

ALS Association Statement on VA Report on Mishandled Claims from Veterans with ALS

November 21, 2018

On Wednesday, The ALS Association issued the following statement:

The ALS Association is deeply concerned that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has mishandled claims and deprived some veterans with ALS of the critical financial support they need, as reported in a [VA Office of Inspector General Report](#) released on November 20, 2018. Any delay in benefits for people with ALS is unacceptable.

We urge the VA to take immediate action to ensure that all veterans diagnosed with ALS, their spouses, and children receive the benefits they are entitled to - including circumstances where the veteran with ALS has passed away. We also urge Congress to provide oversight to ensure all benefits are provided retroactively and in the future to veterans with ALS and their families. The ALS Association plans to meet with the VA to ensure that new regulations, policies, and procedures are put in place.

In 2008, The ALS Association, working with key members of Congress and other advocates, successfully advocated that the VA issue [regulations](#) to establish a “presumption of service connection,” which recognizes that ALS was incurred or aggravated by a veteran’s service in the military. In addition, as a result of advocacy efforts, the VA also increased the minimum disability evaluation for veterans with service-connected ALS to 100 percent. Veterans with ALS may also be entitled to special monthly compensation levels (SMC levels) that may be higher than 100 percent.

Veterans with ALS and their families and survivors are eligible for an array of [“service connected” benefits](#) including monthly compensation and a full range of health care benefits. Benefits may also include insurance benefits for dependents, special adaptive housing grants, automobile grants, adaptive equipment, and aide and attendance allowance to pay for care providers.

The Inspector General report sampled claims between April and September 2017 and found that 45% of cases had erroneous decisions. The report indicated that errors in claims generally occurred because VA policy does not require notification about the availability of special monthly compensation (SMC) if a veteran with ALS has certain medical conditions including impaired speech, difficulty swallowing and breathing, and weakness in the arms and legs. The report can be viewed [here](#).

The ALS Association is proud to help provide support for veterans with ALS. If you are a veteran with ALS, you can always reach out to your [local ALS Association chapter](#) for more information or email alsinfo@alsanational.org. According to the Inspector General’s report, the VA will be further studying this issue and may contact individual beneficiaries (see p. 23). In the meantime, if you have specific questions about your VA benefits, we encourage you to contact the Paralyzed Veterans of America. You can find your local PVA chapter [here](#).