

ALS - In an efforts to keep veterans informed of their expanding eligibility for benefits, the VA sent notifications to veterans with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) for disability compensation benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), outreach letters were sent to 1,864 veterans and survivors last week. VA has since been contacted by a small number of these Veterans who do not have ALS, but were mistakenly sent the ALS outreach letter. VA is immediately reviewing the individual claims files for all the recipients of this letter to identify those who received the notification in error. VA employees are personally contacting these individuals to ensure they understand the letter should not be confused with a medial diagnosis of ALS, explain why they mistakenly received the letter and express VA's sincere apologies for the distress caused by this unfortunate and regrettable error. Recipients of this letter are encouraged to call VA at 1-800-827-1000 with any questions.

ATTACHMENT A

VA Statement Relating to ALS Notification Letters Sent to Veterans and their Survivors:

Last September the Secretary of Veterans Affairs made amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) a presumptively compensable illness for all Veterans with 90 days or more of continuous active service in the military. As a result, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) can now pay disability compensation to Veterans with ALS. Their survivors are also eligible for VA benefits.

In an effort to provide Veterans this new and much-needed support, VA sent notification letters to Veterans with ALS advising them of their potential eligibility for disability compensation benefits. On August 13, 2009, VA sent outreach letters to 1,864 Veterans and survivors across the country. Unfortunately, VA made a coding error and a number of Veterans who should not have received this letter did. The Department is reviewing individual claims files for all the recipients of this letter to identify those who received it by mistake.

VA employees are calling Veterans and survivors to ensure that they understand the purpose of the letter, explain why they mistakenly received the letter, and express VA's sincere apologies for the distress caused by this unfortunate and regrettable error.

Q and A:

How many Veterans have been affected?

- Approximately one third of the letters VA sent were miscoded.

Will VA be issuing a formal apology?

- Yes, the Department is calling all affected Veterans and will also be issuing them a formal letter of apology.

Why did Veterans who do not have ALS get letters?

- VA used data and information from its data base to identify Veterans diagnosed with ALS or who had filed a claim for ALS, but were not currently receiving disability compensation benefits for the condition. However, as a result of problems in the codes VA used to identify these Veterans, VA sent the letter to some Veterans who do not have ALS.

What is VA doing to correct the mistake?

- We are working to identify the specific problems that caused the misidentification of Veterans records. We will ensure any future data extracts for similar outreach purposes are properly formulated and independently validated to prevent these types of problems in the future.

Will Veterans be reimbursed for medical expenses incurred?

- VA will reimburse Veterans who incurred expenses for medical evaluations conducted as a result of receiving an erroneous notification.

What will VA do to prevent this from happening again?

- As a result of this incident, VA is creating a more rigorous process that includes thorough and careful screening of the data, comprehensive review and approval process that will include involvement from our stakeholders before release of notifications letters