

Questions and Answers: CF Members/Veterans with ALS

The Honourable Jean-Pierre Blackburn, Minister of Veterans Affairs and State (Agriculture) announced with the ALS Society of Canada on October 15, 2010, that Veterans with ALS will now be eligible for increased benefits.

Veterans living with ALS will now be able to obtain the help and support they need and deserve, faster than ever before. These Veterans will now be able to receive benefits such as disability benefits, treatment and home care support - services which are greatly needed by Veterans and their families affected by this devastating disease.

The following *Questions and Answers* have been developed to aid in the understanding of the new benefits. Veterans with ALS are encouraged to contact VAC or the Royal Canadian Legion if they have any questions when applying for VAC benefits, as they will be able to provide guidance and assistance to Veterans concerning the application process.

Q1. I am a CF member/Veteran with ALS. How will this new policy benefit me?

Members/Veterans with ALS will now have access to a wide range of services, including rehabilitation services, financial benefits, disability compensation, health benefits and home care. They will receive care and benefits when they require them.

VAC is sensitive to the rapid progression of this devastating disease and the urgent requirement for action. With these new measures, we will be able to assist members/Veterans living with ALS and their families quickly.

Q2. My spouse/common-law partner was a CF member/Veteran and they passed away (either recently or some time ago) from ALS before this new policy was implemented. Am I eligible for survivors' benefits under the new policy?

Surviving spouses/common-law partners may apply for survivor benefits in cases where the CF member/Veteran would have been eligible. All eligible survivors/surviving dependants will receive the benefits to which they are entitled which may include disability compensation, financial benefits, vocational assistance and the Veterans Independence Program.

Q3. My spouse/common-law partner is a CF member/Veteran with ALS. Are there benefits for me under the new policy?

As the spouse/common-law partner of a Veteran, you may be eligible for vocational assistance if it is determined that the Veteran is totally and permanently incapacitated, or unable to work at his or her full potential.

Q4. I am a CF member/Veteran with ALS who was in the reserves and did not serve full-time. Am I eligible for benefits under the new VAC policy?

VAC offers a wide range of services and benefits to Veterans, CF members, certain wartime civilians, and their families. If you fit into any of these categories and you suffer from ALS, irrespective of how long you have served and whether you served full or part-time, you may be eligible for VAC benefits.

- Q5. My parent/family member was a CF member/Veteran with ALS. Are there benefits for me under the new policy?

If a CF member/Veteran is deceased there must be an eligible surviving spouse, common-law partner or dependant to qualify for disability benefits.

If a survivor or surviving dependant was not living with the member/Veterans at the time of death, other criteria must be met to qualify for benefits. If the surviving dependant is a child over the age of 18, other criteria must be met to qualify for benefits.

There may be eligibility for the Educational Assistance Program for children of deceased Veterans. If you are currently following a course of instruction, and you are the child of a deceased Veteran, you are encouraged to contact VAC (toll-free at 1-866-522-2122 or visit one of our District Offices across the country) regarding eligibility to such program.

- Q6. I am a CF member/Veteran with ALS who was denied services in the past. Should I reapply at this time?

VAC will review previously denied claims in the context of the updated policy and, depending on the evidence, previous claims may now be approved. If you have not already been contacted by VAC or the Bureau of Pensions Advocates, you are encouraged to contact VAC (www.vac-acc.gc.ca), the Royal Canadian Legion (http://legion.ca/ServiceBureau/overview_e.cfm) or any other Veterans' organisation for assistance.

- Q7. VAC denied my request for benefits prior to my diagnosis with ALS. Now my diagnosis of ALS has been confirmed. Should I reapply?

If you now have a confirmed diagnosis of ALS, you are encouraged to reapply for benefits. Your application will now be reviewed in the context of the updated policy.

- Q8. I received a letter/phone call some time ago stating that VAC was waiting guidance to decide on my claim/appeal for benefits. Do I continue to wait or do I have to re-file the paperwork?

You are encouraged to contact your VAC or Bureau of Pension Advocate representative or a representative from another Veterans' organisation of your choice to determine what is required. You may not need to re-file any paperwork.

- Q9. I was awarded 100 per cent disability for other conditions. Should I still apply for my ALS?

Although you may already hold 100 per cent disability assessment, if you suffer from ALS and do not currently receive VAC benefits related to this condition, you are encouraged to apply to ensure that all your needs are met. You may be eligible for additional benefits relating to your ALS condition.

- Q10. I have been diagnosed as having a Motor neuron disease. Will I qualify for VAC benefits under the new policy for ALS?

Motor neuron disease includes a number of medical conditions, one of which is ALS. The new policy applies only to confirmed diagnoses of ALS and not all motor neuron diseases. However, you are still encouraged to submit an application as you may still qualify for VAC benefits specific to your claimed condition.

- Q11. How can I apply for VAC benefits?

Given the wide variety of benefits and services that may be available, you are encouraged to contact VAC, toll-free at 1-866-522-2122; visit one of our District Offices across the country; contact the Royal Canadian Legion (http://legion.ca/ServiceBureau/overview_e.cfm), or any other Veterans' organization for further information and assistance.

- Q12. How can I apply for VAC Disability Benefits?

You must first obtain and complete a VAC application for Disability Benefits. You may obtain an application one of four ways: Download an application from our website (www.vac-acc.gc.ca); call us toll-free at 1-866-522-2122; visit one of our District Offices across the country; or contact the Royal Canadian Legion.

A VAC Pension Officer will be pleased to assist you in preparing your application. You can also receive help from representatives of Veterans' organizations such as the Royal Canadian Legion (http://legion.ca/ServiceBureau/overview_e.cfm).

- Q13. I live out of the country and there are not any ALS Society offices here. I also can no longer speak, how do I go about obtaining benefits?

You may download a VAC application for Disability Benefits from our website (www.vac-acc.gc.ca). Once you mail your completed application form to VAC, a VAC Pension Officer will be pleased to assist you in preparing your claim through correspondence.

General inquiries to Veterans Affairs may be directed to the following e-mail address information@vac-acc.gc.ca. Important Note: For security reasons, please do not send personal or confidential information via e-mail. E-mails are not secure and can be observed by a third party while in transit.

If you reside in:

United States: 1-888-996-2242 (toll-free)

United Kingdom, Germany,
France, or Belgium: 00-800-996-22421 (toll-free)

Any other country: 613-996-2242 (collect)

- Q14. What paperwork do I need to have when applying for VAC benefits, i.e., such as discharge and/or service papers, and how can I obtain a copy of my Service Medical Records?

You must provide VAC with medical documentation from a qualified medical practitioner, which includes a confirmed medical diagnosis of ALS, presented with a detailed medical/clinical report confirming the diagnosis. We will provide you the required form with your application for your doctor to complete.

VAC will assist you in obtaining a copy of your Service Medical Records. Once you mail or drop off your completed application form and medical documentation to VAC, a VAC Pension Officer will order your service records, review your application, medical reports and service documents, and let you know if there is anything else required to complete your claim.

- Q15. If my spouse/common-law partner was a CF member/Veteran and has since passed from ALS do I need a death certificate or other paperwork when applying to the VAC for benefits?

Yes, you must submit a copy of the death certificate as well as medical reports or other records that document the cause of death. For more information, call us toll-free at 1-866-522-2122.

- Q16. How long will it take to approve my claim?

VAC will fast track ALS claims as it does with all applications submitted by a CF member/Veteran who is suffering from a serious illness or financial distress or who has urgent health needs. A dedicated team has been created to handle benefits and services for members/Veterans with ALS, and the applications are being processed immediately.

- Q17. How can I check the status of a pending claim?

You can check the status of your claim by calling VAC, toll-free, at 1-866-522-2122
(English) or 1-866-522-2022
(French).

- Q18. How is my disability assessed and why do some members/Veterans receive different levels of compensation?

The Table of Disabilities is the instrument used by VAC to assess the degree of medical impairment caused by an entitled disability. Assessments are provided when entitled conditions are considered medically stable.

A disability assessment takes into consideration both medical impairment and the condition's impact on one's quality of life. A medical impairment rating is provided for the physical loss of, or deviation in the normal functioning of a particular body system. The quality of life rating, provided by the client, is the functional loss in which the entitled disability has impacted on personal relationships, recreational and community activities. The medical impairment rating and the quality of life rating are then combined to determine the disability assessment.

Each disability is rated on its own merit in accordance with the appropriate table and criteria within the Table of Disabilities. As the disease progresses, it can be reassessed as needed.

Q19. What is the disability compensation rate for a CF member/Veteran suffering from ALS?

In general, disability assessments which direct the rate of compensation, range from 0-100 per cent and are determined based on the severity of a medical condition. For Veterans with ALS, the level of assessment and compensation would be based on the extent of symptoms and impairment, loss of function and quality of life impacts. Reassessment can be done at anytime if the symptoms increase or new symptoms develop.

Q20. Is VAC disability compensation considered taxable income?

No. Both Disability Pensions and Disability Awards are tax-free payments.

Q21. Will my disability benefit be paid as a lump sum or a monthly pension?

Most applications for disability benefits received are processed as a Disability Award, and therefore paid as a lump sum. However, there may be some cases where claims will still be ruled under the *Pension Act*, such as World War II and Korean War Veterans, and clients re-applying who have already received an unfavourable ruling. These individuals would then receive a monthly pension. A VAC Pension Officer can advise about these situations.

Q22. Will this new policy allow CF members/Veterans to obtain full health coverage for ALS treatment?

Yes. Once entitled to a Disability Benefit, CF members/Veterans will be able to obtain full health coverage as it relates to their ALS.

Veterans approved for rehabilitation services may also have access to the Public Service Health Care Plan which provides health care coverage for themselves and their families.

Q23. Will I be eligible to receive financial help for the purchase of a van with a wheelchair ramp?

When a CF member/Veteran becomes eligible for Disability Benefits, they will be able to obtain full health coverage as it relates to that condition. Eligibility for treatment benefits associated with ALS may include access to vehicle modifications, where there is a health-related need for such modifications. The CF member/Veteran may be eligible for modifications of a motor vehicle (for example a ramp, a raised roof or lowered floor), or for the costs of factory-installed modifications, if the client is paying extra to have these features included on a new vehicle.

Q24. Will I be eligible to receive financial help for home modifications as a result of requiring special equipment?

When a CF member/Veteran becomes eligible for Disability Benefits, as a result of ALS, they also become eligible for treatment benefits associated with ALS. Eligibility for treatment benefits associated with ALS may include access to home adaptations needed to assist an individual to remain independent in the home, if the individual has a health-related need for the adaptations.

Q25. Are there also rehabilitation benefits?

Yes. Veterans are eligible for rehabilitation services including medical, psycho social and vocational rehabilitation. Vocational assistance can be provided to the spouse or common-law partner if it is determined that the Veteran is totally and permanently incapacitated or unable to work at his or her full potential.

Q26. Does the new VAC policy cover assistance in the home?

Yes. By receiving eligibility as a result of ALS, the CF member/Veteran becomes eligible for a wide variety of home care services and benefits such as personal care, nursing care, housekeeping, grounds maintenance and home modifications. If home care is no longer an option, the CF member/Veteran may be eligible for long term care.

Q27. What does VAC provide for Veteran burial?

VAC can provide assistance for funeral and burial when a Veteran's death results from a pensioned or awarded disability, or when there are insufficient funds in the Veteran's estate. The Last Post Fund administers the Funeral and Burial Program on VAC's behalf. As not all

Veterans qualify for funeral and burial assistance, contact the Last Post Fund for more information at 1-800-465-7113 or by visiting the Web site at www.lastpostfund.ca.