
Vets Commission Calls For Uniform Disability Rating System for Veterans

Washington D.C., October 3, 2007—The Veterans' Disability Benefits Commission today released its report: *Honoring the Call to Duty: Veterans' Disability Benefits in the 21st Century* calling for the Departments of Defense (DoD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) to use a consistent and uniform policy for rating disabilities of U.S. veterans.

“For almost three years, the Commission has studied the existing systems and found disparities that directly impact the benefits that our veterans receive,” said Commission Chair, James Terry Scott, retired Army Lt. Gen. “It is important that all those who have served our Nation receive an appropriate, equitable and consistent benefit for their sacrifices.”

The Commission's report provides 113 recommendations that would help to ensure that the benefit fairly compensates the service-disabled veterans and their families, as well as help them live with dignity as they rehabilitate and reintegrate into civilian life. The Commission identified 14 priority recommendations, among them include:

- Using an updated VA Schedule for Rating Disabilities (VASRD) that would include the evaluation and rating of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental disorders and of traumatic brain injury (TBI) in both the DoD and VA and would be revised to account for new diagnostic classifications, medical criteria and medical advances;
- Identify specific criteria for PTSD rating and establish a holistic approach to PTSD that couples compensation, treatment, and vocational assessment. Re-evaluation should occur every 2-3 years to ensure that treatment is effective;
- Initially increasing compensation rates up to 25 percent to take into account the quality of life and other non-work related effects of severe disabilities on veterans and their families;
- Eliminating the ban on concurrent receipt for all military retirees and for all service members who are separated from the military due to service-connected disabilities, as well as eliminating the SBP/DIC offset for survivors of retirees and in-service deaths, with priority for the more severely disabled veterans.
- Expediting compatible information systems for VA and DoD;
- Realigning the disability evaluation process so that the Military Services determine fitness for duty and service members who are found unfit for duty are referred to VA for disability rating;

- Improving the claims cycle by establishing a simplified and expedited process using best practices and maximizing use of information technology;

At the start of its work, the Commission developed 31 key research questions, which helped define the scope of its mission and enabled the Commission to arrive at essential findings on the appropriateness of the benefits.

During the course of its comprehensive investigation, the Commission conducted eight fact-finding site visits throughout the country and heard from thousands of veterans, advocates and family members regarding the current veterans' disability system. In addition, the Commission employed the Institute of Medicine to review the medical and functional criteria used to rate impairments and other related areas and the CNAC Corporation to provide an overall analysis of the disability and survivors benefits.

"We thank all of the veterans and their family members who took the time to share their experiences with us," said Scott. "Your contributions not only helped us understand the day-to-day trials you face but allowed us the opportunity to meet a few of the brave men and women who have defended our country with great personal sacrifice.

"On behalf of all of the members, it has been an honor to serve on this Commission. It is our obligation, as a grateful Nation, to show our appreciation and take care of our disabled veterans. Through this Commission, we were given the opportunity to ensure that we do it right for all generations of veterans—now and into the future."

There are almost 25 million U.S. veterans currently worldwide—more than 19.5 million are wartime veterans.

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The Veterans' Disability Benefits Commission is an independent, bipartisan body created by Public Law 108-136 and appointed by the President and leaders of Congress, mandated to study the benefits and services intended to compensate and assist veterans and their survivors for disabilities and deaths attributable to military service. The Commission conducted a thorough, objective, and impartial analysis of the full range of programs that are intended to meet the needs of disabled veterans and survivors.