

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL



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The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at <http://www.benefits.va.gov/stpetersburg/>.

NEW BURIAL AND PLOT/INTERMENT ALLOWANCE RATES AND COST-OF-LIVING ADJUSTMENT (COLA)

Public Law 111-275, the Veterans' Benefits Act of 2010, increased to \$700 the burial/funeral allowance for Veterans who die while hospitalized at certain VA facilities and the plot/interment allowance for certain Veterans eligible for burial in a national cemetery. The law also authorized an annual COLA based on the percentage increase in the Consumer Price Index for the 12-month period ending on June 30. The first COLA for burial effective October 1, 2012, is 3.2%. Effective October 1, 2012, the \$700 burial/funeral and plot/interment allowance is increased to \$722.

For burial awards processed on or after October 1, 2012, VA may owe additional money to those beneficiaries paid at the pre-COLA maximum rate of \$700. VA is exploring the electronic identification and payment of these beneficiaries.

OVERVIEW OF CHANGES MADE BY PUBLIC LAW

112-154 On August 6, 2012, the President signed the "Honoring America's Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act of 2012," Public Law 112-154, a comprehensive legislative package providing for the needs of Veterans, their families, and survivors.

Hospital care and medical services for Veterans stationed at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina:

This section extends hospital care and medical services coverage for certain illnesses or conditions to eligible Veterans and family members who served on active duty or resided at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, for not fewer than 30 days during the period beginning on January 1, 1957, and ending on December 31, 1987. This provision took effect on August 6, 2012.

Temporary expansion of eligibility for specially adapted housing assistance for certain Veterans with disabilities causing difficulty with ambulating.

This section temporarily expands the eligibility for VA's specially adapted housing (SAH) assistance for certain Veterans with severe injuries that affect ambulation.

This provision affects Global War on Terror (GWOT) Veterans who received a permanent service-connected disability that is due to the loss or loss of use of one or more lower extremities, severely affecting the functions of balance or propulsion as to preclude ambulating without the use of braces, crutches, canes, or a wheelchair. It applies to Veterans who served and became permanently disabled on or after September 11, 2001. Expansion of the authority expires on September 30, 2013. This provision took effect on October 1, 2012.

Expansion of eligibility for specially adapted housing assistance for Veterans with vision impairment.

This section expands the eligibility for VA's adaptive housing assistance to Veterans with a lesser degree of vision impairment than previously required. The requirement that service-connected disability due to blindness in both eyes be permanently and totally disabling was removed. A Veteran is entitled to receive a special home adaptation if the Veteran's disability is due to blindness in both eyes, having a central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with use of a standard correcting lens. VA will consider an eye with a limitation in the fields of vision such that the widest diameter of the visual field subtends an angle no greater than 20 degrees as having a central visual acuity of 20/200 or less. This provision took effect on October 1, 2012.

Waiver of loan fee for individuals with disability ratings issued during pre-discharge programs.

This section waives the housing loan funding fee for Veterans rated eligible to receive compensation as the result of a pre-discharge review of existing medical evidence, such as service medical and treatment records. This provision took effect on August 6, 2012.

Authorization of use of electronic communication to provide notice to claimants for benefits under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

This section streamlines VA's duty to notify to allow VA to deliver Veterans Claims Assistance Act (VCAA) notices in the most effective means available, to include electronic communication or notification in writing.

This will allow VCAA notices to be provided with claim forms. It will eliminate the need to issue a VCAA notice on a subsequent claim while a previous claim is pending. The provision clarifies that VCAA notice is not required when the maximum benefit can be awarded. This provision took effect on February 2, 2013.

Duty to assist claimants in obtaining private records.

This section clarifies VA's duty to make "reasonable efforts to obtain relevant private records," stating that VA will make not less than two requests for private records unless the first attempt reveals that further efforts would be futile. It directs VA to prescribe regulations to encourage claimants to submit private medical evidence if such submission does not burden the claimant. It also makes clear that VA's assistance in obtaining private records is not required if VA can award the maximum benefit based on the evidence of record. This provision took effect on February 2, 2013.

Authority for retroactive effective date for awards of disability compensation in connection with applications that are fully-developed at submittal. This section allows up to a one-year retroactive effective date for awards of disability compensation based on fully-developed original claims. This provision takes effect on August 6, 2013 until August 6, 2015.

Modification of month-of-death benefit for surviving spouses of Veterans who die while entitled to compensation or pension. This section clarifies that a surviving spouse is entitled to a benefit for the month of a Veteran's death if, at the time of the Veteran's death, the Veteran was receiving disability compensation or pension. It also provides that the surviving spouse is entitled to a benefit for the month of the Veteran's death if the Veteran had a pending claim for compensation or pension that was subsequently granted. In the latter case, the month-of-death benefit would be payable as an accrued benefit. This provision took effect on August 6, 2012.

Expansion of eligibility for presidential memorial certificates to persons who die in the active military, naval, or air service. This section expands eligibility for presidential memorial certificates to individuals who died in the active military, naval, or air service. This provision took effect on August 6, 2012.

Assistance to Veterans affected by natural disasters. The section which pertains to automobiles and other conveyances for certain disabled Veterans and members of the armed forces is amended to allow VA to provide or assist in providing an eligible person with a second automobile or other conveyance if the previously purchased one that VA provided or assisted in providing is destroyed as a result of a natural or other disaster, through no fault of the eligible person, and a property insurer has not provided compensation for the loss. This provision takes effect on August 6, 2013, which means VA cannot pay a second automobile allowance prior to this date.

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

SUICIDE PREVENTION 1-800-273-8255

National Call Center for Homeless Veterans
1-877-4AID-VET (1-877-424-3838)

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437,
St. Petersburg, FL 33731 1-800-827-1000

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022
1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)
Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications
1-877-823-2378

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) 1-877-838-2778

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline
(medical care) - 1-877-222-8387

VA Health Revenue Service (information on amounts owed to VA Medical Centers) 1-866-793-4591

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) -
PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 1-800-669-8477

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) 1-800-733-8387 CHAMPVA inquiries:
PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023; CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024
Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025

National Cemeteries

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL 727-398-9426
6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 352-793-7740
6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 561-649-6489
4083 Lannie Rd, Jacksonville FL 904-766-5222
Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL 850-453-4108/4846
9810 State Hwy 72, Sarasota FL 877-861-9840
104 Marine St, St Augustine FL 352-793-7740

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 5109 Russell Rd
Quantico VA 22134-3903 1-800-697-6947

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility)
PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120
1-888-244-6711

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) - 711

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: www.va.gov

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) www.warms.vba.va.gov

VA Workload and Performance Reports;
<http://www.vba.va.gov/reports/>

St. Petersburg VA Regional Office:
<http://www.benefits.va.gov/stpetersburg/>

Property Management (sale of VA-repossessed homes): <http://va.equator.com>

Florida Dept of Veterans' Affairs: www.FloridaVets.org

Library of Congress (information on pending legislation) thomas.loc.gov