

Students with Intellectual Disabilities Accessing Veterans Affairs (VA) Education Benefits for Survivors and Dependents (Chapter 35)

By Shelby Bates, Cate Weir & Imani Evans

Students use VA educational benefits infrequently, but they may be of interest to college programs as well as to students who are dependents of veterans. This brief provides basic information and resources that students and programs can use to take advantage of VA funding opportunities. VA funding opportunities vary from state to state, so check your state's resources as well for more state-specific information.

WHAT IS CHAPTER 35?

[Chapter 35 of the GI Bill, the Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program](#), provides education and training opportunities to:

- dependents of veterans who are permanently and totally disabled
- dependents of veterans who died while on Active Duty or as a result of a service-related injury

Of all the GI Bill educational benefit programs, the Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program (Chapter 35) is the most relevant to students with intellectual disability (ID).

Students who have attended non-degree comprehensive transition postsecondary (CTP) programs have used Chapter 35. Students can use Chapter 35 funds to cover the expenses of an "eligible program of education," such as:

- degree programs or career-training certificate courses
- non-college degree (NCD) programs leading to certification
- educational and career counseling, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training

An eligible program of education is broadly defined as "any curriculum or any

combination of unit courses or subjects pursued at an educational institution which is generally accepted as necessary to fulfill the requirements for the attainment of a predetermined education, professional, or vocational objective." CTP Programs will seek approval under the NDC category.

[This Veteran's Affairs webpage explains Chapter 35 benefits for NDC programs.](#)

To use Chapter 35 funds, the student must be approved for benefits and the program of education they wish to pursue must be approved by the Education Program in the VA office. Students can receive a monthly payment of up to \$1,265 per month for 36 months to cover educational expenses. These rates are adjusted annually ([check current rate](#)).

Students who meet the Chapter 35 benefits eligibility criteria must apply to the VA to access these benefits. If approved, the student will receive a Certificate of Eligibility (or Notice of Basic Eligibility) from the VA that documents that they are eligible for Chapter 35 benefits.

Eligible students must also find a program that has been approved by the VA as an "eligible program of study." There is a specific approval process that NDC programs, such as CTP programs, must go through for students to be allowed to use VA benefits to pay for attendance.

Because CTP programs must meet certain federal standards and are approved by the US Department of Education, a program that is already an approved CTP may have an advantage when applying for approval by the VA.

College programs for students with ID fall under the [Non-College Degree \(NCD\) program of study category](#) for VA approval purposes. NCD programs must submit the following to the VA in an application for program approval:

- program description
- course descriptions
- the program's satisfactory academic progress policy
- information regarding the certificate that is awarded upon completion

These requirements are similar to what is required in an application to be approved as a CTP program.

College programs for students with ID are relatively new and many people, including VA staff, are unfamiliar with them. To gain VA approval for your program, the college financial aid office and college program staff must collaborate to fully articulate the nature of the college program. The federal GI bill statutes and regulations require programs to have a defined 'educational' or 'vocational' objective. College program applications are commonly denied because they don't meet this requirement. Therefore, programs seeking Chapter 35 approval need to be clear in their application about the distinct educational and vocational focus of the program.

College programs for students with ID that are willing and able to go through the VA approval process will have another possible funding source to offer to their students, helping make the program more accessible and affordable for students. This approval may be worth seeking, particularly in areas of the country with large numbers of US Military veterans.

Chapter 35 GI Bill benefits offer one more funding strategy that college students with ID can pursue. Both the student and program must meet certain criteria to use these funds, but if all criteria are met, this benefit can offer strong financial support for college attendance.

RESOURCES

- [Information on Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance](#)
- [Information on Non-Degree College Programs](#)
- [Full text of Chapter 35 Code](#) (searchable version)
- [Full text of Chapter 35 Code](#) (broken out by chapters)

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