



THE CLAIM BRIEF

Helping Veterans Understand VA Decisions

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PTSD CLAIMS EDUCATION

PTSD VA CLAIM QUICK CHECKLIST

Five evidence areas to review before you submit

Use this guide to:

- Review the core PTSD evidence requirements.
- Identify missing records before submission.
- Organize stressor, lay, and functional-impact evidence.
- Prepare for the next step without guessing or exaggerating.

PLAIN-ENGLISH VA CLAIMS EDUCATION

Independent educational resource - not affiliated with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Start here

Use this checklist to organize what may support a PTSD disability claim. It is not a list of documents every Veteran must have, and a missing item does not automatically mean a claim should not be filed.

The three core PTSD service-connection requirements

Under 38 C.F.R. 3.304(f), the evidence generally addresses: (1) a PTSD diagnosis that meets VA requirements, (2) a medical link between current symptoms and an in-service stressor, and (3) credible supporting evidence that the stressor occurred. Special evidentiary rules may apply to certain stressors, including combat, fear of hostile military or terrorist activity, and personal assault.

Your five-area review

- ☐ Current diagnosis and treatment evidence
- ☐ Clear information about the in-service traumatic event
- ☐ Service records or other evidence supporting the event
- ☐ Lay evidence describing onset, changes, and observable symptoms
- ☐ Evidence showing effects on work, relationships, sleep, judgment, mood, and daily life

Important form update

VA Form 21-0781 now covers claimed mental health disorders related to in-service traumatic events, including PTSD and personal assault/MST. VA discontinued Form 21-0781a on June 28, 2024. The current form is optional, but VA states that completing it may help identify supporting records and evidence.

This resource provides general educational information and organization prompts. It is not legal advice, medical advice, or representation in a VA claim. It does not guarantee service connection, a particular evaluation, or any other outcome. For claim-specific help, consider a VA-accredited VSO representative, claims agent, or attorney.

1. Diagnosis and treatment evidence

- ☐ I identified records showing a current PTSD diagnosis or evaluation.
- ☐ I listed VA, Vet Center, military, and private treatment locations.
- ☐ I checked whether VA has the private records or needs authorization forms.
- ☐ I organized relevant hospital, emergency, counseling, medication, and therapy records.
- ☐ I noted the dates and providers that best document symptom history.

Do not diagnose yourself

Describe what you experienced and how it affects you, but leave medical diagnoses and medical nexus opinions to qualified clinicians.

2. In-service traumatic event

- ☐ I identified the event category: combat, fear of hostile activity, personal assault/MST, or another traumatic event.
- ☐ I recorded the best available date range, location, unit, assignment, and people involved.
- ☐ I separated what I personally remember from what records or other people may confirm.
- ☐ I reviewed VA Form 21-0781 and answered only what applies.
- ☐ If exact dates are unavailable, I used the most accurate approximate period and explained the uncertainty.

NOTES OR MISSING ITEMS

3. Evidence supporting the event

- ☐ Service treatment records
- ☐ Service personnel records
- ☐ Orders, evaluations, awards, incident reports, line-of-duty records, or unit records
- ☐ Police, civilian medical, chaplain, counseling, or crisis records
- ☐ Statements from people with firsthand knowledge
- ☐ Contemporaneous messages, letters, emails, journals, or photographs

Personal assault or MST pathway

The current VA Form 21-0781 explains that alternative evidence and behavior changes may help support a personal traumatic event. Examples on the form include changes in work performance, substance use, and economic or social behavior.

- ☐ I identified any requests for transfer, duty changes, performance changes, disciplinary issues, or unexplained absences.
- ☐ I identified medical, pregnancy, STI, counseling, chaplain, crisis, or law-enforcement records that may be relevant.
- ☐ I identified people who noticed behavioral or emotional changes after the event.

Privacy reminder

Do not place Social Security numbers, full claim numbers, passwords, or unnecessary identifying information in this checklist.

4. Lay evidence and timeline

- [] My own statement describes what I personally experienced, when symptoms began, and how they continued or changed.
- [] Witness statements are limited to what each person personally observed or was told at the time.
- [] The statements avoid exaggeration and do not copy medical language the writer would not naturally use.
- [] Important dates are reasonably consistent across forms, statements, and records.
- [] Where memories are incomplete, the statement says so instead of guessing.

5. Functional impact

- [] Work: attendance, reliability, concentration, conflict, reduced duties, job changes, or lost employment
- [] Relationships: isolation, irritability, trust, communication, parenting, or intimacy
- [] Sleep and energy: nightmares, insomnia, fatigue, or disrupted routines
- [] Daily functioning: hygiene, appointments, finances, driving, crowds, errands, or household tasks
- [] Safety and judgment: risky behavior, anger, substance use, or suicidal thoughts, when applicable

Be specific and truthful

Concrete examples usually communicate impact more clearly than labels. Describe frequency, duration, triggers, and what happens afterward when you can do so accurately.

Final review before submission

- ☐ I used the correct claim or decision-review form for my situation.
- ☐ I reviewed the current VA Form 21-0781.
- ☐ I identified the records VA already has and the records still missing.
- ☐ I submitted private records or the appropriate authorization forms.
- ☐ I used VA Form 21-10210 or the online lay/witness statement option when helpful.
- ☐ I kept a copy of everything submitted and recorded the submission date.
- ☐ My contact information is current so I receive exam notices.
- ☐ I understand that VA may schedule a claim exam and that the examiner does not provide treatment.

Official resources

[PTSD service-connection rule](#)

[VA Form 21-0781 and current usage](#)

[Evidence needed for a disability claim](#)

[VA claim exam information](#)

[VA Form 21-10210 lay/witness statement](#)

[Find a VA-accredited representative](#)

Mental health support

If you are in immediate danger, call 911. Veterans and their loved ones can contact the Veterans Crisis Line by dialing 988 and pressing 1, texting 838255, or visiting VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat.

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