

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 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 90-100% 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 VMSDEP is to promote access to high-quality education at Virginia's public colleges and universities for survivors and dependents of qualified Veterans. Benefits are available for up to 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. Who is eligible to receive benefits to attend school under the VMSDEP program?

- The surviving spouse of a qualifying military service member who has met all eligibility requirements (there are no age restrictions for spouses)
- Dependent children of a qualifying military service member between the ages of 16 and 29

3. What are the eligibility requirements for the VMSDEP program?

To be eligible for this benefit program, dependents and spouses of qualifying military service members 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
- **The Veteran must have a minimum disability of permanent and total or 90 percent and greater as determined by the Department of Veterans Affairs. This rating percentage qualifies the Veteran to APPLY for benefits and does not guarantee approval.**

4. 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.

5. Can a Veteran's step-children or adopted children take advantage of VMSDEP benefits?

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 as long as the dependency relationship was established prior to the qualifying dependent's eighteenth (18th) birthday.

6. 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.

7. What should I do to apply for 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

8. How long does the application process take?

Our goal is to make all eligibility determinations within 46 business days of receipt of your application. It is important that you submit all required and or requested documents in a timely manner in order to prevent delays in processing your application.

9. Do I need to re-apply every year of enrollment?

- **You only need to apply once**, as long as each semester of the awarded benefits listed on the Letter of Authorization is used in succession. When you have been approved, your school will be notified of your available benefits of 4 academic years of eligibility under this program. The school will continue to use these benefits unless you transfer to another school or there is a change in the semesters that you attend. If you transfer to another school or require a change in the semesters you plan to attend you must notify the Virginia Department of Veterans Services, in writing, for the changes to be processed and become effective.
- **You will need to re-apply** if there is a lapse in benefit use in excess of one academic year or more to ensure all eligibility requirements are being met.
- **You will need to re-apply** if the qualifying Veteran's disability rating is temporary and future examinations are scheduled by Veterans Affairs Administration. In this case, Veterans that are rated at least 90 percent and meet all of the other eligibility requirements will be approved. A new application is required. In the case of a missed and/or cancelled examination appointment, the application will be denied until arrangements are made for the exam to be conducted and subsequent findings reviewed.

10. What is the VMSDEP application deadline?

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 benefit. This will allow the Letter of Authorization to be issued in a timely manner.

11. How does the waiver of tuition and fees work?

Eligible individuals are entitled to a maximum of 4 academic years of program benefits as specified in the existing Acts of Assembly. This means your desired school will waive your tuition and required fees for 4 academic years. This also applies if you attend one school for part of your eligibility period and another school for the remainder. Please note that semesters, not academic credit earned, is the standard measure of used entitlement.

12. 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 4 academic years. 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.

13. Are eligible VMSDEP students entitled to receive a stipend for school attendance?

Yes, 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 disbursed six to eight weeks after your school's add/drop period.

14. 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 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.

15. 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 factsheet located on the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) website. It is located at: <http://www.schev.edu/students/factsheetvmsdep.asp>

16. May I take online courses?

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

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

Yes, students are permitted to use their VMSDEP benefits 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 4 academic years of entitlements.

18. May I use VMSDEP benefits for non-credit courses?

Yes, students are allowed to use their VMSDEP benefits for non-credit courses as long as the courses are offered at a state-supported college or university **and** leads to a certificate of completion. However, non-credit course are **not eligible for stipend**.

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

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

19. 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 4 academic years of entitlements. This includes graduate studies, law school, etc

20. 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 to obtain additional information.

21. If I have to temporarily interrupt my education for any reason, can my VMSDEP benefits be reinstated at a later date?

Possibly, you will need to re-apply only if there is a lapse in benefit use in excess of one academic year or more to ensure all eligibility requirements are being met. You must notify the Virginia Department of Veterans Services, in writing, for the changes in your enrollment status to become effective.

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

During 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", after the add/drop period, that semester or term of VMSDEP benefit is considered exhausted.

23. Are there any attendance or academic requirements that I must meet 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.

24. If I do not successfully compete one of my courses, may I repeat it without charge?

No. 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 if you pass or fail the course. If you fail and repeat too many courses while using your VMSDEP benefits, you risk running out of eligibility prior to completing your education plans.

25. 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 for additional information.

26. 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, 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.

27. 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.

28. 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

29. 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

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