The educational benefit programs from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are critical for veterans and their families. In 2021, over 800,000 beneficiaries received more than $10.5 billion in funding from these programs. The vast majority of those funds were distributed through the Post–9/11 GI Bill.

Most veteran beneficiaries use these funds to attend public and nonprofit institutions. Continuing educational benefits, administering them effectively, and ensuring that beneficiaries can enroll in the highest-quality academic programs are vital components for ensuring that veterans, their spouses, and their dependents have the opportunity to succeed in higher education.

The Post–9/11 GI Bill is the VA’s largest educational benefit program

The VA provided over $9 billion in Post–9/11 GI Bill benefits in 2021, supporting over 600,000 veterans and their family members. Of the VA’s seven educational benefit programs, the Post–9/11 GI Bill is by far the largest in terms of funding and number of beneficiaries.

Figure 1. VA education benefits distributed through the Post–9/11 GI Bill

Note: Total beneficiary counts may include individuals who received funds from multiple programs, thus counting the same person multiple times. Beneficiary and funding totals include the Post–9/11 GI Bill, Montgomery GI Bill Active Duty, Montgomery GI Bill Selected Reserve, Reserve Educational Assistance Program, Survivors’ and Dependents’ Educational Assistance, and the Veterans’ Educational Assistance Program.


2 Veterans Benefits Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration Annual Benefits Report Fiscal Year 2021, 10.
The Post–9/11 GI Bill includes support for tuition and fees, a monthly housing allowance, and funds for books and supplies. Veterans are eligible if they served after September 10, 2001, and they may transfer a portion of their benefits to their spouse or children. The funds can be used for college and university degrees, vocational programs, distance education, and reimbursement of licensure or certification exams as well as on-the-job training and apprenticeship programs. At public institutions, benefits cover up to the full cost of tuition and fees. At private nonprofit and for-profit institutions, benefits cover up to $26,042.81 in tuition and fees for the 2022–23 academic year.

How do beneficiaries use the Post–9/11 GI Bill?

Most Post–9/11 GI Bill funds support beneficiaries who are enrolled in public and nonprofit institutions, with a smaller share going toward for-profit institutions. Of the 10 largest recipients of Post–9/11 GI Bill funds, four are public institutions, three are nonprofit, and three are for-profit.

Policy connections

Though most Post–9/11 GI Bill funds support students attending high-quality programs, policymakers and advocates have raised concerns about some programs that target veterans. Ensuring necessary protections for veterans will continue to be a top priority for policymakers. Colleges and universities must also continue their efforts to support veterans who are using the education benefits that they earned in service to the United States.

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