

NEWS FOR VETERANS

VA Simplifies, Speeds Up Veteran Disability Claims

(NAPSA)—More than two million veterans receive monthly disability compensation payments from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and VA is making it easier than ever for veterans to apply for this popular benefit.

Nearly 10 percent of the nation's 24.9 million living veterans receive tax-free compensation ranging from about \$100 to \$2,100 a month, depending on the severity of the disability, for injury or illness traced to military service. A compensable disability may be due to accident, combat or disease, but not intentional misconduct.

Veterans now wait an average of seven months for a decision on a compensation claim. VA hopes to cut that wait in half this year through a number of changes.

Clear Language—VA now gives veterans clearly and concisely written decisions on their benefit applications. Claims adjudicators clearly explain the medical and legal criteria required for a higher evaluation when they evaluate applications at less than the maximum disability rate.

Internet Support—Information for veterans preparing a claim for disability compensation benefits is on the Internet at www.vba.va.gov/claims. Veterans may also apply for compensation online. Those unable to use the Internet may call 1-800-827-1000 toll free for assistance.

Military Bases—In many states and in some foreign countries, VA staff work at military bases to accept and rate claims as service-members leave military service.

Evidence Search—VA's authority to help veterans find evidence to support their claims was



restored recently by Congress.

Veterans' Help—About 50 percent of those who file claims receive some or all of their entire compensation request. Fewer than 10 percent appeal the VA's decision.

One of the common reasons for denial of claims is a lack of documentation. VA needs to find a connection between the veteran's health while in uniform and a chronic condition evident today. Veterans can help speed things up by providing private medical records when they file a claim.

VA can accept private medical records and "buddy testimonials" provided by the veteran. VA also will request copies of service medical files from federal archives when necessary, but this can take time.

Veterans who respond quickly to VA's letters or questions can make a big difference in moving their claims along quickly.

Veterans should also consider using the services of a recognized veterans group or local veterans services officer employed by their state veterans affairs department or their county government to help them prepare materials and file claims.