



STATE OF ALABAMA  
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
P.O. BOX 1509  
MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA 36102-1509  
TELEPHONE (334) 242-5077  
FAX (334) 242-5102



Rear Admiral W. Clyde Marsh, USN, (Ret.)  
Commissioner

## NEWS BRIEFS

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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Contact: Robert Horton  
Public Information Officer  
(334) 242-5084

### **Veterans and dependents receive Cost-of-Living increase in compensation and pension benefits**

The Department of Veterans Affairs included a 5.8 percent Cost-of-Living (COLA) increase in disability and pension benefit payments that millions of veterans and dependents will receive at the end of December.

President Bush authorized the increase that matched the increase in Social Security rates by signing into law the Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2008.

The amount of compensation and pension benefits is dependent on the severity of the disability, income level of the veteran or dependent and other factors. The VA estimates it will provide disability compensation and pension benefits to over 3 million veterans in 2009.

The new rates apply to benefits earned in December.

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### **VA opening 31 new Outpatient Clinics**

Veterans will have easier access to world-class health care under a Department of Veterans Affairs plan to open 31 new outpatient clinics in 16 states to include Alabama's Monroe County.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake said the VA is committed to provide the best health care to the men and women who have served their nation.

With 153 VA hospitals and 745 community-based clinics, VA operates the largest integrated health care system in the country. The VA currently operates 10 community-based outpatient clinics in Alabama.

The new VA clinic in Monroe County will become operational by late 2010 according to the federal VA.

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### **Women Veterans Coordinators available for assistance**

The Veterans Benefits Administration has assigned Women Veterans Coordinators in all VA Regional Offices to assist women veterans with development of claims.

These coordinators have been trained to assist in handling claims for gender-specific conditions and claims based on sexual trauma. Women veterans who file claims based on sexual trauma receive priority care for personal trauma counseling at a VA Medical Center even if they do not have a VA disability rating.

For more information, call the VA Regional Office in Montgomery, Alabama at 1-800-827-1000.

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### **Compensation for Gulf War Veterans**

Gulf War veterans who suffer from chronic disabilities resulting from undiagnosed illnesses may receive VA disability compensation benefits.

The undiagnosed illnesses must have appeared after August 2, 1990 during a veteran's active duty in Southwest Theater of Operations or at any time since then through December 31, 2006.

For assistance in applying for Gulf War related VA benefit programs contact your county veterans service office.

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## **VA financial assistance available to specially adapt eligible disabled veterans' homes**

Certain eligible disabled veterans may be entitled to a grant from the VA for assistance in acquiring a home specially adapted to their needs or for adaptations to their home.

The VA may approve a grant for the actual cost, up to a specified limit for adaptations to a veteran's residence, which are determined by the VA to be reasonably necessary.

The grant also may be used to assist veterans in acquiring a residence, which already has been adapted with special features for the veteran's disability.

Veterans must be permanently disabled due to certain service-connected conditions to be eligible for this benefit. For more information on this program, please visit my office.

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## **Free assistance is available to apply for VA benefits**

Veterans have certain benefits that they have earned as a result of their honorable service in the military.

Additionally, certain survivors and dependents of veterans may also be entitled to VA benefits; however, these benefits are only available to those who apply for them.

The Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs has dedicated and qualified veteran service officers and assistants located in Alabama's 67 counties that provide free and professional benefits counseling and claims service.

To find the location and phone number to a county veterans service office, go to [www.va.state.al.us/vso.htm](http://www.va.state.al.us/vso.htm).