



VA to Provide Payments to Eligible Surviving Spouses

Quick action taken to resolve problem identified by Senate chairman

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WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced immediate actions to quickly identify and pay surviving spouses who are eligible to receive a one-time compensation or pension payment for the month of the veteran's death.

“This benefit payment is long overdue to many of our beneficiaries,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. “In these difficult economic times, it is imperative that we take aggressive action to fix this situation for the families of our veterans.”

Problems in VA's implementation of a change in law that was effective in 1997 resulted in some surviving spouses not receiving the veteran's compensation or pension payment for the month of death. This problem was recently brought to VA's attention by Sen. Daniel K. Akaka, chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Peake immediately directed the formation of a special task force to identify and pay the beneficiaries who never received the benefit or were inadvertently required to repay the money issued for the month of a veteran's death.

Surviving spouses most likely to be affected by this processing problem are those who never applied to VA for survivors' benefits following the death of a veteran.

The task force is in the process of reviewing VA's payment records for veterans who died after December 31, 1996, and who are survived by a spouse. The review will identify those to whom VA owes retroactive benefits for the month of the veteran's death. Current address information is being obtained for as many of these beneficiaries as possible.

VA will begin issuing retroactive payments to eligible surviving spouses at the end of this month. Payments will continue to be issued as additional unpaid beneficiaries are identified

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and VA is able to obtain current address information.

Because there are deceased veterans for whom VA does not have marital status information, a special Survivors' Call Center has been established for spouses who believe they may be entitled to this retroactive month-of-death benefit.

Surviving spouses are encouraged to contact the Survivors' Call Center at the toll-free telephone number, **1-800-749-8387**. Call center agents will assist surviving spouses in providing VA with the information needed to determine their eligibility.

The Call Center is open Monday through Friday from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm central standard time. Inquiries may also be submitted through the Internet at <http://www.vba.va.gov/survivorsbenefit.htm>

VA is aggressively changing its processing procedures to ensure this benefit is correctly paid to all surviving spouses in the future. VA's disability payment system will also be enhanced to automate the month-of-death payment for all eligible surviving spouses.