

— FWD ASSIST HQ —

FIELD GUIDE

Filing for Aid and Attendance

File a complete application for the Aid and Attendance benefit.



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A FWD Assist HQ Field Guide

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This guide is education, not representation. It explains how part of the VA system works so you can handle your own business with confidence. It is not legal or claims advice, and reading it does not create any representative relationship between you and the author. The author is not affiliated with the Department of Veterans Affairs, and nothing here is endorsed by the VA.

This guide prints no live VA dollar figures and no rating percentages on purpose, because they change. Before you make a decision based on any number, check the current figure at va.gov. No book can promise you a rating; the evidence in your file decides the result. Help from an accredited Veterans Service Officer is always free.

In crisis? Call the **Veterans Crisis Line**: dial **988**, then press **1**. You can also text **838255** or chat online at veteranscrisisline.net. It is free, confidential, and available 24/7.

Filing for Aid and Attendance

File a complete application for the Aid and Attendance benefit.

Companion to *VA Aid and Attendance Guide*.

This is general education, not legal or claims advice, and not guidance for your specific claim. It cannot promise you a rating or an outcome, and no one can. For help with your own claim, see a free accredited representative (see [the back of this guide](#)). Nothing here creates a representative relationship.

Current as of October 2026. Rules, forms, and figures change. Check current details at va.gov.

THE BEST WAY TO USE THIS GUIDE

The strongest position is to be your own informed advocate and to work with a free accredited representative. An accredited Veterans Service Organization, such as the DAV, VFW, American Legion, or a county or state veterans office, helps at no charge. Accredited claims agents and attorneys can help too. They can't charge for work done before VA issues its initial decision on your claim, and after that they may charge a fee within the limits of 38 CFR 14.636. This guide is here so you understand your own situation and can work with them as a full partner instead of handing it over blind. If you'd rather handle this yourself, and you're comfortable doing that, the guide walks you through every step. Either way, you stay in control.

The Outcome and What You Need Before You Start

The outcome: By the end of this guide you'll file a complete Aid and Attendance claim with an evidence package that shows, in plain terms, the help you need each day and how often you need it.

This guide prepares you for the task. It doesn't and can't promise a rating, a percentage, or an outcome. The evidence in your file decides the result.

WHAT YOU NEED BEFORE YOU START

- ☐ Your VA decision letters and the list of your service-connected conditions (or your pension award letter, if you get VA pension).
- ☐ A printed copy of the factors in 38 CFR 3.352(a). You'll match your daily life to them.
- ☐ A blank copy of VA Form 21-2680, Examination for Housebound Status or Permanent Need for Regular Aid and Attendance.
- ☐ A VA.gov account, so you can file an Intent to File and the claim online.
- ☐ The person who helps you day to day, willing to write a statement.
- ☐ Recent medical records that describe what your conditions keep you from doing.

When to start: Now. If you aren't filing any other claim, nothing starts until you file one. Your effective date generally runs from the date VA receives your claim or your Intent to File, so protect that date first and build the record after.

Start Here: The Basics

Aid and Attendance is a higher monthly payment for someone who needs another person's help with everyday tasks, such as dressing, bathing, eating or staying safe at home. There are two routes to it. A veteran whose need comes from service-connected disability gets it as Special Monthly Compensation at the L level, which replaces the regular compensation rate. A veteran or survivor who gets VA pension, or a survivor who gets Dependency and Indemnity Compensation, gets it as an added amount on top of that benefit. This guide follows the compensation route, the one the companion book teaches, and flags where the pension route is different. VA sets the amounts, so check current figures at va.gov.

The Steps

STEP 1

Confirm which route fits you and what VA looks at.

On the compensation route, VA looks for a factual need for help under the 38 CFR 3.352(a) factors, or for being permanently bedridden. Blindness in both eyes as the regulation defines it also qualifies for the same level. On the pension and survivor route, VA also counts you as needing aid and attendance if you're a nursing home patient because of mental or physical incapacity. Living in a nursing home doesn't qualify you on the compensation route by itself. You don't have to meet every factor. VA looks at your condition as a whole, and the need has to be regular, not constant.

If your need comes from service-connected disability, **then** follow this guide as written. **If** you get VA pension or you're a survivor on pension or DIC, **then** the factors are the same but you file through the pension side (see Step 11). **If** you're mostly stuck at home but don't need daily hands-on help, **then** ask an accredited representative about Housebound instead. VA won't pay both at once.

Where this is written down: 38 U.S.C. § 1114(l), (s); 38 CFR § 3.350(b), 3.351(c), 3.352(a).

Done when you know which route fits you and which of the 3.352(a) factors apply to your daily life.

STEP 2

File an Intent to File to protect your effective date.

Submit VA Form 21-0966, the Intent to File, online at va.gov/resources/your-intent-to-file-a-va-claim or by phone or mail. It's free. If VA receives your complete claim within one year, VA treats the claim as filed on the date it got your intent.

Do not wait until your evidence package is finished to protect your date. Months you wait before filing anything usually can't be paid back.

Where this is written down: 38 CFR § 3.155(b), (d)(1)(ii).

Done when your Intent to File is in and you have the confirmation.

STEP 3

Match your daily life to the 3.352(a) factors.

Go factor by factor. Can you dress and undress, and keep yourself clean and presentable? Do you need help adjusting a special prosthetic or orthopedic device? Can you feed yourself? Can you use the toilet on your own? Do you need care on a regular basis to protect you from the hazards of your daily surroundings? Are you bedridden? Write down each one that applies and how many days a week it happens.

If your main limitation is mental, such as memory loss or severe psychiatric symptoms, **then** focus on the safety factor and write down what happens when no one is there. **If** your limits are physical, **then** name the movements you can't do (bend, reach, balance, grip).

Where this is written down: 38 CFR § 3.352(a).

Done when you have a written list of the factors that apply, with how often each one happens.

STEP 4

Get medical records that describe function, not just a diagnosis.

A note that says "chronic lumbar strain, continues therapy" doesn't show need for help. A note that says "unable to put on shoes or lower-body clothing due to lumbar strain; spouse assists" does. If your records don't say what you can't do, ask your treating provider for a statement that covers each factor that applies and how often you need help.

Do not leave an old record standing as the last word. If your condition has gotten worse since your last visit, see your provider so the newest note matches how you live now.

Done when at least one record or provider statement describes your limits in terms of the factors.

STEP 5

Get a statement from the person who helps you.

Ask the person who helps you to write what they do, how long it takes, and how often. For example: "I help him dress three or four days a week. On those days he can't bend, so I put on his shoes and fasten his belt. It takes 10 to 15 minutes." They can use VA Form 21-10210, the Lay/Witness Statement, or a signed and dated letter. A relative or household member can provide your care; that doesn't count against you.

Where this is written down: 38 CFR § 3.352(c).

Done when you have a signed, dated statement that names tasks, time and frequency.

STEP 6

Keep a 30-day care log.

Each time someone helps you, write four things: the date, what they did, how many minutes it took, and what triggered it. Thirty days of entries show a pattern. The rule asks whether you need help regularly, so a pattern matters more than one hard day.

Done when you have 30 days of entries.

STEP 7

Have a medical provider complete VA Form 21-2680.

The 21-2680 has an examination section that a medical examiner must fill out. Your own VA or private doctor can do it. Bring the printed 3.352(a) factors, your care log and the caregiver statement to the visit so the provider has the full picture. The form was revised in June 2026, so download the current version from va.gov/forms/21-2680.

If you live in a nursing home, **then** the facility also completes VA Form 21-0779, Request for Nursing Home Information in Connection with Claim for Aid and Attendance.

Done when you hold a completed, signed 21-2680 (and a 21-0779 if it applies).

STEP 8

Get ready in case VA schedules its own exam.

VA may order an exam after you file. Read your 21-2680 and your log again, and have a real example ready for each factor you listed. Plan to describe your typical week, including how often you need help and what happens on harder days.

Done when your examples and documents are ready and you know the date if VA has scheduled an exam.

STEP 9

Attend the exam and describe your limits accurately.

The examiner records what you say and what they observe. A rater at VA decides the claim. If the true answer is "some days yes, some days no," say both parts and say how often each happens. Describe what your helper does and how long it takes.

Do not brush off your limits to look strong. "I manage most things" goes on the form as written.

Done when you've attended the exam, or you've confirmed VA didn't need one.

STEP 10

Write a cover letter that points to your evidence.

For each 3.352(a) factor that applies, write one or two sentences: what you can't do, how often, and which document shows it (for example, "see 21-2680, provider statement dated March 3, care log, caregiver statement"). Keep it to facts.

Done when your letter ties each factor to a named document.

STEP 11

File the claim with the full package.

Compensation route: file VA Form 21-526EZ, Application for Disability Compensation and Related Compensation Benefits, online at va.gov/disability/file-disability-claim-form-21-526ez, and list the claim plainly (for example, "special monthly compensation, aid and attendance"). By mail, send it to Department of Veterans Affairs, Claims Intake Center, PO Box 4444, Janesville, WI 53547-4444. Attach the 21-2680, your records, provider statement, caregiver statement, care log and cover letter.

If you're on the pension or survivor route, **then** apply online through va.gov/pension/aid-attendance-housebound, or mail the 21-2680 and your evidence to Department of Veterans Affairs, Pension Intake Center, PO Box 5365, Janesville, WI 53547-5365. If you aren't on pension or DIC yet, the pension or survivor application (VA Form 21P-527EZ for a veteran, 21P-534EZ for a survivor) goes in with it.

Done when the claim and the whole package are filed within one year of your Intent to File.

STEP 12

If VA denies the claim, pick a review lane within one year.

File a Supplemental Claim (VA Form 20-0995) if you have new and relevant evidence, such as a care log or provider statement VA didn't have. Ask for a Higher-Level Review (VA Form 20-0996) if you think the rater got it wrong on the evidence already in the file. Or appeal to the Board of Veterans' Appeals (VA Form 10182). Start at va.gov/decision-reviews.

If you have new evidence, **then** the Supplemental Claim is the lane that takes it. **If** you have nothing new and think VA misread the file, **then** look at Higher-Level Review or the Board. **If** you aren't sure, **then** take the decision letter to a free accredited representative.

Where this is written down: 38 CFR § 3.2500, 3.2501, 3.2601; 38 CFR § 20.202, 20.203(b).

Done when you've filed a review within a year of the decision, or handed the question to an accredited representative.

Recap Checklist

- ☐ I know which route fits me (compensation or pension/survivor) and which factors apply.
- ☐ I filed an Intent to File (VA Form 21-0966) to protect my effective date.
- ☐ I matched my daily life to the 3.352(a) factors and wrote down how often each happens.
- ☐ My medical records or a provider statement describe what I can't do.
- ☐ I have a signed, dated statement from the person who helps me.
- ☐ I kept a 30-day care log with dates, tasks, minutes and triggers.
- ☐ A medical provider completed VA Form 21-2680 (and 21-0779 if I'm in a nursing home).
- ☐ I prepared real examples in case VA schedules an exam.
- ☐ I attended any VA exam and described my limits accurately.
- ☐ I wrote a cover letter tying each factor to a named document.
- ☐ I filed the claim and the full package within a year of my Intent to File.
- ☐ If denied, I picked a review lane within one year or went to an accredited representative.

Reminder: rules and rates change. Check any current figure at va.gov. Help from an accredited Veterans Service Organization is free. Accredited claims agents and attorneys can't charge for work done before VA issues its initial decision on your claim. After that, they may charge a fee within the limits of 38 CFR 14.636. This guide prepared you for the task. The evidence in your file decides the result.

Get Free, Accredited Help

For anything about your own claim, talk to an accredited representative. Help from an accredited Veterans Service Organization is free. Accredited claims agents and attorneys can't charge for work done before VA issues its initial decision on your claim. After that, they may charge a fee within the limits of 38 CFR 14.636. Free help is available through Veterans Service Organizations such as the DAV, VFW, and American Legion, and through county and state veterans offices.

To find one near you, visit va.gov/get-help-from-accredited-representative. Representation begins only when you sign VA Form 21-22 (for a Veterans Service Organization) or 21-22a (for an individual agent or attorney). With one rare exception for a single unpaid case, only accredited people can represent you before the VA, and only an accredited agent or attorney can charge you a fee. Nothing in this guide creates that relationship.

A warning about claim sharks. Anyone who offers to file your initial claim for a fee, or who guarantees you a rating or a percentage, is selling something you shouldn't buy. Accredited Veterans Service Organizations help at no charge, and accredited claims agents and attorneys may charge only after VA issues its initial decision, within the limits of 38 CFR 14.636. Report predatory companies to the VA Office of Inspector General at 1-800-488-8244.

Keep Going: The Full Guide

This field guide is the short, do-this-now companion to the book *VA Aid and Attendance Guide*. See every FWD Assist HQ title that is out now at fwdassisthq.com/books.

Current as of October 2026. Rules, forms, and figures change. Check current details at va.gov.

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J. Erickson is a service-disabled Air Force veteran. He served as a military firefighter and as a veteran service officer, where he spent years walking veterans through the same claims process he writes about now. He holds an MBA and writes plain-language guides for veterans who want to understand the system without a translator.

He writes the For the Rest of Us series at fwdassisthq.com. This guide is published by FWD Assist HQ as a veteran education resource. It is not affiliated with or endorsed by the Department of Veterans Affairs.