

Veterans Corner

DISABILITY COMPENSATION FOR CONDITIONS RELATED TO MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA (MST)

Some Veterans may have experienced sexual trauma while serving in the military. These kinds of experiences can affect Veterans' mental and physical health, even many years later. Veterans can apply for disability compensation for any current difficulties that are related to their service, including difficulties related to MST. Disabilities determined by VA to be related to your military service can lead to monthly non-taxable compensation, enrollment in the VA health care system, and other important benefits.

Veterans are not granted compensation for the traumatic event itself, but can be granted disability compensation for conditions that result from MST. Exposure to any trauma can potentially result in PTSD or another mental health disorder. PTSD is the most common mental health diagnosis related to experiencing MST.

Evidence required can be forms used in reporting incidents of sexual assault or harassment, as well as investigative reports during military service. However, VA knows that events involving sexual trauma are not always officially reported. Therefore, for PTSD claims related to MST, VA has relaxed the evidentiary requirements and looks for "markers" (i.e., signs, events, or circumstances) that provide some indication that the traumatic event happened. Because military service records may lack corroborating evidence that a stressful event occurred, VA regulations make clear that evidence from non-military sources may be used to corroborate the Veteran's account of the MST. Further, when direct evidence of an MST is not available, VA may request a medical opinion to consider a Veteran's account and any "markers" to corroborate the occurrence of the MST event as related to current PTSD symptoms.

VA provides free health care for physical and mental health conditions related to experiences of MST. No documentation of the MST experiences or disability compensation rating is required. Some Veterans may be able to receive this free MST-related health care even if they are not eligible for other VA care.

The Kings County Veterans Service Office issues Veteran I.D. cards to honorably discharged veterans. Contact Joe Wright if you would like to receive periodic veteran's information by email. There are many state and federal benefits and programs available to veterans and their dependents. To find out if you are eligible for any of these benefits, visit or call our office. We can and will assist you in completing all required application forms. You can get information on the Web from the Kings County Veterans Service Office webpage at www.countyofkings.com.

Joe Wright, retired Navy Master Chief Petty Officer, is the Veterans Service Officer for Kings County. Send your questions to the Veterans Service Office, 1400 W. Lacey Blvd, Hanford, CA 93230; call 852-2669; or e-mail joe.wright@co.kings.ca.us.