

up sessions, program meetings, resource materials and follow-up activities).

4. *Institutional Capacity*: Proposed personnel and institutional resources should be adequate and appropriate to achieve the program or project's goals. The narrative should demonstrate proven ability to handle logistics. Proposal should reflect the institution's expertise in the subject area and knowledge of the country. Proposals should demonstrate the institutional record of successful exchange programs, including responsible fiscal management and full compliance with all reporting requirements for past Agency grants as determined by USIA's Office of Contracts. The Agency will consider the past performance of prior recipients and the demonstrated potential of new applicants.

5. *Project Evaluation*: USIA is results-oriented. Proposals should include a plan to evaluate the activity's success, both as the activities unfold and at the end of the program. USIA recommends that the proposal include a draft survey questionnaire and/or plan for use of another measurement technique (such as focus group) to link outcomes to original project objectives. Award-receiving organizations/institutions will be expected to submit intermediate reports after each project component is concluded or quarterly, whichever is less frequent.

6. *Follow-on Activities*: Proposals should provide a plan for continued follow-on activity (without USIA support) which ensures that USIA supported programs are not isolated events.

7. *Cost-effectiveness/cost sharing*: The overhead and administrative components of the proposal, including salaries and honoraria, should be kept as low as possible. All other items should be necessary and appropriate. Proposals should maximize cost-sharing through other private sector support as well as institutional direct funding contributions.

#### Notice

The terms and conditions published in this RFP are binding and may not be modified by any USIA representative. Explanatory information provided by the Agency that contradicts published language will not be binding. Issuance of the RFP does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the Government. The Agency reserves the

right to reduce, revise, or increase proposal budgets in accordance with the needs of the program and the availability of funds. Awards made will be subject to periodic reporting and evaluation requirements.

#### Notification

Final awards cannot be made until funds have been appropriated by Congress, allocated and committed through internal USIA procedures.

Dated: December 11, 1997.

**Robert L. Earle,**

*Deputy Associate Director for Educational and Cultural Affairs.*

[FR Doc. 97-32815 Filed 12-17-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 8230-01-M

## DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

### Cost-of-Living Adjustments and Headstone or Marker Allowance Rate

**AGENCY:** Department of Veterans Affairs.

**ACTION:** Notice.

**SUMMARY:** As required by law, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is hereby giving notice of cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) in certain benefit rates and income limitations. These COLAs affect the pension, parents' dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC), and spina bifida programs. These adjustments are based on the rise in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) during the one-year period ending September 30, 1997. VA is also giving notice of the maximum amount of reimbursement that may be paid for headstones or markers purchased in lieu of Government-furnished headstones or markers in Fiscal Year 1998, which began on October 1, 1997.

**DATES:** These COLAs are effective December 1, 1997. The headstone or marker allowance rate is effective October 1, 1997.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Paul Trowbridge, Consultant, Compensation and Pension Service (213B), Veterans Benefit Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW., Washington, DC 20420, (202) 273-7218.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** Under 38 U.S.C. 2306(d), VA may provide reimbursement for the cost of non-Government headstones or markers at a

rate equal to the actual cost or the average actual cost of Government-furnished headstones or markers during the fiscal year preceding the fiscal year in which the non-Government headstone or marker was purchased, whichever is less.

Section 8041 of Pub. L. 101-508 amended 38 U.S.C. 2306(d) to eliminate the payment of the monetary allowance in lieu of a VA-provided headstone or marker for deaths occurring on or after November 1, 1990. However, in a precedent opinion (O. G. C. Prec. 17-90), VA's General Counsel held that there is no limitation period applicable to claims for benefits under the provisions of 38 U.S.C. 2306(d).

The average actual cost of Government-furnished headstones or markers during any fiscal year is determined by dividing the sum of VA costs during that fiscal year for procurement, transportation, and miscellaneous administration, inspection and support staff by the total number of headstones and markers procured by VA during that fiscal year and rounding to the nearest whole dollar amount.

The average actual cost of Government-furnished headstones or markers for Fiscal Year 1997 under the above computation method was \$109. Therefore, effective October 1, 1997, the maximum rate of reimbursement for non-Government headstones or markers purchased during Fiscal Year 1998 is \$109.

### Cost-of-Living Adjustments

Under the provisions of 38 U.S.C. 5312 and section 306 of Pub. L. 95-588, VA is required to increase the benefit rates and income limitations in the pension and parents' DIC programs by the same percentage, and effective the same date, as increases in the benefit amounts payable under title II of the Social Security Act. The increased rates and income limitations are also required to be published in the **Federal Register**.

The Social Security Administration has announced that there will be a 2.1 percent cost-of-living increase in Social Security benefits effective December 1, 1997. Therefore, applying the same percentage and rounding up in accordance with 38 CFR 3.29, the following increased rates and income limitations for the VA pension and parents' DIC programs will be effective December 1, 1997:

TABLE 1.—IMPROVED PENSION

## Maximum annual rates

- (1) Veterans permanently and totally disabled (38 U.S.C. 1521):  
 Veteran with no dependents, \$8,665  
 Veteran with one dependent, \$11,349  
 For each additional dependent, \$1,476
- (2) Veterans in need of aid and attendance (38 U.S.C. 1521):  
 Veteran with no dependents, \$13,859  
 Veteran with one dependent, \$16,542  
 For each additional dependent, \$1,476
- (3) Veterans who are housebound (38 U.S.C. 1521):  
 Veteran with no dependents, \$10,591  
 Veteran with one dependent, \$13,275  
 For each additional dependent, \$1,476
- (4) Two veterans married to one another, combined rates (38 U.S.C. 1521):  
 Neither veteran in need of aid and attendance or housebound, \$11,349  
 Either veteran in need of aid and attendance, \$16,542  
 Both veterans in need of aid and attendance, \$21,734  
 Either veteran housebound, \$13,275  
 Both veterans housebound, \$15,202  
 One veteran housebound and one veteran in need of aid and attendance, \$18,465  
 For each dependent child, \$1,476
- (5) Surviving spouse alone and with a child or children of the deceased veteran in custody of the surviving spouse (38 U.S.C. 1541):  
 Surviving spouse alone, \$5,808  
 Surviving spouse and one child in his or her custody, \$7,607  
 For each additional child in his or her custody, \$1,476
- (6) Surviving spouses in need of aid and attendance (38 U.S.C. 1541):  
 Surviving spouse alone, \$9,288  
 Surviving spouse with one child in his or her custody, \$11,082  
 For each additional child in his or her custody, \$1,476
- (7) Surviving spouses who are housebound (38 U.S.C. 1541):  
 Surviving spouse alone, \$7,101  
 Surviving spouse and one child in his or her custody, \$8,895  
 For each additional child in his or her custody, \$1,476
- (8) Surviving child alone (38 U.S.C. 1542), \$1,476

**Reduction for income.** The rate payable is the applicable maximum rate minus the countable annual income of the eligible person. (38 U.S.C. 1521, 1541 and 1542).

**Mexican border period and World War I veterans.** The applicable maximum annual rate payable to a Mexican border period or World War I veteran under this table shall be increased by \$1,963. (38 U.S.C. 1521(g)).

**Parents' DIC**

DIC shall be paid monthly to parents of a deceased veteran in the following amounts (38 U.S.C. 1315):

Table 2

**One parent.** If there is only one parent, the monthly rate of DIC paid to such parent shall be \$412, reduced on the basis of the parent's annual income, according to the following formula:

For each \$1 of annual income		
The \$412 monthly rate		
Shall be reduced by	Which is more than	But not more than
\$0.00 .....	0	\$800
.08 .....	\$800	9,857

No DIC is payable under this table if annual income exceeds \$9,857.

**One parent who has remarried.** If there is only one parent and the parent has remarried and is living with the parent's spouse, DIC shall be paid under Table 2 or under Table 4, whichever shall result in the greater benefit being paid to the veteran's parent. In the case of remarriage, the total combined annual income of the parent and the parent's spouse shall be counted in determining the monthly rate of DIC.

**Two parents not living together.** The rates in Table 3 apply to (1) two parents who are not living together, or (2) an unmarried parent when both parents are living and the other parent has remarried. The monthly rate of DIC paid to each such parent shall be \$297, reduced on the basis of each parent's annual income, according to the following formula:

Table 3

For each \$1 of annual income		
The \$297 monthly rate		
Shall be reduced by	Which is more than	But not more than
\$0.00 .....	0	\$800
.06 .....	\$800	900
.07 .....	900	1,100
.08 .....	1,100	9,857

No DIC is payable under this table if annual income exceeds \$9,857.

**Two parents living together or remarried parents living with spouses.** The rates in Table 4 apply to each parent living with another parent; and each remarried parent, when both parents are alive. The monthly rate of DIC paid to such parents will be \$278 reduced on the basis of the combined annual income of the two parents living together or the remarried parent or parents and spouse or spouses, as computed under the following formula:

Table 4

For each \$1 of annual income		
The \$278 monthly rate		
Shall be reduced by	Which is more than	But not more than
\$0.00 .....	0	\$1,000
.03 .....	\$1,000	1,500
.04 .....	1,500	1,900
.05 .....	1,900	2,400
.06 .....	2,400	2,900
.07 .....	2,900	3,200
.08 .....	3,200	13,250

No DIC is payable under this table if combined annual income exceeds \$13,250.

The rates in this table are also applicable in the case of one surviving

parent who has remarried, computed on the basis of the combined income of the parent and spouse, if this would be a greater benefit than that specified in Table 2 for one parent.

*Aid and attendance.* The monthly rate of DIC payable to a parent under Tables 2 through 4 shall be increased by \$221 if such parent is (1) a patient in a nursing home, or (2) helpless or blind, or so nearly helpless or blind as to need

or require the regular aid and attendance of another person.

*Minimum rate.* The monthly rate of DIC payable to any parent under Tables 2 through 4 shall not be less than \$5.

TABLE 5.—SECTION 306 PENSION INCOME LIMITATIONS

- (1) Veteran or surviving spouse with no dependents, \$9,857 (Pub. L. 95-588, section 306(a)).
- (2) Veteran with no dependents in need of aid and attendance, \$10,357 (38 U.S.C. 1521(d) as in effect on December 31, 1978).
- (3) Veteran or surviving spouse with one or more dependents, \$13,250 (Pub. L. 95-588, section 306(a)).
- (4) Veteran with one or more dependents in need of aid and attendance, \$13,750 (38 U.S.C. 1521(d) as in effect on December 31, 1978).
- (5) Child (no entitled veteran or surviving spouse), \$8,057 (Pub. L. 95-588, section 306(a)).
- (6) Spouse income exclusion (38 CFR 3.262), \$3,144 (Pub. L. 95-588, section 306(a)(2)(B)).

TABLE 6.—OLD-LAW PENSION INCOME LIMITATIONS

- (1) Veteran or surviving spouse without dependents or an entitled child, \$8,628 (Pub. L. 95-588, section 306(b)).
- (2) Veteran or surviving spouse with one or more dependents, \$12,440 (Pub. L. 95-588, section 306(b)).

### Spina Bifida Benefits

Section 421 of Pub. L. 104-204 added a new chapter 18 to title 38, United States Code, authorizing VA to provide certain benefits, including a monthly monetary allowance, to children born with spina bifida who are natural children of veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam era. Pursuant to 38 U.S.C. 1805(b)(3), spina bifida rates are subject to adjustment under the provisions of 38 U.S.C. 5312, which provides for the adjustment of certain VA benefit rates whenever there is an increase in benefit amounts payable under title II of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 401 et seq.). Effective December 1, 1997, spina bifida monthly rates are as follows:

Level I: \$205

Level II: \$715

Level III: \$1,226

Dated: December 10, 1997.

**Hershel W. Gober,**

*Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs.*

[FR Doc. 97-32986 Filed 12-17-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 8320-01-P

### DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

#### Wage Committee, Notice of Meetings

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), in accordance with Pub. L. 92-463, gives notice that meetings of the VA Wage Committee will be held on:

Wednesday, January 14, 1998, at 2:00 p.m.

Wednesday, February 18, 1998, at 2:00 p.m.

Wednesday, March 25, 1998, at 2:00 p.m.

The meetings will be held in Room 246, Department of Veterans Affairs Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420.

The Committee's purpose is to advise the Under Secretary for Health on the development and authorization of wage schedules for Federal Wage System (blue-collar) employees.

At these meetings the Committee will consider wage survey specifications, wage survey data, local committee reports and recommendations, statistical analyses, and proposed wage schedules.

All portions of the meetings will be closed to the public because the matters considered are related solely to the internal personnel rules and practices of the Department of Veterans Affairs and because the wage survey data considered by the Committee have been obtained from officials of private business establishments with a guarantee that the data will be held in confidence. Closure of the meetings is in accordance with subsection 10(d) of Pub. L. 92-463, as amended by Pub. L. 94-409, and 5 U.S.C. 552b(c)(2) and (4).

However, members of the public are invited to submit material in writing to the Chairperson for the Committee's attention.

Additional information concerning these meetings may be obtained from the Chairperson, VA Wage Committee (05), 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420.

Dated: December 11, 1997.

By Direction of the Secretary.

**Heyward Bannister,**

*Committee Management Officer.*

[FR Doc. 97-32987 Filed 12-17-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 8320-01-M