

# Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program (Chapter 35)

Since the passage of the original GI Bill in 1944, the federal government has continued to adopt and implement laws to help veterans transition to the civilian workforce. Through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), these programs offer a range of education and career training benefits for service members and their families to pursue postsecondary pathways. These programs:



**Create incentives** for service member retention and recruitment



**Reward and honor** individuals and their families for their service to the country



**Increase social mobility** and provide smoother transitions into civilian life

The Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program (DEA) is administered by the VA and offers educational benefits to eligible spouses and children of service members who died, are missing, or have a permanent and total service-connected disability.<sup>1</sup>

## HOW IT WORKS

Over \$2.6 billion in beneficiary payments were made to 265,505 survivors and dependents in fiscal year 2025 to support degree and certificate programs, apprenticeships, on-the-job training, and other forms of postsecondary education. The program provides up to 36 months of education benefits, paid directly to the student, which includes a monthly stipend of up to \$1,574 per month to help cover educational costs and expenses. The monthly stipend amount is lowered for students who enroll less than full time.

The federal government also mandates that DEA program beneficiaries receive the in-state tuition rate at public colleges and universities. Typically, spouses may use this benefit within 10 years from the date that the VA determines they are eligible. Children generally must be between the ages of 18 and 26 to use this benefit.

## DEA BY THE NUMBERS<sup>2</sup>



**265,505** survivors and dependents used DEA in FY 2025



**58.4%** increase in program beneficiaries, FY 2021–2025



**59.7%** of DEA beneficiaries enrolled in 4-year undergraduate programs in FY 2025



**26.7%** of DEA beneficiaries enrolled in 2-year college programs in FY 2025

<sup>1</sup> This program was originally passed as a part of the War Orphans' Educational Assistance Act of 1956. It was later renamed the Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program (DEA) and was expanded to include spouses and children of disabled service members. The program is codified in Title 38 U.S.C., Chapter 35.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration. (2025). *Annual Benefits Report Fiscal Year 2025: Education*. <https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/abr/docs/2025-education.pdf>.