

VA to Provide Payments to Eligible Surviving Spouses

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has 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. 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. A special task force has been formed 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 has begin issuing retroactive payments to eligible surviving spouses. Payments will continue to be issued as additional unpaid beneficiaries are identified 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.

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.

There are many state and federal benefits and programs available to veterans and their dependents. To find out if you are eligible for any of these benefits, visit or call our office. We can and will assist you in completing all required application forms. You can also get information on the web from the Kings County Veterans Service Office website at www.countyofkings.com.

Joe Wright, retired Navy Master Chief Petty Officer, is the Veterans Service Officer for Kings County. Send your questions to the Veterans Service Office, 1400 West Lacey Blvd, Hanford, CA 93230, the phone number is 582-3211 ex. 2662 or email joe.wright@co.kings.ca.us.