

# 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 [www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete](http://www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete).

**2008 VA HEALTH CARE ENROLLEE SURVEY** The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is conducting the 2008 update of its national VHA telephone Survey of Enrollees. The purpose of the survey is to provide information that is incorporated into annual VHA projections of enrollment, utilization, and expenditures, as well as into a variety of high level VHA budget and policy related analyses.

The survey provides critical and essential information on veteran utilization of health services, used in projecting the resources and services needed in VHA, and in developing the budget. The survey collects information on a random sample of 42,000 veterans enrolled in the VA system, who participate in an approximately 15-30 minute telephone survey. The survey was fully initiated during the week of September 22, 2008. Interviewing will continue for 10 weeks.

Veterans support in this survey will help ensure that the best care possible is provided, where it is needed, when it is needed, and by whom it is needed. Previous survey reports are available at <http://www.va.gov/vhareorg/reports.htm>.

**JACKSONVILLE NATIONAL CEMETERY DEDICATED** (VA News Release) WASHINGTON – On September 21, 2008, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) dedicated its newest national cemetery in Jacksonville, FL. The cemetery, currently being constructed, is expected to begin burials in January 2009. The cemetery is located north of the Jacksonville International Airport and approximately five miles from Interstate 295 along Lannie Road. For information on the Jacksonville National Cemetery, call the cemetery office at (904) 358-3510. To make burial arrangements at the time of need, call the national cemetery scheduling office at (800) 535-1117.

**PENSACOLA CLINIC RELOCATED** The Pensacola VA Outpatient Clinic is now the Pensacola Joint Ambulatory Care Clinic (JACC), operated by VA in conjunction with the Department of Defense (DoD), and located at 790 Veteran Way, Pensacola FL 32507. The toll-free telephone number is 1-866-927-1420 (limited calling area) and the commercial number is 850-912-2500. The clinic has been operating at the new location since August 25, 2008.

**VA ANNOUNCES CHANGES TO THE DISABILITY RATING SCHEDULE FOR TRAUMATIC INJURIES AND BURN SCARS** (VA News Release) WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced changes in the way VA will evaluate traumatic brain injuries (TBI) and burn scars for purposes of determining the appropriate level of compensation veterans receive for these injuries.

VA has revised the Disability Rating Schedule in light of current scientific and medical knowledge in order to provide VA employees with more detailed and up-to-date criteria for evaluating and compensating veterans with these injuries.

Two groups of veterans may be affected by these changes. The first group includes veterans who will be awarded disability compensation for TBI and burn injuries in the future. The second group includes veterans already receiving compensation for these injuries whose disabilities are reevaluated under the new criteria.

**VA ESTABLISHES ALS AS A PRESUMPTIVE COMPENSABLE ILLNESS** (VA News Release) WASHINGTON – Veterans with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) may receive badly-needed support for themselves and their families after the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that ALS will become a presumptively compensable illness for all veterans with 90 days or more of continuously active service in the military.

The decision was based primarily on a November 2006 report by the National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine (IOM) on the association between active-duty service and ALS. The report, titled "Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis in Veterans: Review of the Scientific Literature," analyzed numerous previous studies on the issue and concluded that "there is limited and suggestive evidence of an association between military service and later development of ALS."

ALS, also called Lou Gehrig's disease, is a neuromuscular disease that affects about 20,000 to 30,000 people of all races and ethnicities in the United States, is often

relentlessly progressive, and is almost always fatal. ALS causes degeneration of nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord that leads to muscle weakness, muscle atrophy, and spontaneous muscle activity. Currently, the cause of ALS is unknown, and there is no effective treatment.

The new interim final regulation applies to all applications for benefits received by VA on or after September 23, 2008, or that are pending before VA, the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, or the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit on that date. VA will work to identify and contact veterans with ALS, including those whose claims for ALS were previously denied, through direct mailings and other outreach programs.

#### **VA CLARIFIES VOTER REGISTRATION REGULATIONS**

(VA News Release) WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it has clarified its policy on assisting veterans' voter registration activities, with particular focus on inpatients and residents of VA community living centers, domiciliaries and patients with limited access to community voter registration resources.

VA will welcome state and local election officials and non-partisan groups to its hospitals and outpatient clinics to assist VA officials in registering voters at VA facilities. Such assistance, however, must be coordinated by those facilities in order to avoid disruptions to patient care.

Voluntary Service Program Managers at each of VA's 153 hospitals will be responsible for implementing the new policy, and for providing timely and accurate voting information to veterans cared for at their facilities.

[Note: the deadline to register in Florida to vote in the November 2008 general election is October 6.]

**VETERANS DAY TEACHER GUIDE** The 2008 Veterans Day teacher resource guide is now available. The guide includes information on the history and meaning of Veterans Day, youth volunteer opportunities, facts and figures, and a classroom activity guide. There are even a coloring book, and maze and word scramble games for children. The guide, along with a Veterans Day poster, is being distributed on CD-ROM to principals at 118,000 schools nationwide. To view or download a copy of the guide, visit the Resources section of the Veterans Day Web site at <http://www.va.gov/opa/vetsday/index.asp>.

#### **IMPORTANT DATES IN OCTOBER**

- October 1** payments for September due
- October 6** last day to input change of address or establish direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 10-31-2008 payments
- October 13** Federal holiday – Columbus Day
- October 15** last day to file a 2007 tax return to receive an economic stimulus payment
- October 17** last day to change or cancel direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 10-31-2008 payments
- October 31** – payments for October due

#### **VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:**

##### **SUICIDE PREVENTION 1-800-273-8255**

**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) -

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 1-800-733-8387

##### **National Cemeteries**

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL 727-398-9426  
6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 33513 352-793-7740  
6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 33467 561-649-6489  
4083 Lannie Rd, Jacksonville FL 32218 904-358-3510  
Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL 850-453-4108/4846  
9810 State Hwy 72, Sarasota FL 877-861-9840

**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) Unit** - Chicago VA Regional Office 1-800-829-4833

##### **INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:**

**VA Web Site:** [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)

**VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS)** [www.warms.vba.va.gov](http://www.warms.vba.va.gov)

**St. Petersburg VA Regional Office:**

[www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete](http://www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete)

**Property Management (sale of VA-repossessed homes):** [www.ocwen.com](http://www.ocwen.com)

**Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs:** [www.floridavets.org](http://www.floridavets.org)

**"Florida Vets First:"** [www.FloridaVetsFirst.com](http://www.FloridaVetsFirst.com)

**Library of Congress (information on pending legislation)** [thomas.loc.gov](http://thomas.loc.gov)