

eBenefits connects veterans to VA resources

The Veterans Administration is launching into the 21st century and it wants veterans to follow its lead.

They have created eBenefits, a joint Department of Defense and VA web portal that provides resources and self-service capabilities to veterans, service members and their families to research, access and manage their VA and military benefits and personal information.

The eBenefits application is a key component of the VA's ongoing transformation to a digital environment for benefits delivery. The capabilities of eBenefits give veterans and service members greater flexibility in securing the information they are looking for from the convenience of their own homes or smart-phones.

eBenefits uses secure credentials to allow access to personal information and gives users the ability to perform numerous self-service functions. It also provides a list of links to other sites that provide information about military and veteran benefits.

Service members and veterans can access records such as Post-9/11 GI Bill enrollment status, VA payment history, military records, VA home loan certificates of eligibility and VA benefits letters, such as copies of their official VA and military correspondence, including Veterans civil service preference, military service verification, benefits verification letters.

The eBenefits site allows for easy navigation of the online disability compensation claim submission process using interview-style questions and drop-down menus.

The site allows veterans and service members to view and download Tricare health insurance status and enrollment information, VA health care enrollment status and medical appointment information.

Through eBenefits, service members, veterans and beneficiaries can update addresses, phone numbers, direct deposit information, apply for benefits and request military service records.

Before veterans or service members can access and use eBenefits, they must be listed in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System and obtain a DoD self-service logon.

If veterans attempt to register and are informed they have no DEERS record, VA will first need to verify their military service and add them to DEERS. This is most likely to occur in the case of veterans who served prior to 1982. All VA regional offices have staff familiar with procedures for adding a veteran to DEERS.

The service is free and may be obtained in person at a VA regional office, DoD ID card issuing office or online at www.ebenefits.va.gov.

For those applying online, the registration wizard will walk the user through a series of questions to assist in obtaining a basic or premium account.

With a premium account veterans can view personal data within the VA and DoD systems, apply for benefits online, check the status of claims, update address records, and more. A basic eBenefits account allows veterans to customize the site and access information, including some confidential information but not all personal information contained within the VA or DoD systems.

To get a premium account, veterans must verify their identity. Many veterans will be able to verify their identity online by answering a few personal security questions. For those unable to verify their identity online, they will receive a basic account.

Several options are available for veterans and service members to establish their online identity and obtain a premium account, including service members using their Common Access Card and military retirees using their Defense Finance and Accounting Service logon. Veterans receiving VA benefits via direct deposit should call (800) 827-1000 and selecting option 7. My HealtheVet users may use their secure My HealtheVet identity to obtain an eBenefits account. Others may need to visit a VA regional office or Tricare Service Center to have their identities verified in person.

The reality is accessing your benefit online is the way of the future. No, make that the way of today. eBenefits provides veterans with the ability to access information about their benefits anywhere, anytime and empowers them to manage those benefits through site's self-service capabilities.

Ted Puntillo is director of Veteran Services for Solano County. Reach him at 784-6590 or TEPuntillo@SolanoCounty.com. The Solano County Veteran Services Office, 675 Texas St. in Fairfield, is open from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.