

Service Officers Report

By: Robert G. Mitchell

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VA Claims Backlog Numbers

Department of Veterans Affairs claims backlog numbers are being referenced by many members of Congress, and Veterans Service Officer's (VSO) recent Congressional testimony to the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees, and also in new reports associated with the Walter Reed fiasco and it's important to clarify what these vastly different numbers mean. There are roughly 400,00 VA rating cases pending; the total Compensation and Pension (C&P) cases pending is over 600,000; and finally, the total C&P and cases on appeal is currently about 700,000. as with seamless transition and other related issues, case backlogs are a continuing challenge and have been addressed by service organizations for many years.

Additional Life Insurance for Totally disabled Veterans

Congressman Walter B. Jones (N.C.) introduced "The Disabled Veterans Insurance Improvement Act" (H.R. 2026), that would increase the amount of supplemental life insurance available for totally disabled veterans. Currently veterans who are 100% disabled can obtain \$10,000 in life insurance, obtain a waiver for the premium and purchase up to \$20,000 more in coverage. The bill would increase the coverage available by \$20,000, making a total of \$50,000 of life insurance available to totally disabled veterans. Senator Daniel Akaka (Hawaii, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, has also introduced similar legislation in the U.S. Senate, "The Disabled Veterans Insurance Act" (S. 643), that increases life insurance available to totally disabled to \$40,000.

Mandatory Funding for VA Medical Care

BACKGROUND:The American legion, VFW, DAV, AMVETS, Blinded Veterans Association, JWV, Military Order of the Purple Heart, PVA, and VVA have joined forces in support of change VA medical care from discretionary to mandatory annual appropriations. The goal is to help stabilize VA medical care funding by using a formula based system similar to Social Security and Medicare. In a meeting with Representative Reynolds, members from the American Legion asked the congressman to consider mandatory funding to meet our medical care obligations to returning service-members. Representative Lynn C. Woolsey (CA), introduces H.R. 508 titled Bring the Troops Home and Iraq Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2007, which has 52 cosponsors in the House of Representatives. Section 301 asks for assured funding for veteran healthcare. In addition, Rep. Randy Kuhl (NY) has introduced a freestanding measure, H.R. 1382, entitled the Mandatory Funding for Veterans Act of 2007. **ACTION:** The American Legion has already met this year with some key Senators' staff members to discuss mandatory funding. **POSITION:** The American Legion will continue to seek legislation for assured funding in the 110th Congress and monitor this bill as it works its way through Congress.

Eligibility for Disability Pension

Veterans with low incomes who are permanently and totally disabled, or are age 65 and older, may be eligible for monetary support if they have 90 days or more of active military service, at least one day of which was during a period of war. (Veterans who entered active duty on or after September 8, 1980, or officers who entered active duty on or after October 16, 1981 may have to meet a longer minimum period of active duty). The veteran's discharge must have been under conditions other than dishonorable and the disability must be for reasons other than the veterans own willful misconduct

Payments are made to bring the veteran's total income, including other retirement or Social Security income, to a level set by Congress. Un-reimbursed medical expenses may reduce countable income for VA purpose.

VA provides this pension to the veteran or surviving spouse living at home, in a nursing home, or in an assisted living facility. For more details contact Robert Mitchell, Director of Saratoga County VSA at 518-884-4115.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

If I am enrolled in VA health care, what benefits will I receive?

You are eligible for inpatient and outpatient services, including preventive and primary care, rehabilitation, mental health and substance abuse treatment, home health, respite and hospice care, and prescription medications.

If I am covered by another insurance company, do I have to pay the deductibles when being treated by the VA?

No, VA does not require that you pay those charges. Many insurance companies will apply VA co-payment charges toward satisfaction of their annual deductible.

Will VA pay for care in private facilities?

Usually not, VA provides care in private facilities at VA expense when there is a contractual arrangement. If VA approves your care in advance or receives timely notification of an emergency room visit or admission, your private facility care may be covered.

Can I get dental care?

Dental benefits are limited to service connected dental conditions or to veterans who are permanently and totally disabled from service connected causes. For specifics, contact the Veterans Service Center at your local VA health care facility.

Can I get hearing aids and eyeglasses from VA?

Hearing aids and eyeglasses require a service connected disability rating of 10% or more. They are not provided to non-service connected veterans for naturally occurring hearing or vision loss. Additional information is available at your local Veterans Service Center.

What kinds of maternity services are provided?

VA provides maternity care but cannot provide care to a newborn child – even in the immediate aftermath of the birth. Other arrangements must be made for payment for the care of the child.

Frequently asked questions will be continued each month!

Patriot Express Loan

Patriot express initiative has new and enhanced programs and service for veterans and members of the military community wanting to establish or expand small businesses. Eligible military community members include:

- Veterans
- Service-disabled veterans
- Active-duty service members eligible for the military's Transition Assistance Program
- Reservists and national Guard members
- Current spouses of any of the above
- The widowed spouse of a service member or veteran who died during service or of a service-connected disability

For more information call Howard Wildove at 518-485-7647.