
THURSTON COUNTY VETERANS ASSISTANCE FUND POLICIES AND PROCEDURES



Adopted 1986
Policy Revisions 1990, 1995, 2009
Policy Revision 2017, 2019, 2020, 2022

VETERANS ASSISTANCE FUND – POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

1.0 General Provisions

1.1 Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the Thurston County Veterans Assistance Fund, hereinafter called the VAF, is to provide for the relief of indigent veterans, their families, and the families of deceased indigent veterans as defined in RCW 73.08.005. The intent of the VAF is to provide model programs that benefit veterans and family members facing financial hardship.

1.2 Funds Generated

The VAF is generated from a tax levied by the Thurston County Board of County Commissioners. Use of the fund is governed by RCW 73.04.080, 73.08.005, 73.08.010, 73.08.035, 73.08.070, 73.08.080, 73.08.090, 73.04.080 including subsequent changes in the law and these policies and procedures.

1.3 Program Assistance to Individuals

Only eligible veterans and eligible family members of veterans may receive assistance from the VAF. The eligible veteran or family member must have a financial need and must provide documentation proving their need to receive assistance from the fund.

There is no automatic annual entitlement for assistance and the provision of assistance is subject to the availability of funds. The assistance provided may include financial assistance for certain purposes, homeless shelter services, incarcerated veteran services, and other allowable services that benefit eligible veterans and eligible family members.

1.4 Definition of Veteran 73.08.005

Eligibility for the VAF is expanded to include general under honorable conditions for veteran defined in RCW 73.08.005.

1.5 Veterans Advisory Board

The Thurston County Veterans Advisory Board established by Thurston County Code Chapter 2.122 provides advice to the Thurston County Board of County Commissioners on needed and appropriate assistance programs.

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2.0 Service Delivery

2.1 Program Services

Thurston County may provide all program services or other entities may be authorized by Thurston County to administer a veterans' assistance program or programs through grants, contracts, or inter local agreements. Veterans Assistance Funds may be combined with other funding sources and donations may be accepted.

Contracts for shelter services shall not include a requirement to reside in Thurston County at least 31 days prior to obtaining shelter services.

2.2 Nationally Recognized Veteran Service Organizations

Nationally recognized veteran service organizations located in Thurston County that have a memorandum of agreement currently in effect with the Public Health and Social Services Department may appoint representatives from their organization to assist veterans or eligible family members apply for veteran related benefits including assistance from the VAF.

As authorized by RCW 73.04.080, veteran service organizations assisting veterans apply for veteran related benefits including the VAF may be reimbursed up to \$360 annually for their current year's regular meeting place rent. An authorized meeting place rent form and a receipt(s) showing the veteran service organization's prior year paid rental fee must be submitted to the VAF by the end of the current year. Any post, camp or chapter that owns the building used for their regular meeting space or is furnished quarters by the state or by any municipality does not qualify for meeting place rent.

2.3 Community Activities

Veterans Assistance Funds may be provided to support community activities that benefit eligible veterans and their families if recommended by the VAB and approved by the Director of Public Health & Social Services. The duration of the activity shall not exceed one year and the cost shall not exceed \$10,000. Examples of community activities that may be funded include information and referral fairs and veteran stand downs.

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3.0 Financial Assistance

3.1 Eligibility

In order to receive assistance from the VAF, the veteran or family member must meet the eligibility criteria outlined in this section. The applicant must provide documentation deemed acceptable by the staff of the Public Health and Social Services Department verifying eligibility for assistance.

Eligibility shall be based on an application from the veteran, surviving spouse or surviving domestic partner. Step-children of the veteran, surviving spouse or surviving domestic partner may be included in family size for purposes of determining income eligibility and the amount of assistance.

Households with more than one eligible veteran shall include one two year period at a time.

3.1.1 Veteran and Family Member Status

An applicant for assistance from the Veterans Assistance Fund must be a veteran or the family member, as defined in RCW 73.08.005(2) "Family". Eligibility however is established by the veteran, surviving spouse or surviving domestic partner providing proof of veteran status and other required documentation. Qualifying children are a natural, adopted or step-child under the age of 18.

3.1.2 Residency

Applicants must have been residents of Washington State for at least six months immediately prior to obtaining assistance from the VAF.

Applicants must have been residents of Thurston County for at least 31 days immediately prior to obtaining assistance from the VAF. Post office boxes cannot be used to establish residency.

3.1.3 Indigence

- A. Applicants must be indigent. One or more of the following definitions shall be used to determine if an applicant is indigent:

-Receiving one of the following types of public assistance: Temporary assistance for needy families, general assistance, poverty-related veterans' benefits, food stamps or food stamp benefits transferred electronically, refugee resettlement benefits, Medicaid, or supplemental security income.

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-Receiving an annual income, after taxes, of up to two hundred percent or less of the current federally established poverty level. Income received during the 31 day period prior to the date of application shall be used to determine an annual income. Income includes all funds received by the applicant and their spouse or domestic partner, and all other individuals who will benefit from the assistance. Consideration may be made to deduct court ordered payments and garnishments from final income calculation.

- B. Upon the recommendation of the VAB and approval by the BoCC income may also be determined by utilizing a methodology developed by the staff of Public Health & Social Services that certifies the applicant and eligible family members are unable to pay reasonable costs for shelter, food, utilities and transportation because the applicant's available funds are insufficient.
- C. Examples of included income which must be reported on the VAF application for the purpose of determining income eligibility are as follows:

Money, wages and salaries after taxes	Labor and industries payments
Net receipts from self-employment	Unemployment compensation
Savings	Child support
Worker's compensation	Social security other than supplemental security income
Alimony	Foster child payments
Veterans' compensation and disability	Tax refunds, gifts, loans, lump-sum inheritance, one-time insurance payments or compensation for injury or death
Military family allotments or other regular support from an absent family member or someone not living in the household	Dependency and indemnity compensation for service-connected death
Retirement, pension (including veterans' pension) and annuities	Educational assistance benefits (not including grants, loans and veterans' educational assistance benefits paid directly to the school for tuition and books)
Insurance payments	Vocational rehabilitation subsistence allowance and work-study benefits
Dividends, interest, and periodic receipts from estates or trusts	Any other funds coming into the household.

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D. No or Little Income

Applicants who report no income or little income for the previous 31 days must be eligible and receiving Washington State Department of Social and Health Services Basic Food Assistance and/or Medicaid in order to be indigent for the VAF. The applicant must provide documentation showing their eligibility for Basic Food Assistance and/or Medicaid.

3.2 Application Procedures

The applicant must complete a VAF application and provide supporting documentation proving eligibility for assistance. Applications are valid for 90 days. It is the applicant's responsibility to report any changes in status during this 90-day period of time. After 90 days a new application must be completed.

3.2.2 Certification

Applicants applying for assistance are required to sign a statement certifying that the information provided is complete and accurate and that if discovered to be otherwise the applicant shall be denied assistance from the fund. The veteran or eligible family member shall also authorize the Thurston County to verify the accuracy of the information provided by the applicant.

3.3 Financial Assistance

Financial assistance may be provided for eligible veterans and eligible family members to assist with basic needs such as past due rent, past due mortgage, utilities, food or other types of assistance deemed appropriate by Thurston County.

3.3.1 Maximum Allocation

Eligible veterans or family members with no other family members in the household may receive up to \$1000 in financial assistance in a twelve month period of time. If there are two or more family members in the household, up to \$2000 in financial assistance may be provided in a twelve month period of time.

The maximum amount of financial assistance provided may be amended if recommended by a majority vote of the VAB and approved by the Director of Public Health & Social Services.

3.3.2 Limitations

The maximum number of years a veteran or eligible family member may receive assistance from the VAF is two years. The two year limitation may be amended if recommended by a majority vote of the VAB and approved by the Director of Public Health & Social Services.

3.3.3 Types of Financial Assistance

A. Rent or Mortgage Assistance

Eligible veterans or family members may receive assistance with past due rent, first and last month's rent, past due mortgage payments and nonrefundable deposits for the applicant's residence.

The applicant must provide a written rental agreement or documents proving ownership of the property. The veteran or eligible family member must be able to sustain rent or mortgage payments in the months to come.

Payments for rental assistance shall be paid directly to the property owner, property management company or the owner's legal representative. Payments shall not be made to family members. When requested by Thurston County, the owner of the property or apartment manager shall complete a Thurston County Vendor Information Form prior to payment of rent.

Rent shall be paid only for the applicant's primary residence. Veterans or eligible family members who share a residence with the property owner may receive a maximum of \$1000 for their share of the rent in a twelve-month period of time.

Mortgage payments shall be made directly to the mortgage lender and shall only be paid for the applicant's primary residence.

B. Motel Stays

Motel and hotel stays shall only be paid if one of the two conditions apply:

-A physician or discharging hospital provides a written statement as to why providing housing at a local shelter is not medically recommended. The facility must be located in Thurston County.

-There are no shelter beds available and the homeless Veteran (or qualifying family member) requesting services is too ill to stay in the elements.

Consideration will also be made for those that have experienced Military Sexual Trauma (MST)

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Motel/hotel stays are limited to 5 consecutive days and restricted to a one-time approval. The recipient must also participate in the Veterans Housing Group to find permanent housing.

C. Utilities

Eligible veterans or family members may receive assistance with utilities, which includes: power, water, refuse, propane, septic, and wood. Other utility services such as phone, cable, or internet services shall not be paid.

Assistance can also be applied to costs for reasonable repairs to existing utilities. Assistance will not exceed the total amount allowed in 3.3.1 above.

The applicant must provide a utility bill, a shut-off notice, or letter of impending disconnection from the power, water or refuse company showing the current amount owed. Payment shall be made directly to the utility company and may include shut-off and reconnection fees.

Payment shall be made to an account in the veteran or eligible family member's name only. Utilities shall only be paid for the residence where the veteran or eligible family member currently resides.

Telephone services shall only be paid when a physician provides written documentation that the telephone is needed for a medical emergency.

The veteran or eligible family member may be required to first utilize other energy assistance programs prior to the approval of VAF.

D. Food and Non-Food Items

Veterans or eligible family members may receive assistance with food and certain non-food items. All food and non-food items, including personal hygiene items shall be purchased utilizing a VAF voucher with a vendor who has agreed to participate in the Thurston County voucher system.

The voucher shall state the allowable food and non-food purchases. Further assistance may be denied to any veteran or eligible family member who does not adhere to the requirements set forth in the food and non-food voucher and these policies and procedures.

A maximum amount for the purchase of food and non-food items in a month shall be determined based on need and other resources available.

F. Transportation

Daily or monthly bus passes may be provided for transportation within Thurston County. If approved by Public Health & Social Services funding may be provided for transportation outside the county for visits to the VA Puget Sound Health Care System at American Lake, the Seattle VA Hospital and South Sound CBOC (Sterling Medical). This may include funding for public transit or other means of transportation.

Financial assistance may be provided for primary vehicle repair, not to exceed the maximum allocation located in 3.3.1 above. Approved repair services are limited to basic operation of the vehicle or ADA modifications. The Veteran must prove ownership of the vehicle and provide proof of valid insurance for the previous 30 days.

G. Burial or Cremation Services

Up to \$1200 shall be provided for the burial or cremation of any deceased indigent veteran or deceased family member of an indigent veteran who dies without leaving means sufficient to defray funeral expenses. These funds are in addition to funds for other types of financial assistance.

In addition to program documentation requirements, a death certificate and documentation showing the burial or cremation expenses incurred must be provided prior to receiving assistance from the VAF. A funeral home or the family members or friends of the deceased who paid the funeral expenses may be reimbursed for payments made for burial or cremation services up to the maximum allowed. In order to be eligible for reimbursement from the VAF the request for assistance must be submitted within six months of incurring the costs for burial or cremation services.

H. Occupational Assistance

Funds may be used to pay for occupational certification test fees and licensing for qualified applicants.

Assistance can also be applied to required work attire, safety and mandatory occupational equipment.

I. Other Requests

Other requests for financial assistance not listed in these policies and procedures shall be evaluated on a case-by-case basis to provide assistance with basic needs.

3.3.4 Waiver

On a one time basis the Director of the Public Health and Social Services Department or the director's designee may waive the eligibility requirements set forth in these policies and procedures, excluding state law requirements. This shall be done only when there is a specific, documented need or circumstance which establishes the individual's need for financial assistance.

4.0 Denial of Services

Thurston County may refuse service to disorderly or disruptive individuals including those who intimidate or threaten a public servant or attempt to do so.

Applicants who have been denied assistance may request a review of the denial by the Director of the Public Health and Social Services Department or the director's designee. The director or the designee may request additional information in order to make an informed decision and shall issue a decision within 10 days of receiving the information. The director or designee's decision is final.

5.0 Complaints

For complaints of discrimination, applicants may file a complaint pursuant to the Complaint Resolution Procedure for Public Service.

6.0 Fraud, Criminal Activity or Misuse of Funds

If it is determined that the applicant provided false information or that fraud, criminal activity or misuse of funds has occurred, the veteran or family member may be ineligible to receive assistance from the VAF for up to 10 years. Thurston County will seek to prosecute individuals where there is evidence of fraudulent claims for assistance.

7.0 Severability

If any provision of these policies and procedures or their application to any particular person or circumstance is held to be invalid, illegal or unenforceable, the remaining provisions and their application to other persons or circumstances shall not be affected.

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8.0 Emergency Amendment

While under a Thurston County declared emergency, the following exceptions may be applied to the above policy and procedures to assist Veterans and their families in financial distress:

8.1 Remove Limit on Access

Under 3.3.2 above, Veterans are only able to access the Veterans Assistance Fund (VAF) twice in their lifetime. This amendment waives that requirement in order to help more Veterans with financial hardships.

8.2 Increase Available Financial Support

Under 3.3 above, the total financial amount that a Veteran is eligible to receive is \$2,000 for a single Veteran and \$4,000 for a family. This provision will extend that amount to \$2,500 and \$4,500, respectively.

8.3 Allow for Internet Service Support

The current policy does not allow for financial assistance for internet-related bills. Because the internet is an essential resource in the COVID-19 environment due to social distancing and remote work and education, this emergency declaration allows for internet/cable financial assistance.

8.4 Veteran Responsibility

In order to access the extended resources this emergency amendment offers, the Veteran or family member must participate in other Lacey Veteran Hub programs. Considering the VAF is limited in resources, the intent of this rule is to help the Veteran/family member to become financially independent. The Hub can help with housing, employment, counseling, Veteran Administration claims, and many other important resources for Veterans and their families.