

Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program Frequently Asked Questions 2016-2017

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 served in covered military combat and has been rated by the United States Department of Veteran Affairs as totally and permanently disabled or at least 90% permanently disabled as a direct result of such service. 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% permanent 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 mandatory fees at a public institution of higher education or eastern Virginia Medical School.
- Stipend to offset the costs of room, board, books, and supplies (amount of stipend is dependent on funding) for any VMSDEP beneficiaries attending a public institution of higher education or Eastern Virginia Medical School.

2. Who is eligible to receive benefits to attend school under the VMSDEP program?

- The spouse of a qualifying military service member (there are no age restrictions for spouses); and
- The child, between the ages of 16 and 29, of a qualifying military service member.

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

To be eligible for this benefit program, survivors and dependent of qualifying military service members must meet the following eligibility requirements as outlined in the Code of Virginia § 23.1-608:

- The child of a qualified military service member must be between the ages of 16 and 29; there are no age restrictions for spouse of such Veteran.
- 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 a public institution of higher education or Eastern Virginia Medical School.
- 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 a public institution of higher education or Eastern Virginia Medical School.
- **A qualified military service member is one who served in covered military combat and has been considered totally and permanently disabled or at least 90% permanently disabled as a direct result of such service.**

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

The Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Services may certify dependents above the age of 29 in those cases in which extenuating circumstances prevented the dependent child from using the benefits before the age of 30.

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

The biological and adopted child of a qualified military service member may take advantage of VMSDEP benefits. Eligibility for such benefits has not been expanded to include the step-child.

6. As an eligible child, if I get married while attending school, do I lose my entitlement to VMSDEP benefits?

No, an eligible child's marital status does not impact such child's entitlement to VMSDEP benefits.

7. What should I do to apply for VMSDEP benefits?

- Submit an application for admission to a public institution of higher education or Eastern Virginia Medical School; and
- 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 need to apply only once.

NOTE: 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.

10. What is the VMSDEP application deadline?

VMSDEP applications are accepted year-round. However, you should submit your VMSDEP application at least sixty (90) 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 students are entitled to 4 academic years, or it's equivalent, of program benefits as specified in the existing Acts of Assembly. This means your desired school will waive your tuition and required fees for 8 semsters. 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. 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.

13. 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. Your admission is based on each public institution of higher education or Eastern Virginia Medical School admission requirements.

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

Yes, eligible students are permitted to use VMSDEP benefits at multiple Virginia public colleges and universities concurrently. 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>

15. May I take online courses?

Yes, as long as those classes are offered through a public institution of higher education or Eastern Virginia Medical School.

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

Yes, as long as those classes are offered through a public institution of higher education or Eastern Virginia Medical School.

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

Yes, Yes, as long as those classes are offered through a public institution of higher education or Eastern Virginia Medical School; 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>)

18. 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 public institution of higher education or Eastern Virginia Medical School. **NOTE:** The benefits are available for 8 semesters. This includes graduate studies, law school, etc.

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

No, VMSDEP benefits are only applicable at a public institution of higher education or Eastern Virginia Medical School.

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.

20. 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.

21. 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.

22. Are there any attendance or academic requirements that I must meet to continue my eligibility under VMSDEP?

Your attendance and academic progress must be acceptable according to the guidelines established by the school you are attending.

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

VMSDEP benefits shall be applied toward any courses taken by an eligible student. The benefits are calculated on a semester basis regardless of the type of courses taken. **NOTE:** If you repeat a significant amount of courses while using your benefits, you risk exhausting your benefits prior to completing your curriculum.

24. 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.

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

Yes, eligible students are permitted to use VMSDEP and DEA benefits concurrently. **NOTE:** Eligibility periods for the programs vary; therefore, such students should consider their individual circumstances to determine whether to use the benefits simultaneously or separately.

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
101 North 14th Street, 17th Floor
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

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