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# News Release

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## **Nearly 11,000 Survivors to Receive Retroactive Payments by New Years *Search for Other Eligible Survivors Continues***

WASHINGTON -- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has identified nearly 11,000 surviving spouses of deceased veterans who will receive a lump-sum payment before the New Year to correct an error in their VA benefits. Also documented were more than 73,000 who had been previously paid. VA officials are still tracking down eligible survivors.

“I am pleased that our task force working to correct this problem has been able to identify this first group this week,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. “We understand the difference these funds can make for these surviving spouses, especially during the holiday season.”

Payments will be released to these survivors on Dec. 29. The total value of the payments is about \$24 million.

At issue is a 1996 federal law that makes a surviving spouse eligible to receive the veteran’s VA compensation or pension benefit for the month of the veteran’s death. VA failed to properly implement that law in all cases.

Most likely to have been affected by this problem are surviving spouses who never applied for VA survivors’ benefits following the death of a veteran. Eligible for the payment are surviving spouses of veterans who died after Dec. 31, 1996. The Department doesn’t have current addresses for many of them, which makes the process of contacting them difficult.

VA has established a special Survivor Call Center (1-800-749-8387) for spouses who believe they may be eligible for this retroactive benefit. The Call Center is open Monday through Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., Central Standard Time. Inquiries may also be submitted through the Internet at <http://www.vba.va.gov/survivorsbenefit.htm>.

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