)

👉 Follow us on social media for education and resources



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