Department of Veterans Affairs

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News Release

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Secretary Seeks Fast Track to Process Claims
Focus on 200,000 Veterans Expected to File Claims under New Agent Orange Presumptives over Next Two Years

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today an aggressive new initiative to solicit private sector input on a proposed "fast track" Veterans' claims process for service-connected presumptive illnesses due to Agent Orange exposure during the Vietnam War.

"This will be a new way of doing business and a major step forward in how we process the presumptive claims we expect to receive over the next two years," Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Eric K. Shinseki said. "With the latest, fastest, and most reliable technology, VA hopes to migrate the manual processing of these claims to an automated process that meets the needs of today's Veterans in a more timely manner."

Over the next two years, about 200,000 Veterans are expected to file disability compensation claims under an historic expansion of three new presumptive illnesses announced last year by Secretary Shinseki. They include Veterans who have Parkinson's disease, ischemic heart disease and B-cell leukemias.

In practical terms, Veterans who served in Vietnam during the war and who have one of the illnesses covered by the "presumption of service connection" don't have to prove an association between their medical problems and military service. This "presumption" makes it easier for Vietnam Veterans to access disability compensation benefits. Vietnam Veterans are encouraged to submit their claims as soon as possible to begin the important process of compensation.

Along with the publication of proposed regulations for the three new presumptives this spring, VA intends to publish a formal request in *Federal Business Opportunities* for private-sector corporations to propose automated solutions for the parts of the claims process that take the longest amount of time. VA believes these can be collected in a more streamlined and accurate way.

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Development involves determining what additional information is needed to adjudicate the claim, such as military and private medical records and the scheduling of medical examinations.

With this new approach, VA expects to shorten the time it takes to gather evidence, which now takes on average over 90 days. Once the claim is fully developed and all pertinent information is gathered, VA will be able to more quickly decide the claim and process the award if granted.

The contract is expected to be awarded in April with proposed solutions offered to VA within 90-days. Implementation of the solution is expected within 150 days.

"Veterans whose health was harmed during their military service are entitled to the best this nation has to offer," added Secretary Shinseki. "We are undertaking an unprecedented modernization of our claims process to ensure timely and accurate delivery of that commitment."

Last year, VA received more than one million claims for disability compensation and pension. VA provides compensation and pension benefits to over 3.8 million veterans and beneficiaries. Presently, the basic monthly rate of compensation ranges from $123 to $2,673 to Veterans without any dependents.

Disability compensation is a non-taxable, monthly monetary benefit paid to Veterans who are disabled as a result of an injury or illness that was incurred or aggravated during active military service.

For more information about disability compensation, go to www.va.gov. Additional information about Agent Orange and VA's services and programs for Veterans exposed are available at www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange.

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