

Dignity[®]
MEMORIAL

∞ LIFE WELL CELEBRATED™ ∞

**HOMELESS VETERANS
BURIAL PROGRAM**

PROGRAM MANUAL AND IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

There is a group of American heroes and forgotten soldiers that need our help – our homeless and forgotten veterans. They're hungry, wounded, alone and homeless.

There are approximately 600,000 homeless in the United States, approximately one-third of which are veterans. That's nearly 200,000 veterans sleeping in our parks, on our streets, in cardboard boxes, under bridges and in tunnels every night. "A disgrace," says former Secretary of Veteran Affairs Jesse Brown, "that we have men and women who served in American uniform who are out on the streets with no place to go and few prospects for a better life."

Veterans are twice as likely to become homeless as non-veterans. About 90% are not homeless by choice; many are battle-scarred and unable to cope in today's society.

Because we believe that all Americans who served their country deserve honor and respect in life and, certainly, dignity in death, the Dignity Memorial network of funeral, cremation and cemetery service providers has developed the Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program. The program is designed for veterans lost in the system, left with medical examiners, whose bodies are unclaimed, and for whom no one will assume responsibility. In partnership with numerous veterans' organizations, Dignity Memorial providers help to ensure that eligible veterans receive the honors in death that their service in life merited.

Through the Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program, eligible homeless and forgotten veterans will receive honorable military graveside services with burial in a Veterans Administration national or state cemetery. Ceremonial honors include an honorary gun salute and taps by a military detail and chaplain.

Through the program, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs provides eligible veterans with opening and closing of the gravesite, a grave liner, a headstone or marker, a graveside ceremony and burial in a National Cemetery. Participating Dignity Memorial funeral directors provide coordination of the services, transportation, preparation, clothing and casket. No money will be accepted or charged by Dignity Memorial providers for these services.

GOVERNMENT STATISTICS

- Approximately 40% of homeless men are veterans, although veterans comprise only 34% of the general adult male population. (National Coalition for Homeless Veterans).
- Every night, over 271,000 homeless veterans sleep on the streets. The reasons are many, but downsizing of the military, reductions in educational benefits, physical and mental ailments, and war-related mental illnesses all contribute to the tremendous number of our nation's veterans who are homeless. (National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, 1994).
- America's homeless veterans have served in World War II, Korea, Cold War, Vietnam, Grenada, Panama, Lebanon, Kuwait, or the military's anti-drug cultivation efforts in South America, and 47% of homeless veterans served during the Vietnam Era. (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs)

- More than 67% served our country for at least three years and 33% were stationed in a war zone. (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs)
- There are 1,948 Americans unaccounted for in Southeast Asia as of November 7, 2001 in North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Cambodia, China and Laos. (The Library of Congress)

MISSION

The Dignity Memorial® Homeless Veterans Burial Program provides professional military burial services for homeless, unclaimed veterans for whom no one will assume responsibility.

PURPOSE

The Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program is firmly based upon the belief that all Veterans deserve a dignified and honorable burial. Therefore, the purpose of the program is to help identify eligible homeless and indigent veterans and to help facilitate dignified and honorable burials at VA National Cemeteries.

This program will not compete with or replace services provided by private or government agencies. The only referrals accepted are through the respective local government agencies. Please contact Dignity Memorial Community Relations Department if you have any questions at 713-525-5341.

HISTORY

The idea for this program was initiated during a luncheon conversation between two long time veterans' advocates who saw a need to assist those who served their country and then became homeless. The idea was brought to the attention of the Saint Louis County Veterans Services Office where a program outline was developed and a committee was formed to implement the program. Major General Bill Branson, Army, United States (Retired), and co-founder of the program explains, "This program was created by veterans for veterans of special need. It is one way we can say 'thank you' and show our respect to veterans who might otherwise be forgotten."

PARTNER AGENCIES

Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program represents a coordinated effort among Dignity Memorial providers, local medical examiners offices, coroners, county human services offices, Veterans Administration regional offices, VA medical centers, VA national cemeteries, and veterans service organizations such as the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, Vietnam Veterans of America, Gold Star Mothers, Stand Down (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs), and the Veterans Advocacy Foundation. Representatives from these agencies compose the Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program committee. We ask that you set up a sub-committee with such individuals in your market, this will serve as your committee.

THE IDENTIFICATION PROCESS

The Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program starts with the identification process. If identification is not possible; disposition will be according to the minimal standards of the Laws of the State. In most cases, the place where a death occurs determines the jurisdiction for the disposition of an unclaimed body.

Your DMHVBP committee should work closely with local medical examiners, coroners and Public Administrators to identify veterans by investigating names, Social Security numbers and prior

addresses, if available. If not available, the decedent's fingerprints are sent to the FBI, which maintains fingerprint records of all military personnel.

ELIGIBILITY

Once past military service has been verified, the DMHVBP committee determines program eligibility. Among other criteria, veterans must have been discharged under other than dishonorable conditions to be eligible for the program. In addition, the veteran should either have no living relatives or in some cases, relatives who living but who are estranged and will not accept any financial responsibility.

The veteran must be eligible for burial in a VA National Cemetery to participate in the program.

THE ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE

The responsibility of the individual committee members to the program was designed to provide an immediate response to the death of a homeless veteran. Each member agency of the Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program committee has a specific task when notified of a homeless or indigent veteran's death.

THE ROLE OF THE MEDICAL EXAMINER/CORONER'S OFFICE/PUBLIC ADMINISTRATOR

The beginning of the homeless burial process starts with the Medical Examiner's Office. In the event of an unclaimed body, the Medical Examiner's Investigator will attempt to locate a relative or friend who will take financial responsibility for the disposition of the body. If the body continues to be unclaimed, and is considered indigent, the Medical Examiner's Office then notifies the County Veterans Services Manager. The Veterans Service Manager then begins the investigation process to determine if the deceased is a veteran and eligible for this program.

THE ROLE OF THE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES – VETERANS SERVICE PROGRAMS *DEPENDENT UPON COUNTY RESOURCES**

The Veterans Services Manager maintains a log of possible burials and contacts various agencies of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to verify the decedent's honorable prior military service. (Our program assists those veterans with honorable or general discharges; those with other than honorable discharges are adjudicated on an individual basis to determine eligibility. The measure of eligibility for this program is the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs regulations regarding eligibility.)

We utilize three VA organizations to identify homeless veterans and for verifying eligibility:

1. The Detail Clerk
2. The VA Regional Office and
3. The Director of the National Cemetery

THE ROLE OF THE DETAIL CLERK

The VA Details Clerk, the Health Care for Homeless Veterans Program, and the Chaplain Services are all represented on the Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program committee. The Details Clerk handles in-hospital deaths and assists our program with eligibility; the Health Care for Homeless Veterans Program provides information on veterans that are known to their program and tries to identify friends and family of the veterans and the VA Chaplain Service provides clergy who perform the funeral service.

THE ROLE OF THE VETERANS AFFAIRS REGIONAL OFFICE

Verification of eligibility and adjudication of cases can be determined by the VA Regional Office. Dignity Memorial providers will request that a VA Regional Office representative attend a homeless or indigent veteran's funeral. A flash (notation) is put into the veteran's claims folder to indicate the veteran was buried under the auspices of the Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program.

THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL CEMETERY

The Administrator and the Assistant Administrator are members of the Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program Committee. They coordinate the services of the funeral home, the VA Chaplain Service, and the Military Funeral Honors Program. The National Cemetery provides the opening and closing of the gravesite, a grave liner, a headstone, and a graveside ceremony. If there is no National Cemetery, a good faith effort will be made for alternative arrangements.

THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL DIGNITY MEMORIAL FUNERAL PROVIDER

Once eligibility is verified and the Dignity Memorial provider is notified, the funeral director provides transportation, preparation of the body, funeral clothing, and the casket. The program was designed so the mortuary and the VA National Cemetery are in close proximity. This allows the mortuary and cemetery personnel to schedule burials so that they do not conflict with their other duties.

Service Corporation International (SCI) provides the funding for the Dignity Memorial funeral providers who are part of SCI's large network of funeral homes and cemeteries worldwide and which participate in the Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program.

THE ROLE OF MILITARY FUNERAL HONORS

Graveside services include members of the decedent's military service branch if available as part of an honor guard that will provide the rifle salute, folding and presentation of the U.S. flag, and the sounding of taps. Guard members, reservists, and veterans organization honor guards also perform these services for all eligible veterans.

**PROTOCOL AND PROCEDURE FOR ELIGIBILITY AND REFERRAL FOR THE DIGNITY
MEMORIAL HOMELESS VETERANS BURIAL PROGRAM**

The Homeless Veterans Burial Program receives referrals from the Medical Examiners' offices in the counties and jurisdictions within the cities where the program is active. We do not receive referrals from individuals or other agencies as our goal is to provide dignified burial services to veterans of the United States military that are homeless or indigent at the time of their death.

- A. Veterans who are in receipt of social security benefits or VA compensation or pension benefits **AND** who have assets at the time of their death are not recognized as indigent.
 - I. Participating Medical Examiner's offices are responsible for making an investigation into the deceased veteran's finances to insure that neither the veteran nor his/her family members have the ability to pay for burial.
 - II. Family members of the deceased that contact any of our committee members should be referred to the Medical Examiner's office in the jurisdiction where the veteran's death occurred.
 - III. When assets are discovered during an investigation of a veteran's death, referral should be made to the Public Administrators office in the jurisdiction where the veteran's death occurred.

- B. Veterans who die of natural causes in a nursing home facility are not normally picked up by a Medical Examiner's office. They most often are moved directly to a mortuary.
 - I. Most nursing home patients have some type of income or they would not be living in the nursing home.
 - II. If committee members learn of the death of a veteran who is deemed indigent and living in a nursing home facility, the committee member should contact the DMHVBP Chairperson. An investigation will be made into the financial arrangement that exists between the nursing home and the veteran.
 - III. Often upon the death of a veteran there are funds existing in a nursing home account that can be utilized for the veteran's funeral.

COMMENTS ABOUT
THE DIGNITY MEMORIAL HOMELESS VETERANS BURIAL PROGRAM

The Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program Committee was developed to provide an honorable burial process for homeless and indigent veterans when there is no family or friends who can afford to bury the veteran. Because of the publicity that has surrounded the program, many people have a partial view of how the program operates.

Many well-meaning people have referred individuals to our program upon hearing about the death of a veteran. Some have referred to the program as "a free burial program for veterans" without qualifying that the program is for homeless or indigent veterans. We all have been present at a homeless veteran's funeral where we have questioned why a large number of mourners can attend but couldn't participate financially in the burial of their loved one. What can we do to avoid these embarrassing situations for the families of deceased veterans and for our committee? The best that we can do for these veterans is to work within the procedures we have developed for the program and continue to provide dignified burials for homeless and indigent veterans.

We do not want to turn any veteran away who is eligible to be buried within the rules of our program. Dignity Memorial providers have been very gracious in assisting our program with the burial of veterans whose eligibility might be in question. The attitude has been if there is some way to assist in the burial of an indigent veteran then we should find a way to provide that assistance. Dignity Memorial providers provide all the necessary funding for this program and will work with the VA to secure any VA funding.

We need to review each case separately and determine eligibility on the criteria that makes our program an asset for homeless and indigent veterans. Without eligibility rules, our program could not flourish. It would be impossible to determine who should be buried and who should not. The support of the VA Regional Office, VA Medical Center, and Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery has been crucial in determining each veteran's eligibility for burial benefits and burial in a national cemetery.

The attendance at each funeral by our VA chaplains and the members of our participating veteran's organizations is an important part of our process so that no veteran who is buried under the auspices of our program is buried without others in attendance. The contribution of the Military Funeral Honors Program and their participating veteran organization partners lends grace and a military precision to each funeral that shows respect for our homeless and indigent veterans.

To date, we have been able to provide every burial in a dignified and efficient manner. Our members are willing and active participants in this process to honor veterans who many times have no one else to honor them. We will continue to do this work and to give back to veterans who are less fortunate and have no family or friends to provide them with an honorable and dignified burial.

CIVILIAN PROTOCOL FOR MILITARY FUNERALS

While many in the nation will remember the sacrifices of the U.S. military on Memorial Day, few will be aware of the role civilians play at a military funeral.

Dignity Memorial Providers offers civilian protocol for use during a veteran's funeral to help family and friends better honor a loved one's military service.

At a veteran's funeral, a civilian is asked to participate by facing the casket or urn, standing erect or at attention, and placing the right hand over his or her heart when:

1. The flag-draped casket or urn with the flag displayed is moved outdoors, such as in a hearse, on a caisson, or while carried by pallbearers. This protocol does not apply when civilians are themselves in motion, such as walking toward a gravesite.
2. Rifle volleys are fired.

NOTE: Men in civilian clothing wearing hats should remove the hat with the right hand and hold it over the left shoulder so that the hand is over the heart. An exception to this protocol occurs if a member of a veteran's organization, such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars or the American Legion is wearing the organization's overseas cap. In that instance, the individual should salute but not remove his or her cap.

As a rule of thumb, when those present in uniform salute, civilians should place their right hand/hat over their heart/left shoulder.

SAMPLE ORDER OF SERVICE

- Introduction
- Everyone Stands
 - Posting of Colors
- Memorial Service Commencement
- Invocation
 - by Reverend
- Introduction
 - DM Chairperson
- Intro – Co-Chairperson
- Speaker1
- Speaker 2
- Speaker 3
- Benediction
- Closing Remarks
- 21 Gun Salute
- Taps
- Presentation of the Flag
 - To a Gold Star Mother
- Retire the Colors

THE COMMITTEE STRUCTURE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The first step is for the Market Director to identify the Chairperson for the assigned area. Future Chairpersons will be carefully selected and Dignity Memorial representatives will be given first consideration. It is important that the Chairperson believe in the value of this program to promote good will and enhance market share with all veterans and their families. Some of our most successful Chairpersons are managers of highly visible active Dignity Memorial locations. Consider a Deputy or Co-Chairperson to assist with obtaining the support of veterans and civic organizations and the many details involved. Effectively managed DMHVBP programs can create positive media coverage and good will.

The first mission for the Chairperson is to identify and recruit the Executive Committee. Their job will be to refer deceased homeless veterans for DMHVBP service, determine their eligibility for burial in a Veterans Administration national cemetery, and determine eligibility for the DMHVBP to make sure no funds are available. The Executive Committee will manage and operate the program and we recommend the following positions:

- a. Dignity Memorial Chairperson (Optional Co-Chairperson)
- b. Medical Examiner's, Coroner's Office (In California it is the Public Administrator)
- c. Social Services
- d. VA Regional Office Representative
- e. VA National Cemetery Representative
- f. VA Medical Center Representative

We recommend that you establish a subcommittee which should consist of members from various Veteran Service Organizations. Examples of organizations are:

- a. The American Legion
- b. Veterans of Foreign Wars
- c. Vietnam War Veterans
- d. Korean War Veteran Association
- e. Gold Star Mothers of America
- f. Chaplains, Jr. ROTC, Military Honor Guards, etc.

Establish a roster of committee members with name, agency, address, phone numbers and e-mail address.

Conduct quarterly meetings until the committee is organized, tasks are assigned and the committee can operate with e-mail instructions.

CRITERIA TO CONSIDER WHEN SELECTING A CHAIRPERSON

The primary chairperson should be a Dignity Memorial representative who may be involved in organizations that promote the welfare of fellow veterans. In some communities you may also want to have a co-chairperson who may not be directly affiliated with the Dignity Memorial network but who is well versed in knowledge about the company and its service to veterans.

The chairperson:

- Should be willing to devote a significant amount of time to the Homeless Veterans Burial Program.
- Should have the ability to send and receive e-mail.
- Must work within the established guidelines.
- Must work closely with Dignity Memorial management and staff.
- Must be willing to work with city, state, county and national agencies to identify and determine eligibility of deceased veterans for this program.
- Will be responsible for obtaining approval from the committee members for the initial call.
- Is responsible for ensuring that only veterans, who would otherwise be buried in pauper's graves without military services, are referred to the Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program.
- Must have the ability to organize monthly meetings for committee members. These meetings are very crucial in the first months as the program develops meeting may move to a quarterly schedule and then occur as needed.
- Will help file the necessary forms to secure any VA payments to help offset costs.

THE FIRST COMMITTEE MEETING

We recommend a three hour meeting hosted by General Manager at their location. In addition to the executive committee members in attendance, market managers and other staff should be present. Consider a fifteen minute mixer with coffee, soft drinks and cookies before starting for a "meet and greet" session to "break the ice". Request that all guests sign in with name, organization, address, phone number and e-mail address. This will be the Committee Roster for future planning and communicating.

The host will open the meeting and introduce the person representing the program at the corporate level who will give the presentation. Including the question and answer period after the presentation it takes about 90 minutes.

In many instances, a light lunch is served or snacks depending on the time. After this, the invited guests will leave. After they depart, there will be a one hour meeting with Dignity personnel to talk about lessons learned, reports, cost, procedures and how to use this program to enhance Market share. (Use the after meeting talking points)

Each metropolitan area will have a minimum of fifty active veterans organizations and our goal is to try and recruit member from many of them to serve as sub-committee members. Don't forget to recruit Clergy, Government Leaders, Police and Fireman.

Remember, it is important that we establish the time and dates for our letters to recruit members as far in advance as possible.

THE PROCESS

STEP ONE: NOTIFICATION

The process starts with the Medical Examiners / Coroner's Office or Public Administrator. In the event of an unclaimed body, the Medical Examiner or Coroner will attempt to locate a relative or friend who will take financial responsibility for the disposition of the body. If the body is unclaimed and is considered indigent, the Medical Examiners, Coroner's Office or Public Administrator will then notify the chairperson of the Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program.

STEP TWO: DETERMINE ELIGIBILITY

The chairperson is responsible to assist in determining eligibility. This program assists those veterans with honorable or general discharges; those with other than honorable discharges are adjudicated on an individual basis. The measure of eligibility for this program is the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs regulations regarding eligibility.

The chairperson should contact various agencies of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to verify the decedent's honorable prior military service. Contact is also established with the VA Medical Center, VA Regional Office, and the VA National Cemetery, which are utilized for identification and to verify eligibility for services.

STEP THREE: SCHEDULING AND PERFORMING THE SERVICE

Once the Dignity Memorial funeral provider is notified, services will be performed by the funeral director.

STEP FOUR: FILE VA PAPERWORK TO SECURE PAYMENT FROM THE VA

The VA provides a burial allowance for homeless indigent veterans as part of their budget. Although we have not filed this paperwork in the past, after much discussion with committee members from across the country, including representatives from the VA and the national cemetery system, we have decided that this is a prudent course of action. With the assistance of corporate, we will help each market file the necessary paperwork necessary to secure these funds. This will help our locations offset costs to procure a metal casket for a more dignified interment at the national cemetery.

VETERAN SERVICE ORGANIZATION RESPONSIBILITIES

Representatives from VSOs such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars, DAV and American Legion are essential in helping to launch the program in your community and for familiarizing other veterans organizations and advocates with the program.

These committee members will also play an advisory role in Veterans Affairs.

The Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program is an extension of services and benefits which are provided to each veteran by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. This department is involved in the program through local VA Medical Centers and Regional Offices. Each performs separate and distinct functions.

US DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

It is very helpful when representatives from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs serve on the committee. They help coordinate the services of the funeral home, the chaplain service, the state Military Funeral Honors Program and attend the eligible veteran's funeral.

The VA Details Clerk, the Health Care for Homeless Veterans Program, and the Chaplain Services all need to be represented on the Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program Committee.

1. The Details Clerk handles in-hospital deaths and assists with eligibility.
2. The Health Care Case Worker for Homeless Veterans can provide information on Veteran's that are known to their program and tries to identify friends and family.
3. The Chaplain Service provides clergy who perform the funeral service.

These committee members may also be the area administrator and/or the assistant in each of the positions listed above. The regional representatives in those areas are also vitally important in assisting in the adjudication of cases where a less than honorable discharge is evident and are also responsible for marking each claims folder to indicate the veteran was buried under the Dignity Memorial Homeless Veteran Burial Program noting that there were no costs for the veteran's burial.

REFERENCE AND RESOURCE INFORMATION FROM THE US DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS WEB SITE

www.va.gov

What is the purpose of this site?

Veterans who served honorably in the U.S. Armed Forces deserve a proper burial. There is a risk that veterans whose remains are unclaimed, and not identified as veterans, will be buried in pauper graves. We ask for your assistance in helping VA eliminate that risk. The following information is intended to make you aware that there are burial benefits for eligible veterans, and that we are prepared to assist in any way possible.

Who is a "veteran?"

A veteran means a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable.

- [Certain reservists and National Guard Members](#) may be eligible for benefits.
- Other groups considered to have performed active military service ([38 Code of Federal Regulations, Sec. 3.7](#)).

How can you verify veteran status of an unclaimed decedent?

Verification requests for veteran status of adult decedents should be made to VA regional offices, medical facilities, or VA national cemeteries. By calling the VA toll-free benefits number, **1-800-827-1000**, you will reach a representative who can verify if a decedent was a veteran and if VA burial benefits are in order. Contact your nearest [VA regional office representative](#). Note: VA is not able to verify veteran status of *unidentified* remains. The [Federal Bureau of Investigation \(FBI\)](#) should be contacted for assistance in this type of case.

What information is required for verification?

The information needed for verification is the decedent's name and VA claim number (if known). Otherwise, as much of the following information as possible will be useful: Social Security number, date of birth, branch of military service, service number, and service dates.

What happens if immediate verification cannot be made?

When the VA representative contacted is not able to fully verify veteran status from computer records, a process is activated to investigate further and follow up with the inquirer. If there is a claims file for the veteran, it will be reviewed. If necessary, assistance will be sought from the VA Records Management Center or the National Personnel Records Center where veterans' military records are stored. The turnaround time for VA verification generally ranges from immediate to three days. The result will be one of the following:

- The decedent was a veteran, and eligible for VA burial monetary benefits.
- The decedent was a veteran but ineligible for burial monetary benefits.
- There are no records identifying military service by the decedent.

What is the purpose of VA burial benefits?

VA burial benefits help to offset the costs of the veteran's burial, funeral, and plot-interment.

How much does VA pay?

Service-Related Deaths: If a military service-related injury or disease caused the veteran's death, VA will pay up to \$2,000 toward burial expenses. If the veteran is buried in a VA national cemetery, some or all of the costs for transporting the veteran's remains may be reimbursed.

Certain Non Service-Related Deaths: VA will pay up to \$300 toward burial and funeral expenses, and \$300 as a plot-interment allowance. If the veteran died in a VA hospital or under VA contracted home care, some or all of the costs for transporting the deceased's remains may be reimbursed.

What are the eligibility criteria for non service-related death benefits?

- The veteran was receiving VA compensation or pension at the time of death, **OR**
- The veteran was entitled to receive VA compensation or but decided not to reduce his/her military retirement or disability pay, **OR**
- The veteran died in a VA hospital or while in a nursing home under VA contract, or while in an approved state nursing home, **OR**
- There is no next of kin or other person claiming the remains of the veteran, and there are not available sufficient resources to cover burial and funeral costs, and the veteran served honorably in the U.S. Armed Forces during any war or was discharged from the military because of a service-connected disability.

Who may be paid the VA burial and plot-interment allowances?

Generally, VA will pay the allowances to the person (or entity) who

- paid for the veteran's burial or funeral, **AND**
- has not been reimbursed by another government agency or some other source such as the veteran's employer.

What is the application process?

Apply for VA burial allowances by completing VA Form 21-530 (Application for Burial Allowance). A death certificate (if not already furnished to VA) and copies of paid funeral and burial bills should be attached. The application should be submitted to the VA regional office serving the claimant's area.

What is the time limit to apply for burial allowances?

There is no time limit for claiming reimbursement of burial expenses for a service-related death. In non service-related deaths, the claim must be filed within 2 years of the veteran's burial.

Are there related VA benefits?

The following are additional VA benefits for eligible veterans:

- **Burial Flag** - A United States flag is provided for veterans who served honorably. The purpose of the flag is to drape the veteran's casket. The flag should be presented to the veteran's next of kin immediately after the burial.
- **Burial at VA National Cemeteries** - Any veteran with honorable service is eligible for burial at a VA national cemetery. The [nearest cemetery](#) should be contacted for arrangements. Veterans are also eligible for burial at state veterans cemeteries.
- **Headstone and Marker** - A headstone or marker is provided for the burial of veterans who served honorably. The National Cemetery Administration arranges that for burial at its national cemeteries. On application, VA will also provide a headstone or marker for burials at other cemeteries.
- **Presidential Memorial Certificate**. A certificate honoring the memory of veterans who served honorably is sent to the veteran's next of kin, and other loved ones on request. The certificate bears the President's signature.

Coroners & Medical Examiners

Generally, coroners and medical examiners are responsible for the disposition of unclaimed remains. In some jurisdictions, sheriffs and justices of the peace are responsible. It is important that they contact VA to verify the veteran status of all identified adult decedents who are unclaimed and indigent. Decedents verified as veterans may be buried in a VA national cemetery or state veterans cemetery, and other burial benefits may apply.

[List of Coroners, Medical Examiners & Others Responsible for the Disposition of Unclaimed Remains](#) - This list was compiled during VA's 2003 survey of coroners and medical examiners. All states and the District of Columbia are included, representing over 3,100 jurisdictions. The list is provided as an inventory for VA outreach purposes. It is updated as VA is informed of changes. VA can be informed by calling 1-800-827-1000, or by email to cooutreach@vba.va.gov.

MILITARY FUNERAL HONORS **"Honoring Those Who Served"**

The Department of Defense (DOD) is responsible for providing military funeral honors. "Honoring Those Who Served" is the title of the DOD program for providing dignified military funeral honors to veterans who have defended our nation.

Upon the family's request, Public Law 106-65 requires that every eligible veteran receive a military funeral honors ceremony, to include folding and presenting the United States burial flag and the playing of Taps. The law defines a military funeral honors detail as consisting of two or more uniformed military persons, with at least one being a member of the veteran's parent service of the armed forces. The DOD program calls for funeral home directors to request military funeral honors on behalf of the veterans' family. However, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) National Cemetery Administration cemetery staff can also assist with arranging military funeral honors at VA national cemeteries. Veterans organizations may assist in providing military funeral honors. When military funeral honors at a national cemetery are desired, they are arranged prior to the committal service by the funeral home.

The Department of Defense began the implementation plan for providing military funeral honors for eligible veterans as enacted in Section 578 of Public Law 106-65 of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2000 on Jan. 1, 2000.

Questions or comments concerning the DOD military funeral honors program may be sent to the address listed below.

The military funeral honors Web site is www.militaryfuneralhonors.osd.mil.

Department of Defense
Directorate for Public Inquiry and Analysis
Room 3A750, The Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1400

KEY MESSAGES

Following are the key messages about the Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program.

All participants and committee members should be familiar with the key messages, and the identified spokesperson should rely on the key messages when speaking about the program. All communications about the Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program should contain one or more key messages for consistency throughout the program and the Dignity Memorial network.

- The Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program provides dignified burial services for eligible homeless and indigent veterans to ensure they receive the honors in death that their service in life merited.
- The Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program was founded upon the belief that every veteran deserves a dignified and honorable burial.
- The program is a cooperative effort among Dignity Memorial funeral, cremation and cemetery service providers, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, local medical examiners, coroners, veterans advocates and veterans organizations.
- Through the program, homeless or indigent veterans who have no family to claim them are identified and provided with a proper military burial. Participating Dignity Memorial providers provide preparation of the body, transportation, clothing, casket and coordination of the funeral service. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs provides eligible veterans with the opening and closing of the gravesite, a grave liner, a headstone or marker, a graveside ceremony and burial in a National Cemetery.
- Currently available in 27 cities across the country, the Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program has provided burial services for more than 600 homeless veterans since the program's inception in 2000.
- The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that 154,000 veterans are homeless on any given night and many, without families to claim them, will one day risk burial in pauper's graves. The Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program strives to provide these men and women with the proper military burials they deserve.
- As Dignity Memorial funeral, cremation and cemetery service providers, we consider it an honor to serve these brave men and women who so selflessly served their country.
- The Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program is one of many efforts of the Dignity Memorial network to honor and support our nation's veterans and active military. Other initiatives and programs include the Veterans Planning Guide, the Dignity Memorial Military Family Careline, the Dignity Memorial Vietnam Wall, educational veteran seminars and special pricing for members of Veterans Service Organizations.

PUBLIC RELATIONS: COORDINATION WITH THE SCI COMMUNITY RELATIONS DEPARTMENT

Proper promotion of the Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program and the services it conducts can generate positive media for the program and the Dignity Memorial providers within the market, while continuing to build good will and relationships within the community.

As soon as a potential Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program burial is identified, the Dignity Memorial chairperson of the executive committee should contact the Community Relations office at **713-525-5341**. Even if the services are not yet scheduled, advance notification to Community Relations is appreciated so the public relations specialists can be aware of the potential workload and plan accordingly.

All press materials for the Homeless Veterans Burial Program will be generated by the Community Relations/External Communication office. The Community Relations Department may also coordinate their activities with the Public Affairs Officers from the Regional VA offices that have provided solid support in the past.

SPOKESPERSONS

The spokesperson for the Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program may or may not be the chairperson of the executive committee. In GX2 markets, the spokesperson will likely be the market spokesperson who has been media trained to connect the DMHVBP with other veteran's services. The spokesperson will be identified by the Community Relations department.

In those markets where the spokesperson is the chair of the DMHVBP executive committee, Community Relations will prepare him or her with key messages and media coaching as necessary.

Only Dignity Memorial representatives can be authorized to speak on behalf of the Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program.

PRESS RELEASE

Upon confirmation of a homeless veteran burial, the Community Relations/Corporate Communications department will prepare a press release for distribution to the appropriate local media outlets. The Corporate Communications department will compile the media list as well. Both the press release and the media list will be shared with the DMHVBP chairperson for review and approval prior to distribution. Once both are approved, the Corporate Communications department will distribute the release.

Advance notice is important for the release to be prepared, reviewed, approved and distributed in a timely manner.

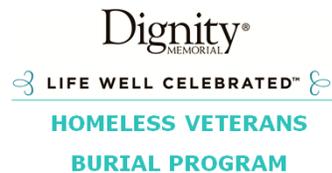
MEDIA ALERT

The Corporate Communications department will also prepare a media alert announcing the “who, what, when, where and why” facts of the scheduled homeless veteran burial. A media alert is designed to encourage media coverage of the burial and is usually distributed the day before the scheduled service. The Corporate Communications department will make follow-up phone calls to major media outlets the morning of the scheduled service to confirm receipt of the media alert and to confirm planned attendance.

MEDIA CLIPS

The Corporate Communications department also will monitor for media coverage of the homeless veteran burial after the service is completed and will send electronic copies of news clips to the chair of the Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program committee and market management as appropriate.

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Media Contact:
Kimberly Tarleton, 713-525-5341**

Seminole County Homeless Veteran to Receive Military Funeral

GOTHA, Fla. – (December 14, 2014) – With more than 150,000 homeless veterans in the U.S., many of the individuals who risked their life for our country remain unclaimed at their death and risk burial in a pauper’s grave. Through the Dignity Memorial[®] Homeless Veterans Burial Program, one local veteran won’t be among them. U.S. Army veteran Kenneth Hicks (1950 - 2009) will receive a funeral service conducted with military honors at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, December 16 at Woodlawn Funeral Home, 400 Woodlawn Cemetery Rd., Gotha, Fla. Following the service, the U.S. Military Veterans Motorcycle Club will escort the hearse to Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell, Fla.

Hicks, 59, who served his country during the Vietnam War and was a POW, had no legal next-of-kin to make his funeral arrangements. That’s when the Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program stepped in to see to it that Hicks receives a burial befitting a veteran of our nation’s armed services.

“The Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program is a cooperative effort designed to ensure that veterans who are homeless, indigent and have no family receive the honors in death that their service in life merited,” said Larry Jenkins, director of Dignity Memorial providers in the Orlando area. “Mr. Hicks deserves a dignified military burial to honor his service to our country, and we are honored to be able to provide it for him.”

Hicks will receive a chapel memorial service Wednesday morning performed by retired Navy Chaplain Tom Love, complete with military funeral honors, including the playing of *Taps* and rifle volley, conducted by Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 4225. Additional military

honors, including the folding and presentation of the American flag, will take place at the interment service at Florida National Cemetery and will be performed by the Florida National Guard.

The Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program is a cooperative effort among Dignity Memorial funeral, cremation and cemetery service providers, American Legion, VFW, Florida National Cemetery, Florida National Guard and Osceola Veterans Association.

Through the program, Dignity Memorial funeral and cemetery providers provide preparation of the body, transportation, casket and coordination of the funeral service. Florida National Cemetery will provide the opening and closing of the gravesite, a grave liner, a headstone or marker and the graveside ceremony.

The Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program is one of many efforts of the Dignity Memorial network to honor and support our nation's veterans and active military. Other initiatives and programs include the Veterans Planning Guide, the Dignity Memorial Vietnam Wall, educational veteran's seminars and special pricing for members of veteran's service organizations.

The Dignity Memorial network of more than 1,600 funeral, cremation and cemetery service providers is North America's most trusted resource for funeral and memorialization services. Dignity Memorial providers offer an unmatched combination of products and locations serving families with care, integrity, respect and service excellence.