

How VA Social Workers Help Veterans

How Do I Know I Need A Social Worker? You will find social workers in all program areas in VA Medical Centers who are ready to help you with healthcare, psychological and social needs or resources. If you have questions or problems, the social worker will be able to help you or can refer you to the right person for help. Here are just some of the ways that VA social workers can help:

- Financial or housing assistance
- Getting help from the VA or from community agencies, such as Meals on Wheels, so you can continue to live in your own home
- Applying for benefits from the VA, Social Security and other government and community programs
- Making sure your doctor and other VA staff on your treatment team know your decisions about end-of-life issues, generally called advance directives and living wills. Things like whether you want to be on life support equipment, whether you are an organ donor, and which family member or other person you have chosen to make decisions on your behalf when you are unable to make those decisions yourself
- Arranging for respite care for your caregiver so she or he can have a break or go on vacation without worrying about who will be caring for you
- Developing a plan for improved mental, physical and emotional functioning
- If you are having marriage or family problems
- If you would like help with moving to an assisted living facility, a board and care home or a nursing home.
- If someone close to you has passed away and you want to talk about it
- If you have problems with drinking or drug use
- If you feel that someone is taking advantage of you or if you feel mistreated in a relationship
- If your parent or spouse is in failing health
- If you are feeling stress because of your health or because your medical condition interferes with your daily activities
- If you are feeling sad, depressed or anxious
- If you really aren't sure what you need, but things just don't feel right

Social work services are offered to veterans from all eras and military cohorts. No matter your age or military experience, we're here to serve you.

How can social workers help veterans with problems and concerns?

Assessment

The first step is generally for the social worker to meet with you, and often with your family. The social worker will ask you questions about your health, your living situation, your family and other support systems, your military experience and the things you think you need help with. The social worker will then write an assessment that will help you and your VA health care team make treatment plans.

Crisis intervention

In a crisis situation, social workers can provide counseling services to help you get through the crisis. The social worker will then help you with more long-term needs. The social worker can help you apply for services and programs in your community and through the VA to meet emergent needs.

High-risk screening

Social workers work particularly closely with those veterans who are at high risk, such as those who are homeless, those who have been admitted to the hospital several times, and those who cannot care for themselves any longer.

Discharge planning

When you are admitted to a VA hospital, the social worker will help you make plans for your discharge back home or to the community. If you need services in your home or if you can no longer live at home by yourself, the social worker can help you make arrangements for the help you need.

Case management

Social workers often provide long-term case management services to veterans who are at high risk of being admitted to a hospital, those who have very complex medical problems, and those who need additional help and support. They are available when needed to provide and coordinate a variety of services you may need, including counseling or support services or just helping you figure out what you need or how to get it.

Advocacy

Sometimes it can be hard for a veteran to speak up for himself or herself. And sometimes veterans are confused by such a big, bureaucratic agency like the VA. Social workers can advocate for you and go to bat for you when you have a hard time doing it by yourself.

Education

Social workers can help educate you and your family about your health care condition, what services and programs are available to you, how you can live a more healthy life, how you can deal with stress and loss, and how you can find support groups and other self-help programs in your community.

Social workers also educate other staff in the medical center and in the community about VA programs and services and about how problems veterans may be having in their personal lives can impact their health.

Psychotherapy

Clinical social workers provide individual therapy, group therapy, and family therapy to address emotional, behavioral and mental health needs.

VA social workers can help you with all of these types of services, plus many, many more. If you have a problem or a question, you can talk to the social worker on your unit or in your clinic.

How can I find a social worker to help?

Social workers are assigned to every unit, clinic and program at the VA. Just tell your doctor, nurse or clinic/unit clerk that you'd like to see a social worker. They can either direct you to the social worker's office or contact them for you.