

Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment Program

The VFW's Concerns:

The Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program (VR&E) provides critical counseling and other adjunct services necessary to enable service-disabled veterans to overcome barriers as they prepare for, find, and maintain gainful employment. VR&E offers services on five tracks: re-employment, rapid access to employment, self-employment, employment through long-term services, and independent living.

The VFW views VR&E as a critical tool in promoting success for our veterans. It is at the forefront in ensuring veterans can remain in the workforce and stay employed in meaningful careers. Once a veteran receives a disability rating and cannot continue along their original path in the workforce, they must choose a different route for their career. This is where VR&E is critical, because it helps veterans remain employed by providing training and education for an alternative career.

An obstacle in utilizing the VR&E program is the 12-year period of eligibility. Counselors have the ability to waive this limitation, so it is not as much a barrier for acceptance as it is a barrier for veterans seeking to apply. The VFW commonly hears from veterans that they did not apply for VR&E because they did not think they were eligible due to the 12-year limitation. Service-disabled veterans must have the opportunity to use VR&E services at any point during their employable lives when service-connected disabilities interfere with their employment and when economic changes require them to learn new employable skills.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) must better explain VR&E and its uses before service members separate during the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). A consistent complaint from our members is they were unaware of the VR&E program and its eligibility requirements. Misinformation is spread by word of mouth, leading to misunderstanding about eligibility and how the program can be used. Some veterans are approved to use VR&E to attain advanced degrees, yet others are denied the same opportunity. The flexibility of VR&E is an integral part of the program, but not having standardized usage leads to confusion and resentment toward VA. A more robust discussion of the program within TAP classes would help mitigate some of the confusion surrounding VR&E, and may guide more veterans toward using it if there is more comprehensive information presented earlier.

The VFW's Solutions:

- Congress must pass H.R. 444, *Reduce Unemployment for Veterans of All Ages Act of 2019*, which would remove the 12-year limit on utilizing the VR&E program, so veterans can use it for life.
- Congress and VA must ensure transitioning veterans are engaged in TAP classes informing service members about VR&E, so there is complete knowledge of the program.