

COMPENSATION FOR VETERANS WITH ALS (LOU GEHRIG'S DISEASE)

Veterans with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), and widows of veterans who died of ALS, can receive financial compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The VA announced on Sept. 23, 2008 that ALS would become a presumptive illness for all veterans with 90 days or more of continuously active service in the military.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs at the time, Dr. James B. Peake, based his decision primarily on a November 2006 report conducted by the National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine (IOM) on the association between active-duty service and ALS. The report titled *Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis in Veterans: Review of the Scientific Literature*, analyzed numerous previous studies on the issue and concluded that "there is limited and suggestive evidence of an association between military service and later development of ALS." Peake noted that: "Veterans are developing ALS in rates higher than the general population and it was appropriate to take action."

ALS, also called Lou Gehrig's disease, is a neuromuscular disease that affects about 20,000 people in the United States, is often relentlessly progressive, and is almost always fatal. ALS causes degeneration of nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord that leads to muscle weakness, muscle atrophy, and spontaneous muscle activity. Currently, the cause of ALS is unknown, and available treatments only slow the progression of the disease but do not halt it. "ALS is a disease that progresses rapidly, once it is diagnosed," Secretary Peake explained. "There simply isn't time to develop the evidence needed to support compensation claims before many veterans become seriously ill. My decision will make those claims much easier to process, and for them and their families to receive the compensation they have earned through their service to our nation."

Please contact the Shawano County Veterans Service Office at 715-526-9183 if you have any questions or know a veteran who suffers from ALS or a veteran's widow whose husband passed away from ALS.