

Chapter 16 – National Guard Transition Assistance Advisor

The National Guard has placed a Transition Assistance Advisor at each of the State Joint Forces Headquarters to serve as the statewide point of contact and coordinator for easy access to Department of Veterans Affairs benefits and to provide assistance in access to entitlements through the Military Health System (TRICARE). In May 2005, the partnership between the National Guard and Department of Veterans Affairs was solidified when the Chief of the National Guard Bureau signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the Under Secretary of Health and Under Secretary of Benefits at the Department of Veterans Affairs. The hallmark of this partnership is that VA has access to soldiers and families at unit events, and family programs as part of VA's outreach program targeted at returning soldiers and their families. The goal of the partnership is to educate all Guard members and their families about their entitlements and how to access the VA.

Transition Assistance Advisors (formerly State Benefits Advisors) assist National Guard members with access to care and enrollment at VA healthcare facilities near their home of record. They also assist National Guard members and their families in applying for other VA entitlements and benefits such as compensation and pension for disabilities, insurance, loan guarantee, vocational rehabilitation/employment (VRE) and educational benefits. Additionally, they work with other Joint Forces Headquarters staff members and Directors of State Family Programs to build a state coalition of support with VA and community organizations for Guard members and their families to access in their community. While the program was set up to primarily take care of Guard members and their families, Transition Assistance Advisors provide critical support and facilitate the integration for the delivery of VA and community services to all members of the active and reserve components.

State Coalition Model

The state coalition is a model that ties together the resources of the Department of Defense, Department of Veterans Affairs, National Guard, and state and local community resources in an effort to ensure Guard member and their families receive the benefits and support to which they are entitled. Unlike active component members who return to a specific military base with onsite support and services for the service member and family, reserve component members return to their communities and civilian employment. The state coalition provides a community based network of support of VA, state and community resources to assist Guard and Reserve members at the local level.

Role of the Transition Assistance Advisor

The role of the State Transition Assistance Advisor is to match the member in need with those who can provide the information or service. Transition Assistance Advisors:

- Provide information and assistance to Guard members and their families in understanding and obtaining VA benefits and services through the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Military Health System to meet specific needs of the service member.
- Coordinate with appropriate VA, TRICARE, Veteran Service Organizations, and other federal, state and community resources to provide critical information and assistance in obtaining services to meet the needs during the post-deployment period.
- Participate in the mobilization and demobilization process to brief/advise Guard members and their families on available VA entitlements and VA and community information on available resources.
- Assist in the coordination activities for the Post-Deployment Health Reassessment event provided as a screening evaluation for lingering physical and mental health conditions at 3-6 months post-deployment.

- Research and resolve issues associated with entitlements when Guard members/and or their family members encounter problems.
- Provide advice to the Joint Forces Headquarters and coordinates with Family Support Specialists, Employer Support Groups, regarding entitlements available through Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Labor and other veterans' entitlement and benefit programs.
- Highlight best practices through a monthly electronic TAA report as well as quarterly newsletters and monthly conference calls with VA experts.

Transitional Assistance Advisors can be reached through the National Guard Family Program website at: <http://www.guardfamily.org/Public/Application/ResourceFinderSearch.aspx>