



MILITARY CAREGIVING HANDBOOK

For Veterans, Service Members and their Families

AARP salutes the service and sacrifice of America's Veterans, Military, and their families, and we are proud to support the 5.5 million Veteran and Military Caregivers in the United States. No matter where you are in your caregiving journey, we are here to help.

Look inside for:

5 Key Issues to Address in Your Caregiving Journey

Facts about **Veteran and Military** Caregivers

Helpful Resources and **Caregiving Checklists**

AARP
Family Caregiving™



www.aarp.org/veterans



INTRODUCTION

Caregiving is demanding, intense and intimate, and it presents frequent challenges for the partners, parents, siblings, friends and neighbors who are involved in it. It also may be one of the most loving and rewarding roles you will ever play.

Every caregiving journey is unique. Your caregiving experience may start suddenly with a catastrophic injury that changes the trajectory of, not just the service member or veteran's life, but yours as well. Or you may be supporting your veteran as they age, beginning with tasks such as driving to the grocery store or a doctor's appointment, and gradually increasing support over time. You might spend much of your time helping with emotional support or social interaction due to mental or behavioral health issues. Or you may be protecting them and combating isolation in unusual conditions like a quarantine.

No caregiver handles this job the same way and no two service members or veterans have an identical set of health challenges. How you care for your son, daughter, spouse, partner, sibling, parent or friend will depend on the type of wound, injury or illness they are dealing with; whether they are active duty, retired and/or a veteran; how much you can take on; and the amount of support you find as a caregiver.

Remember that whether you're a military spouse caring for an active-duty service member, a child caring for a parent who's a veteran, an adult caring for a sibling service member or a parent caring for a wounded child, there are government and nonprofit supportive services available.

Having a good road map will help make your caregiving journey easier, no matter what unexpected detours come up. We've outlined five important issues you'll need to address along the way. We hope this information will help you get organized and connect with the resources that you and your loved ones need. You'll find more in-depth tips about each of these issues, as well as more resources and checklists, in our free **Military Caregiving Guide at aarp.org/veterans**.

THE FACTS BEHIND MILITARY AND VETERAN CAREGIVING

- There are **5.5 million** military and veteran caregivers in the U.S.
- **Voluntary, uncompensated caregivers** provide \$14 billion in service for wounded warriors each year.
- **Military caregivers** consistently experience worse health outcomes, greater strains in family relationships and more workplace problems than non-caregivers.
- **Post-9/11 caregivers** are four times more likely to be at risk for major depressive disorder than non-caregivers; pre-9/11 caregivers are two times more at risk.
- **Most programs offering services** to military caregivers are focused on the care recipient. Only 15 percent of the programs surveyed support caregivers as a targeted population.

Source: RAND Corporation – Hidden Heroes: America’s Military Caregivers

VA CAREGIVER SUPPORT PROGRAM

caregiver.va.gov | 855-260-3274

VA has a number of services designed specifically to support you as you care for veterans, including:

- Peer support & mentoring
- Educational Resources
- Caregiver training program
- Caregiver Support Line



TALK IT OUT

It's essential to talk about the medical, emotional and financial needs, goals and wishes of your service member or veteran, and your role as a caregiver. If your loved one's service is recent, you have probably discussed vital issues about health care and finances before he or she left for deployment; if you are caring for an older veteran, you may have never discussed financial, legal or care-related issues. These are sensitive topics, so express your love and concern and, most importantly, listen. Empower your loved one to speak freely, then discuss his or her preferences so you can find the best course of action together.

TEAM UP

The support of family, friends and colleagues, as well as fellow caregivers and service providers, is critical. You don't have to face the responsibilities of caregiving alone. It may feel as if no one really understands your situation, but trying to do everything solo may lead to burnout and problems with your own physical and emotional well-being. Building a team can ease relationships with family and friends and prevent burnout—which could lead to your withdrawal from social activities and extreme isolation.

Reach out to friends, family members and community resources to form a larger network of people who can assume responsibilities for part of your loved one's care. Everyone involved should understand the care recipient's needs, circumstances, desires and goals. It is important for all team members to acknowledge that the primary caregiver and wounded warrior are at the center of the team.

MAKE A PLAN

The most effective caregiving plans are made with your wounded warrior or veteran at the center of every decision. Start by determining what the needs and priorities are, including the types of care that are needed. Make sure you'll have the legal ability to help with medical and financial affairs. Begin to explore the support and service options that are available in your community and solicit others to help manage the work ahead. Divide up care tasks among your team of family and friends, based on their strengths and what they are willing to do. Your plan will be a flexible framework that will guide you through the good days, the rough spots, or even the extreme challenges of a worldwide pandemic. It can be adjusted as your loved one's needs, your team's ability to help, resources, or external factors beyond your control change over time.

SEEK PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

There are VA and other community organizations and resources in your community that provide a variety of services to help care for your loved ones and support you as well. When you need a break, explore respite care options, and if you feel isolated or lonely in your caregiving journey, consider joining an in-person or online peer support group where you can connect with other military caregivers. Contact your local area agency on aging using the Eldercare Locator at [eldercare.acl.gov](https://www.eldercare.acl.gov), and also visit [HiddenHeroes.org/resources](https://www.HiddenHeroes.org/resources) for a simple-to-search list of more than 200 carefully vetted resources that are available specifically for veteran and military caregivers.



CARE FOR YOURSELF

Veteran and military caregivers often say the most difficult part of caregiving is the demand on their time. Balancing caregiving with work and other family obligations can be stressful and exhausting. Because stress can take a toll on your health, well-being and ability to provide care, it's critical to take care of your basic health needs, such as sleep, exercise, hydration, healthy eating, and keeping up with your own health care appointments. These things will also help you manage stress, take care of yourself and be a better caregiver:

- Schedule regular breaks from caregiving to engage in activities that matter to you, whether that's taking a class, going for a walk, meeting a friend for dinner or taking your kids to the park.
- Acknowledge and seek support to manage the myriad emotions that are part of the caregiving experience.
- Connect with other caregivers in similar situations by joining an in-person support group, or online social network such as AARP's Facebook Family Caregivers Discussion Group [facebook.com/groups/aarpfamilycaregivers](https://www.facebook.com/groups/aarpfamilycaregivers).

CONCLUSION

We hope this overview has helped you focus on the issues you are or will be dealing with as a veteran and military caregiver. Check out AARP's **free Military Caregiving Guide at [aarp.org/veterans](https://www.aarp.org/veterans)** for more in-depth information, resource lists, additional checklists, and a sample weekly caregiving plan that will help you get organized at any phase of your caregiving journey.

GENERAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT

(One for each individual who will need care)

| Area of Need | Types of Possible Tasks | Point Person |
|--|---|--|
| Home Maintenance and Living Situation | <input type="checkbox"/> Home repairs/modifications <input type="checkbox"/> Home maintenance <input type="checkbox"/> Pay VA home loan, mortgage or rent <input type="checkbox"/> VA home accessibility modifications <input type="checkbox"/> Safety and security <input type="checkbox"/> Grocery shopping and meal preparation <input type="checkbox"/> Lawn care <input type="checkbox"/> Pet care <input type="checkbox"/> Housekeeping <input type="checkbox"/> Research alternative living situations <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ |
| Financial Affairs | <input type="checkbox"/> Pay bills <input type="checkbox"/> Keep track of financial records <input type="checkbox"/> Manage assets <input type="checkbox"/> Apply for and supervise public benefits <input type="checkbox"/> Leave earnings statement (LES) <input type="checkbox"/> Military compensation statement <input type="checkbox"/> VA caregiver stipend program bills <input type="checkbox"/> US GI Bill for education or for a dependent <input type="checkbox"/> File claim with VA | _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ |
| Transportation | <input type="checkbox"/> Driving decisions <input type="checkbox"/> Coordinate rides <input type="checkbox"/> Locate transportation services | _____ _____ _____ _____ |
| Personal Care | <input type="checkbox"/> Coordinate personal care activities <input type="checkbox"/> Help with daily grooming and dressing <input type="checkbox"/> Rides to hair stylist <input type="checkbox"/> Clothes shopping | _____ _____ _____ _____ |



GENERAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT

(One for each individual who will need care)

| Area of Need | Types of Possible Tasks | Point Person |
|------------------|---|---|
| Health Care | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Enroll in health care <input type="checkbox"/> Transition to TRICARE or CHAMPVA (if retired) <input type="checkbox"/> Monitor and record physical and emotional symptoms <input type="checkbox"/> Arrange medical appointments, transportation, and someone to accompany as needed <input type="checkbox"/> Submit medical insurance and bills <input type="checkbox"/> Explain medical decisions <input type="checkbox"/> Medication management (fill prescriptions, fill pill boxes, give reminders and dispense medications) <input type="checkbox"/> Perform medical tasks (wound care, injections and catheter) <input type="checkbox"/> Obtain medical bracelet and/or medical alert system, if needed | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| Communications | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Keep family caregiving team informed <input type="checkbox"/> Coordinate team visits <input type="checkbox"/> Daily check-in <input type="checkbox"/> Obtain cell phone and/or internet to enhance communication <input type="checkbox"/> Connect on social media | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| Socialization | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Send greeting and thank-you notes <input type="checkbox"/> Arrange for visitors <input type="checkbox"/> Arrange outings <input type="checkbox"/> Join local veterans group | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| Adaptive Devices | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Order, maintain and pay for adaptive devices <input type="checkbox"/> Train on how to use devices <input type="checkbox"/> Get educated on process to secure devices and get them maintained by VA <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |



MILITARY CAREGIVER RESOURCES

AARP Veterans, Military and their Families Initiative: aarp.org/veterans

AARP salutes the service and sacrifice of America's Veterans, Military, and their families. With over four million members nationwide who have served our country, AARP has a long history of providing free resources, important information, and timely programming to meet their unique needs on family caregiving, fighting fraud through *Operation Protect Veterans*, re-careering through *Work & Jobs*, and helping them connect with their earned military service benefits.

AARP Family Caregiving: aarp.org/caregiving or 877-333-5885

AARP's Family Caregiving website is your one-stop-shop for tips and tools to help you care for a loved one. It has valuable information about handling medical issues, health records and advance directives, home safety, financial and legal issues, caregiver life balance and much more. (For Spanish resources, go to aarp.org/cuidar or call 888-971-2013.) You'll also have the opportunity to join our community and connect with other caregivers like you at aarp.org/caregivingcommunity.

Elizabeth Dole Foundation: hiddenheroes.org

The Elizabeth Dole Foundation is the preeminent organization empowering, supporting and honoring our nation's 5.5 million military caregivers—the spouses, parents, family members and friends—who care for America's wounded, ill or injured service members and veterans at home. The Foundation's Hidden Heroes campaign brings vital attention to the untold stories of military caregivers and provides a network for military caregivers to connect with their peers and access carefully vetted resources.



www.aarp.org/veterans

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AARP Caregiving Support 877-333-5885 | www.aarp.org/caregiving