

# VETERAN CHATS

## ***SPECIALLY ADAPTIVE HOUSING (SAH) GRANT***

Morgan Brown, National Legislative Director

00:00 Hello everyone. My name is Morgan Brown and I'm the National Legislative Director for Paralyzed Veterans of America. Did you know that there are more

00:10 than more to the VA home loan than just the loan guarantee?

00:15 The VA has several home modification programs that provide additional help for veterans with serious service connected disabilities.

00:22 One of those programs is a Specially Adaptive Housing Program which helps disabled veterans and Servicemembers enjoy barrier free living.

00:31 That will be the focus of our conversation today and I'm pleased to be joined by the Chief of the Specially Adaptive Housing Grant Program, Mr. Jason Latona. Good afternoon Jason and thank you for being here today.

Jason Latona, Chief of the Specially Adaptive Housing Grant Program

Hey Morgan. Yeah, thanks so much for having me. it's a pleasure to be here.

Morgan Brown, National Legislative Director

00:49 Jason, you are well aware that many of our PVA members have used SAH Grants, but I'd like to gear our conversation today towards Members who haven't used or may even be unaware of the SAH Grant Program altogether. Is that okay?

Jason Latona, Chief of the Specially Adaptive Housing Grant Program

01:03 Absolutely.

Morgan Brown, National Legislative Director

01:05 So then I'll begin by asking you to explain what specially adaptive housing grants are.

Jason Latona, Chief of the Specially Adaptive Housing Grant Program

01:13 Sure, yeah, so um specially adapted housing benefit program awards monetary grants to provide physical adaptations to eligible veterans and service-members homes. So the overall intent of the program is to provide a better quality of home life for most severely disabled veterans.



Jason Latona, Chief of the Specially Adaptive Housing Grant Program

1:33 How these benefits take shape is unique to each situation we work with the individual veterans and their contractors that they select.

01:40to tailor design features to meet their individual needs. There are

01:46three different grant types offered to the SAH Program. The first is the most widely known it's called Specially Adaptive Housing Grant we call it the SAH grant.

01:56it's got a cap of little over \$101,000. This grant covers veterans with the most severe service connected disability, such as loss of use of multiple limbs blindness ALS or other terminal illnesses.

02:11The the second grant is called the special housing adaptations grant, also known as the SHA grant. This covers individuals who have service connected loss or loss of use of both hands or have certain severe burns.

02:26The current grant max for this fiscal year is a little over \$20,000 for the SHA grant and last, and not least, we have the temporary residence adaptation grant or the TRA grant.

02:39Is what we call it. This furnishes grant funds to adapt a family members home so, whereas the first two grants.

02:46are aimed towards veterans who own their own home or purchasing or building their own home. TRA is to adapt the family members home and to make changes such as areas is the entry, bathroom accessibility that type of thing.

02:59In the case of a veteran who's eligible for the larger SAH grant.

03:03This year veteran can get over \$40,000 if they're adapting a loved one's home and for veterans who are eligible for the SHA grant veterans can get over \$7,000 a little over \$7,000 for the TRA grant.

03:19Another positive side of this is that those amounts are not deducted from the larger grant amount, so a veterans eligible for the larger grants.

03:29When they go back to earn to adapt their own home, they will still have the complete grant amount available, even if they've used the TRA on a loved ones home.

Morgan Brown, National Legislative Director

03:40okay, so Jay you talked about.

03:43eligible veterans.

03:46What is the eligibility criteria for a service member or veteran in order to qualify for the SAH grant program?



Jason Latona, Chief of the Specially Adaptive Housing Grant Program

03:53eligibility for an SHA grant or any of the other adaptive grants within the VA begins with the nature and the degree of a veteran's service connected disability rating. So this is determined by determined by VBA's compensation service.

04:09So when a veteran submits a request for a disability compensation to VA, they'll receive a rating decision, and if the rating decision includes a disability that qualifies for one of our grants, we will get notified.

04:21And then, once we're notified we assign an agent to work with the veteran, schedule an initial interview, and that agent will work with them throughout the entire process. But, a few examples of qualifying conditions for an SAH grant would be loss or loss of use of

04:37let's say both legs, both arms, blindness in both eyes. There can also be certain ailments that qualify, such as ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease, which is also presumptively service connected.

04:53There are several other conditions that could be qualifying now a specific criteria for eligibility are also spelled out on our webpage and our web page is a very good resource for this information.

05:03Our web page can be found very easily by going to va.gov in the top right hand corner of the screen is a search box and you can type in specially adapted housing or SAH and that will take you directly to our website, which has more information on eligibility criteria.

Morgan Brown, National Legislative Director

05:23So, how would a service member or veteran then apply for the SAH Grant Program?

Jason Latona, Chief of the Specially Adaptive Housing Grant Program

05:29Well, the easiest ways to submit an application for SAH through their e-benefits account and just submit it electronically through e-benefits.

05:39Veterans can also submit a paper application by mailing it into the VA or dropping it in with one of their VBA representatives at the local VA Medical Center. Or they can also have their veteran service officer representative like PVA submit the application on their behalf.

05:57More information on how to submit the application and to download a copy of the application can also be found on our website.

Morgan Brown, National Legislative Director

06:04Okay, thank you Jay.

06:06So let's just assume then hypothetically so the veteran has so they've applied for the program they've been approved, could you kind of walk us through then just kind of like a quick, step by step, on what the veteran could expect to occur after that happens?



Jason Latona, Chief of the Specially Adaptive Housing Grant Program

06:24 Sure, within a day or two of us being notified that we have a veteran who's eligible for the grants we assign a specially adapted housing agent, we have about 200 SAH agents across the country.

06:38 That agent who's assigned to the case will reach out directly to the veteran and to their family and set up what we call our initial interview.

06:47 During the initial interview we describe the entire program, we talk about the feasibility of the property, they want to adapt or if they're planning on building a new home, we talked about the

06:58 general adaptations that we usually provide based upon a veteran's disability, we also talk about processes like how the veteran can find a builder,

07:08 what do they do once they find a builder and how to get bids and then that agent who's assigned will actually be with that veteran and their family throughout the entire grant process until the projects are completed.

07:22 Another interesting point about our grant is veterans can come back six times. Most of the time they'll be using the same specially adapted housing agent that they used on the first grant or they may be assigned to someone else.

07:35 But veterans can come down back six times throughout their lifetime up to the maximum grant amount that's available so.

07:43 For instance, if there's \$101,000 available for a veteran and they only need to use \$30,000 on the first usage, the balance is still available, and they can come back five individual times to dip into that balance until well until

07:59 they've exhausted their grant amount. So as their needs change, there's more opportunity to go back and make more adaptations.

Morgan Brown, National Legislative Director

08:07 Okay.

08:10 So, looking at the you're talking about modifications and whatnot perhaps for the benefit of our listeners, could you give us an idea of common adaptations that take place, and then I know that there are, in some cases there are restrictions and so maybe talk about 08:31 adaptations that veterans would usually pursue and then maybe some of the stuff that's prohibited that the grant cannot be used for.

Jason Latona, Chief of the Specially Adaptive Housing Grant Program

08:40 Sure, yeah gladly, um so the original intent to this program in 1947 is when conversation started happening about this adaptive housing program then of course it came into law in 1948.



08:52The original plan was for veterans who are suffering from paralysis and a lot of that maintains today.

09:00These specially adapted housing grant is

09:03considered a grant for wheelchair accessibility. So the most popular adaptations we deliver are usually a fully accessible bathroom and that will mean a roll in curbless shower with with grab bars.

09:18Thermostatic controls in the shower, temperature control. A roll under vanity, a comfort high toilet, grab bars, things like that and also oftentimes it's a pocket door or some kind of sliding door to ease accessibility.

09:32We also see a lot of requests to widen hallways and doorways for wheelchair accessibility so some can get in and out very easily. Then of course,

09:42ingress and egress. In the case of emergency, we will want to make sure that veterans can get in and out of the home or the caregiver can get them in and out of the home.

09:50So we want to make sure that there are safe ingress and egress. So we're installing ramps, we're replacing stairways with different types of ramp configurations.

09:58We also see things some very unique things like elevators. Do code compliance requirements or covenants a lot of times large ramps won't work, so we end up installing an elevator.

10:10Now these things, of course, take a lot of the grant funds, but the manufacturers usually work with us pretty well and we make sure we get good pricing on things like that stair lifts are another adaptation, we deliver.

10:24We also every year see new products that are coming out. Smart home technology is also a big item. Veterans who are

10:31dealing with blindness in both eyes eligible for our grant a lot of the veterans are pursuing different types of smart home technology, and we also help them provide that and work with the builders for those as well.

Morgan Brown, National Legislative Director

10:44Okay.

10:46Is there any specific information or unusual circumstances about the grant program that PVA Members might benefit knowing?

Jason Latona, Chief of the Specially Adaptive Housing Grant Program

10:57Well yeah so one of the things is a lot of veterans are working with nonprofits to actually have work done on their home. Veterans can leverage SAH grants for those engagements as well.



0011:09So if a veteran is working for a nonprofit maybe they're even having a home built a veteran is actually able to use their grant funds to apply it to the construction of that home.

11:18And that nonprofit can then use a grant funds to pay forward to another veteran's home.

11:24We also see like I mentioned a minute ago some pretty situations as far as ingress and egress goes, depending on the type of living situation, a veteran is in.

11:33There might not be space, to put it into types of ramps or ingress that we need to so there's a lot of cool different products out in the market like we spoke about elevators and platform lifts and things like that that veterans can use their grant for. I'll also say that.

11:50Sometimes, it can be tricky. Veterans have a hard time finding a builder either a builder who wants to bid on the job because they're not familiar with, especially about that housing grant process how that all works.

12:02And they're concerned they might not be able to be profitable, but also sometimes there just aren't a lot of builders in the area who understand accessibility.

12:10This is an area where organizations like PVA have a leg up with such a depth in the adaptation industry can help inform their veteran customers.

12:19What those requirements are, but especially adapted housing grant program and their SAH agent will work with them to help identify some builders who have completed projects in the past, and who are maybe more familiar with the process.

Morgan Brown, National Legislative Director

12:35All right, well, it all sounds interesting I know you talked about it before, but so veterans or other interested parties, maybe a family member that knows of a veteran that

12:48would benefit from this program. Where again would they go to find out more information about the SAH

Jason Latona, Chief of the Specially Adaptive Housing Grant Program

12:53program? The easiest place to go is just the log on to va.gov just search it in your browser.

13:02When you get to the landing page in the top right hand corner of the screen will be a search box, they can just type in specially adapted housing or SAH. It'll take you right there.

13:11Really, these days, you can type in SAH, Specially Adapted Housing in any browser directly, most of the time it'll take you to our website or to one of our fact sheets.

13:21I'd also say to that although we're focusing primarily on the specially adapted housing grant right now, the VA actually has five different specially adaptive housing grants that we offer.

13:31Three belong to the SAH program, but there are two others as well. One is called HISA or the Home Improvement and Structural Alterations



Jason Latona, Chief of the Specially Adaptive Housing Grant Program

13:41grant, and that is run by the prosthetics team in VHA. Another is run by the Veteran Readiness and Employment Program.

13:50And it's called an independent living track. So these are two other options, a veteran may not be eligible for specially adapted housing grant.

13:58They may be eligible for this other grants and they can find information on those grants in the same way they do with the with SAH going by the va.gov website typing in HISA or VR&E independent living in the search box and that will take you directly to their website for more information.

Morgan Brown, National Legislative Director

14:17Alright. Well Jason, I want to thank you again for being with us today to explain what this important program does and for everything you and your team do for our nation's veterans. We really appreciate it.

Jason Latona, Chief of the Specially Adaptive Housing Grant Program

14:29Thanks Morgan. Yeah and I have to tell you the heroes in this scenario are our veterans  
14:35who've suffered these disabilities, due to their service to our country. To them and their families. They're really the heroes here, as well as the specially adaptive housing agents who are in the field every day meeting with veterans to make sure they get the adaptations, they need.

Morgan Brown, National Legislative Director

14:51Alright and I also want to thank our listeners who are here with us today. Many PVA Members have benefited greatly from the specially adaptive housing grant program.

15:01The accessibility provided through this program greatly increases the quality of life for these veterans.

15:07And again, if you'd like to learn more about VA housing modification grant programs like SAH, please contact your PVA Service Officer or visit the VA website. This concludes today's podcast. have a wonderful day everyone.

