

# Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program Frequently Asked Questions 2015-2016

The Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program (VMSDEP) is a Commonwealth of Virginia program which provides education benefits to spouses and children of military service members killed, missing in action, taken prisoner, or who became totally and permanently or at least 90 percent disabled as a result of military service in an armed conflict. Military service includes service in the United States Armed Forces, United States Armed Forces Reserves, or the Virginia National Guard. Armed conflict includes military operations against terrorism or as the result of a terrorist act, a peace-keeping mission, or any armed conflict after December 6, 1941.

- NOTE: A Veteran's total and permanent or 90-100 percent disability must have been directly caused by the Veteran's involvement in: 1) military operations against terrorism; 2) a peacekeeping mission; 3) a terrorist act; 4) an armed conflict subsequent to December 6, 1941. The service connected disability cannot simply have been incurred during active duty that coincides with one of the listed events/missions.

The purpose of the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program is to provide undergraduate or other postsecondary education free of tuition and all required fees. A stipend to offset the cost of room, board, books, and supplies may also be available, contingent on funding. Benefits are available for up to four (4) academic years.

## **1. What benefits are available under the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program (VMSDEP)?**

- Waiver of tuition and all required fees associated with tuition at any public institution of higher education or other public accredited postsecondary institution granting a degree, diploma, or certificate in the Commonwealth of Virginia.
  - NOTE: Required fees are those fees that are incurred after tuition is charged and does not include application, reservation, or enrollment fees
- Stipend to offset the costs of room, board, books, and supplies (amount of stipend is dependent on funding) for any VMSDEP beneficiaries attending any public institution of higher education or other public accredited postsecondary institution granting a degree, diploma, or certificate in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

## **2. What are the requirements for this program?**

To be eligible for this benefit program, dependents and spouses of qualifying military servicemembers must meet the following eligibility requirements as outlined in the Code of Virginia § 23-7.4:1, Paragraph A, Subsection 1:

- The dependent must be between the ages of 16 and 29 inclusive; there are no age restrictions for spouses.
- The military service member must have entered military service from the Commonwealth of Virginia or been a bona fide domiciliary or maintained a physical presence in the Commonwealth of Virginia for five (5) consecutive years immediately prior to the application for admission to the desired public institution of higher education or other public accredited postsecondary institution granting a degree, diploma, or certificate located in the Commonwealth of Virginia.
- In the instance of a deceased military service member, the surviving spouse can meet the residency requirements if he or she bona fide domiciliary or maintained a physical presence in the Commonwealth of Virginia for five (5) consecutive years prior to marrying the military service member or has been a bona fide domiciliary or maintained a physical presence in the Commonwealth of Virginia for five (5) consecutive years immediately prior to the application for admission to the desired public institution of higher education or other public accredited postsecondary institution granting a degree, diploma, or certificate located in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

## **3. Is the surviving spouse of a qualifying military service member eligible to attend school under this program?**

Yes, as long as all eligibility requirements are met.

## **4. How do I access my VMSDEP benefits?**

- Apply to and be accepted by a public institution of higher education or other public accredited postsecondary institution granting a degree, diploma, or certificate in the Commonwealth of Virginia.
- Apply for eligibility from the Virginia Department of Veterans Services (DVS) by completing the VMSDEP online application found on the DVS website at [www.dvs.virginia.gov/vmsdep.shtml](http://www.dvs.virginia.gov/vmsdep.shtml).
- The Virginia Department of Veterans Services will provide a copy of the VMSDEP Letter of Eligibility to your designated school's financial aid office via secure email. Please remember it is your responsibility to work with the financial aid office to ensure that the benefits are correctly applied.

**5. Will I be notified if I am eligible for VMSDEP benefits?**

Our goal is to make all eligibility determinations within 46 business days of receipt of your application. It is important that you apply early so the Virginia Department of Veterans Services will have time to view your application, and if found eligible, issue your Letter of Eligibility in time for you to use your VMSDEP benefits.

**6. Do I need to apply only once or for every year I will attend school?**

You only need to apply once on the premise that each semester of the awarded benefit listed on the Letter of Eligibility is used in succession. When you have been approved, your school will be notified of your available entitlement for the 36 months of eligibility under this program. The school will provide available benefits unless you transfer to another school or there is a change in the semesters that you attend. If a change in the authorization period is requested, you must notify the Virginia Department of Veterans Services in writing for the changes to be made and become effective. If there is a lapse in benefit use in excess of one academic year or more, it will be necessary for you to reapply to ensure all eligibility requirements are being met.

In the case of future Veterans Administration examinations with regard to the qualifying Veterans disability rating, Veterans that are rated at least 90 percent and meet all of the other eligibility requirements will be approved on an annual basis up to the last full semester before the date of the future examination. The date of the examination will be annotated and the Veteran and applicant will be notified of this decision. A new application is required prior to the last semester of the eligibility period. In the case of a missed examination appointment, the application will be denied until arrangements are made for the exam to be conducted and subsequent findings reviewed.

**7. When is the VMSDEP application due?**

VMSDEP applications are accepted year-round. However, you should submit your VMSDEP application at least sixty (60) days prior to the start of the term (semester) that you wish to use your entitlement to ensure that your Letter of Eligibility is issued in a timely manner.

**8. How does the waiver of tuition and fees work?**

Eligible individuals are entitled to a maximum of 36 months of program benefits as specified in the existing Acts of Assembly. This means your desired school will waive your tuition and required fees for 36 months. This also applies if you attend one school for part of your eligibility period and another school for the remainder. Please note that enrollment, not academic credit earned, is the standard measure of used entitlement.

**9. It is noted that eligible VMSDEP students are entitled to receive a stipend for school attendance. How does this stipend work?**

- For detailed information regarding VMSDEP stipend funding please visit:

<http://www.schev.edu/students/factsheetvmsdep.asp>

- NOTE: The stipend is not available for the advance purchase of books. Stipend funding is typically received six to eight weeks after your school's add/drop period.

**10. If I am entitled to benefits under VMSDEP, am I guaranteed admission to a public institution of higher education or other public accredited postsecondary institution granting a degree, diploma, or certificate (state-supported college or university) in the Commonwealth of Virginia?**

No, eligibility for the VMSDEP benefit does not guaranteed admission to a state-supported college or university. Your admission is based on each college or university's admission requirements and your academic credentials. Please note that you must be admitted to a participating college or university to use the VMSDEP benefits as outlined in the Code of Virginia § 23-7.4:1, Paragraph A, Subsection 1.

**11. May I attend two state-supported colleges or universities concurrently?**

Yes, students are permitted to attend two state-supported institutions concurrently as long as all admission and attendance requirements are being met. With regard to the awarding of stipend funding in the instance of dual-enrollment please see the VMSDEP Fact Sheet located on the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) website here:

<http://www.schev.edu/students/factsheetvmsdep.asp>

**12. May I take online classes?**

Yes, students are permitted to take online classes as long as those classes are offered through a state-supported college or university.

**13. Does my entitlement mean that my tuition and fees will be waived for my entire 36 months of eligibility?**

Your tuition and required fees will be waived for up to 36 months. As outlined in the 2014 Virginia Acts of Assembly Chapter 2: Item 461, Subsection B, *no beneficiary may receive the education benefits provided by § 23-7.4:1, Code of Virginia, and funded by this or similar state appropriations, for more than four years or its equivalent.* There are no exceptions or waivers for the maximum entitlement timeframe.

**14. May I use my VMSDEP benefits for remedial or refresher courses?**

Yes, students are permitted to use their VMSDEP entitlement for remedial or refresher courses as long as the courses are offered at a state-supported college or university; however, each month of preparatory education will be charged against the student's 36 month eligibility period.

**15. May I use part of my entitlement to earn a masters or professional degree?**

Yes, VMSDEP benefits may be used for any program offered at any state-supported college or university, as long as your program matriculation is within your 36 months of entitlement. This includes graduate studies, law school, and etc.

**16. May I use my VMSDEP benefits after I reach age 30?**

If you are the dependent of a qualifying military service member, you must use your VMSDEP entitlement between the ages of 16 and 29, inclusive. However, the Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Services may approve the use of VMSDEP benefits for dependent children older than 29 years of age, but only if extenuating circumstances prevented the use or exhaustion of benefits prior to age 30.

**17. May I use my VMSDEP benefits to attend a private school or a school in another state?**

No, usage of the VMSDEP benefit is limited to state-supported schools located in the Commonwealth of Virginia. However, if you choose to attend private school, you may be entitled to receive federal education benefits under the Fry Scholarship or the Dependents Education Assistance Program (Chapter 35 of Title 39 of the U.S. Code). Visit the U.S. Department of Veterans affairs website at [http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/survivor\\_dependent\\_assistance.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/survivor_dependent_assistance.asp) to obtain additional information.

**18. As a dependent student, if I get married while attending school, do I lose my entitlement to VMSDEP benefits?**

No, an eligible student's marital status has no effect on his or her entitlement to VMSDEP benefits.

**19. If I have to interrupt my education for some reason, can my VMSDEP benefits be reinstated at a later date?**

Please refer to Question 6 of the VMSDEP FAQ's for information about requesting changes to your VMSDEP authorization.

**20. Are there any attendance or academic requirements that must be met to continue my eligibility under VMSDEP?**

Yes, your attendance and academic progress must be acceptable according to the guidelines established by the school you are attending. If you are suspended from school for any reason, your VMSDEP benefits will be terminated for the duration of the suspension.

**21. If I do not successfully complete one of my courses, may I repeat it without charge?**

Tuition and fees will be waived for any courses taken by a VMSDEP beneficiary; however, any courses that are taken and/or repeated during an eligible academic term are still deducted from the total eligibility period regardless of if you pass or fail a course. If you fail and repeat too many courses while using your VMSDEP entitlement, you risk running out of eligibility prior to completing your education plans.

**22. If I withdraw from school, will it affect my entitlement period under the VMSDEP benefit?**

After the add/drop period; and in most instances within the first nine weeks of a semester, a student may withdraw from courses without academic penalty and receive a grade of "W." In the case of a withdrawal and subsequent grade of "W" that semester or term of VMSDEP entitlement is considered as used by the student and cannot be gained back.

**23. How is VMSDEP different from the Dependents Education Assistance Program?**

VMSDEP is a benefit provided by the Commonwealth of Virginia and is administered by the Virginia Department of Veterans Services. The Dependents Education Assistance Program (Chapter 35 of Title 38 of the U.S. Code) is a benefit program offered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and falls under the GI Bill benefit umbrella. Eligibility requirements for the VMSDEP benefit and the DEA (Chapter 35) benefit are different, for more information regarding the DEA benefit; please visit the Survivors and Dependents portion of the GI Bill website at [http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/survivor\\_dependent\\_assistance.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/survivor_dependent_assistance.asp) for additional information.

**24. Can I use my VMSDEP benefits in conjunction with my DEA (Chapter 35) benefits?**

Yes, students are permitted to use VMSDEP and DEA benefits concurrently, however, note that the eligibility periods for the two programs are different. Depending on a student's individual circumstances, it may be beneficial to use each benefit simultaneously or separately.

**25. As a Veteran, can my step children or adopted children take advantage of the VMSDEP benefit?**

Any dependent of a qualifying military service member including adopted children, adopted *step* children, or other dependent children, can take advantage of the VMSDEP benefit.

**26. As a Veteran, if my claim for disability benefits with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is adjudicated now and my subsequent disability rating is made retroactive to the date my claim was submitted, am I able to receive reimbursement from the VMSDEP benefit for tuition that I have paid out of pocket for my qualifying spouse or dependent?**

Eligibility for the VMSDEP benefit is based upon the date that an application was submitted for the program by or on behalf of a qualifying spouse or dependent student. It is at the discretion of the college or university that the student wishes to attend whether or not any tuition and fees applied to the student's account prior to the VMSDEP benefit authorization date. Please note that colleges and universities are not obligated to refund any monies that have already been paid.

**27. If I have other questions about my VMSDEP benefits, who can I talk to?**

Please write or call the Virginia Department of Veterans Services. We are here to help and will be happy to provide you with information and assistance. The VMSDEP Coordinator's contact information is listed below:

Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program  
900 East Main Street  
Sixth Floor, West Wing  
Richmond, VA 23219  
Phone: (804) 225-2083

**28. What other sources of information are available?**

Additional information can be found on the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia's website at:

<http://www.schev.edu/students/factsheetvmsdep.asp>

Information regarding the Dependents Education Assistance Program (Chapter 35) can be found on the Department of Veterans Affairs Survivors and Dependents section of the GI Bill website at:

[http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/survivor\\_dependent\\_assistance.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/survivor_dependent_assistance.asp)

You may also contact the Financial Aid or Bursar's office at your desired state-supported college or university for information and/or assistance.