



Disability Compensation for Conditions Related to Military Sexual Trauma (MST)

Some Veterans experience MST during their service. These kinds of experiences can affect mental and physical health even many years later. Veterans can apply for disability compensation for any current health conditions that were caused by or got worse because of their military service, including conditions related to MST.

If you file a claim for disability compensation and VA determines you have disabilities related to your military service, you could receive:

- Monthly nontaxable compensation
- Other important benefits
- VA health care services
- 10-point hiring preference for federal employment

Ask your VA representative or Veterans Service Organization about:

- Disability compensation
- Pension
- Health care
- Caregiver program
- Career services
- Educational assistance
- Home loan guaranty
- Insurance

You can also contact a Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) MST Outreach Coordinator to help you with the claim process. All local VBA Regional Offices have MST Outreach Coordinators. Visit <https://www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/mstcoordinators.asp> to locate one near you.

Please note that applying for disability compensation is separate from eligibility for free MST-related healthcare services through VA. You do not need to apply for disability compensation to receive MST-related treatment and do not need to have reported your experience at the time the event occurred. You may be able to receive MST-related treatment even if you are not eligible for other VA care. To learn more, visit <http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp> or contact your local VA medical facility and ask to speak to the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) MST Coordinator.

MST Definition

VA uses the term MST to refer to sexual assault or sexual harassment while an individual was on Active Duty, Active Duty for Training, or Inactive Duty Training. Examples include:

- Being pressured or coerced into sexual activities, such as with threats of negative treatment if you refuse to cooperate or with promises of better treatment in exchange for sex;
- Someone having sexual contact with you without your consent, such as when you were asleep or intoxicated;
- Being physically forced to have sex;
- Being touched in a sexual way that made you uncomfortable;
- Repeated comments about your body or sexual activities; and
- Threatening and unwanted sexual advances.

To receive disability compensation from VA, you must have a current health condition related to these experiences.

Evidence Needed For A Disability Claim Based on MST

MST impacts different Veterans in different ways, and you can file a disability compensation claim for any health condition you have as a result of your experiences of MST.

For any VA disability compensation claim to be successful, there must be:

- A current physical or mental condition that affects your body or mind; **and**
- An event, injury, or illness that happened while you were serving in the military; **and**
- A link between your current disability and the event, injury, or disease that happened during your military service.

For MST-related claims, you can use any of the items listed below to support your disability claim related to MST.

- Department of Defense (DoD) sexual assault or harassment reporting forms
- Investigative reports completed during military service

In addition to DoD reports, Veterans who have current posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or other mental health conditions related to their experiences of MST can also submit indirect sources of evidence. These may be behavioral events, patterns of changed behavior or circumstances that provide clues the traumatic event happened. They do not have to show definitive evidence that it did. Some examples are:

- Change in work performance at the time
- Episodes of the following without clear cause:
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
- Journals or personal diaries
- Panic attacks
- Pregnancy tests
- Records from official sources
 - Civilian physicians
 - Civilian hospitals, health clinics, mental health counseling centers
 - Civilian law enforcement
 - Rape crisis centers or centers for domestic violence
- Relationship issues, like divorce
- Requests for transfer to another military duty assignment
- Sexual dysfunction
- Statements from others
 - Chaplains or clergy members
 - Counselors
 - Faculty members
 - Family members
 - Fellow Service members
 - Roommates
- Substance abuse
- Tests for sexually transmitted diseases
- Unexplained social or economic behavior

VA may request a medical opinion to help determine how the indirect sources of evidence relate to the MST and any current PTSD or other mental health symptoms. VA will schedule an appointment for you to meet with a clinician who will provide this medical opinion. If you prefer to meet with a clinician of a certain gender for this appointment, please make this request during the scheduling of your appointment.

Recent Improvements to Our Claims Process

In its efforts to continuously improve its service to Veterans, VA has made several recent changes to improve how MST-related claims are processed and decided. VA now provides special training to staff who work on MST-related claims. This is to make sure they have the specialized knowledge needed to evaluate these claims properly.

If you filed an MST-related claim before August 2018 and received a denial, VA encourages you to refile so that your claim can be reviewed by staff who have received this training. You can request a re-evaluation by contacting an MST Outreach Coordinator at your local VA Regional Office or going online to <https://www.va.gov>. When you request a re-evaluation, you may submit new or additional evidence with your claim. Veteran Service Officers (VSOs), MST Outreach Coordinators and other VA staff can help you with submitting your claim.

Applying for Disability Compensation

There are many ways to apply.

- Apply online at <https://www.va.gov>.
- Appoint an accredited VSO to help file your claim.
- Complete VA Form 21-526EZ, Veteran's Application for Compensation and/or Pension. Find this form online at <https://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/VBA-21-526EZ-ARE.pdf>.
- Contact a VBA MST Outreach Coordinator to help you with the claim process. Female and male VBA MST Outreach Coordinators are available at all local regional benefit offices. Visit <https://www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/mstcoordinators.asp> or call 1-800-827-1000 to locate one near you.