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Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA): Pension Programs

Within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) administers three veteran pension programs. These programs provide monthly benefits to wartime service veterans discharged under *other than dishonorable* conditions or to their survivors who meet specific age or disability requirements and have limited incomes. Two of VA's main VBA pension programs are needs-based, unlike VA's disability compensation program.

- The Veterans Pension makes payments to certain disabled, low-income veterans. In FY2023, the program paid an average annual benefit of \$14,211 to 153,568 beneficiaries, or \$2.18 billion total.
- The Survivors Pension (also known as the Survivor Benefit Pension, or SBP) makes payments to certain low-income spouses or children of deceased veterans. In FY2023, the program paid an estimated average annual benefit of \$10,772 to about 109,364 beneficiaries, or \$1.18 billion total.

A third pension program is available to veterans who received the Medal of Honor. Unlike the other two pension programs, it is not a needs-based or income-based program. The only requirement is having received the Medal of Honor. There are fewer than 70 living Medal of Honor recipients who qualify for this pension.

This report discusses the eligibility criteria and current benefit levels of these programs. In addition, the report provides data on the number of pension beneficiaries and the average annual benefit amounts for FY2019-FY2023.

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Overview

Within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) administers pension programs for certain low-income veterans, their surviving spouses, and dependent children.¹ This report lays out the qualifications for each program and how the Maximum Annual Pension Rates (MAPRs) are determined.

The VA's two main VBA pension programs were created by the Veterans and Survivors Pension Improvement Act of 1978 (P.L. 95-588):

1. The Veterans Pension makes payments to certain disabled, low-income veterans.
2. The Survivors Pension (also known as the Survivor Benefit Plan, or SBP) makes payments to certain low-income surviving spouses and dependent children of deceased veterans.

To qualify for either program, a veteran must have become eligible for payments on or after January 1, 1979, served during wartime, and been discharged under *other than dishonorable* conditions. A qualifying individual's combined income and assets must total less than the net worth limit. If a claimant meets these qualifications, the amount received is then determined by the number of dependents the veteran has and whether he or she qualifies for additional assistance.

The third VBA-administered pension program mentioned in this report is for Medal of Honor recipients. To receive this benefit, a veteran must have been awarded the Medal of Honor from a U.S. President. It is not an income or needs-based program.

Difference Between VA and Department of Defense Pensions

VA pensions are needs-based monthly² benefits paid to certain wartime veterans or their survivors, either of whom must demonstrate financial need and meet certain net worth requirements. The active duty service requirement must include at least one day during a period of war.³

The Department of Defense pension is a retirement program for eligible active duty and reservist personnel that is generally based on a minimum of 20 years of active service.

Pension Beneficiaries

Table 1 shows the number of pension beneficiaries and the average annual benefit amount by beneficiary category for FY2019-FY2023. In FY2023, 153,568 veterans received Veterans Pension benefits, and 109,364 survivors received Survivors Pension benefits.

¹ The military retirement program is also referred to as a pension. For additional information, see CRS Report RL34751, *Military Retirement: Background and Recent Developments*, by Kristy N. Kamarck.

² Payments for some VA pension programs may be made less frequently than monthly if the amount of the annual benefit is less than 4% of the MAPR to a veteran under Title 38, Section 1521(b), of the *U.S. Code*. See 38 C.F.R. 3.3(a)(3) and (b)(4).

³ 38 U.S.C. §1521(j).

Table I. Number of VA Pension Beneficiaries and Average Annual Benefit Amount by Category, FY2019-FY2023

In U.S. Dollars

Fiscal Year	Veterans Pension		Survivors Pension	
	Number of Beneficiaries	Estimated Average Annual Individual Benefit Amount	Number of Beneficiaries	Estimated Average Annual Individual Benefit Amount
2019	239,114	\$12,538	170,037	\$8,976
2020	219,587	\$12,717	159,083	\$9,333
2021	194,712	\$12,683	139,864	\$9,386
2022	173,969	\$13,270	125,740	\$9,986
2023	153,568	\$14,211	109,364	\$10,772

Source: CRS, based on data from VA, *Annual Benefits Report*, various years, <https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/abr/>.

Notes: Recipients of the Medal of Honor Pension are not included in these data. Unlike the Veterans Pension and Survivors Pension, the Medal of Honor Pension is not income-based. The Medal of Honor Pension is paid in addition to either disability compensation or the Veterans Pension benefit.

Veterans Pension

Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible for the Veterans Pension benefit, a veteran must meet eligibility criteria related to the individual's period of service and military discharge status, disability or age, and income and net worth.

Period of Service Requirement

A veteran must meet military service requirements, including having served during a period of war, to be eligible for the Veterans Pension benefit.⁴ Specifically, a veteran must have been discharged from military service under conditions *other than dishonorable* and must meet one of the following conditions:⁵

- started on active duty before September 8, 1980, and served at least 90 days on active duty with a minimum of one day during wartime;⁶
- started on active duty after September 7, 1980, and served at least 24 months or served the full period called or ordered to active duty with at least one day during wartime;⁷ or

⁴ 38 C.F.R. §3.2. See also CRS Report RS21405, *U.S. Periods of War and Dates of Recent Conflicts*, by Barbara Salazar Torreon.

⁵ 38 U.S.C. §1521(j). If a veteran were unable to complete the active duty service requirement, there are exemptions that may permit the veteran to be eligible for the Veterans Pension. These exemptions are stated in Title 38, Section 5303A, of the *U.S. Code*.

⁶ 38 C.F.R. §3.12a.

⁷ 38 C.F.R. §3.12a. This provision applies only to enlisted personnel, not officers.

- was an officer and started on active duty after October 16, 1981, and served at least 24 months with at least one day during wartime.⁸

Exceptions to the Period of Service Requirement

A veteran may qualify for the Veterans Pension if he or she had not met the period of service requirement so long as the separation from service was due to a service-connected disability or fell under one of the exemptions listed in Title 38, Section 5303A, of the *U.S. Code* (see “Period of Service Requirement”).⁹ If the veteran meets one of these exemptions and is receiving or is entitled to receive compensation or retirement pay for a service-connected disability, he or she may be eligible to receive the Veterans Pension.¹⁰

Period of War for Pension Eligibility

All military service is classified as either wartime or peacetime. The type of service may affect a veteran’s eligibility for certain VA benefits. Only veterans with wartime service qualify for VA’s Veterans Pension.¹¹

Periods considered *wartime* for the purposes of veterans’ benefits, listed in **Table 2**, are defined in law and designated by Congress or presidential declaration. The qualifying periods of war for this benefit are the Mexican border period, World War I, World War II, the Korean conflict, the Vietnam era, and the Persian Gulf War.¹² A former servicemember who served during the periods listed in **Table 2** is not required to have served in a combat zone for the service to be considered wartime.

⁸ 38 C.F.R. §§3.12a, 3.3(a)(3). This provision only applies to those officers who had not served on active duty prior to October 17, 1981.

⁹ 38 U.S.C. 5303A (b)(3)(G)(ii-iv). Such exemptions include discharge from service due to a physical or mental condition that is not considered a disability but prevents the servicemember from performing his or her duties, discharge from service due to a preexisting condition that VA does not determine to be service connected, and an involuntary discharge or release from service due to a reduction in force.

¹⁰ 38 U.S.C. §§1521(j)(2), 1541(a), 1542(a), and 5303A.

¹¹ 38 U.S.C. §1521.

¹² 38 C.F.R. §3.3 (a)(3).

Table 2. Congressionally Designated Wartime Periods

Name	Beginning Date	Ending Date
Mexican Border Period ^a	May 19, 1916	April 5, 1917
World War I	April 6, 1917	November 11, 1918 ^b April 1, 1920 ^c
World War II ^d	December 7, 1941	December 31, 1946
Korean Conflict ^e	June 27, 1950	January 31, 1955
Vietnam Era	For veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam ^f	November 1, 1955
	For veterans who served outside the Republic of Vietnam ^g	August 5, 1964
Persian Gulf War ^h	August 2, 1990	Ongoing

Source: 38 U.S.C. §§101, 1501 and 38 C.F.R. §3.2. See also CRS Report R47299, *U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: Who Is a Veteran?*

Notes:

- a. 38 U.S.C. §101(30).
- b. 38 U.S.C. §101(7)(A) and 38 C.F.R. §3.2(c). If a veteran was in service between November 11, 1918, and July 2, 1921, and also served on active duty between April 5, 1917, and November 12, 1918, the veteran's service is considered part of the World War I period.
- c. 38 U.S.C. §101(7)(B). This time period is for veterans who served with the U.S. military forces in Russia.
- d. 38 U.S.C. §101(8) and 38 C.F.R. §3.2(d). If the veteran was in service on December 31, 1946, with continuous service before July 26, 1947, this service is considered part of the World War II period.
- e. 38 U.S.C. §101(9).
- f. 38 U.S.C. §101(29)(A).
- g. 38 U.S.C. §101(29)(B).
- h. 38 U.S.C. §§101(33), 1501(4). The Persian Gulf War period includes the post-9/11 Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. The ending date has not yet been established and will end only on the date prescribed by presidential proclamation or law.

Times not designated as periods of war by Congress or the President, such as the period between the end of the Vietnam era and beginning of the Persian Gulf War, are considered to be peacetime. Three U.S. military operations occurred during this span of peacetime that are not periods of war:

1. Lebanon (1982),
2. Grenada (1983), and
3. Panama (1989).

Age or Disability Requirement

Veterans ages 65 and older meet the age requirement for the pension regardless of disability status (or disability rating). A veteran under 65 years of age can be eligible for the pension if he or she meets the disability requirement as outlined below.¹³

To meet the disability requirement, the veteran must be permanently and totally disabled due to a *nonservice-connected* injury, illness, or combination thereof that is not a result of his or her own

¹³ 38 C.F.R. §3.3(a)(3)(vi)(A)-(B).

willful misconduct.¹⁴ If a veteran is either partially or completely disabled by a *service-connected* injury, illness, or combination, the individual would generally be eligible for disability compensation, a separate VA program with its own eligibility and benefit structure.¹⁵

A veteran would meet the disability criteria if he or she:

- is a patient in a nursing home for long-term care due to a disability;
- is unemployable due to a disability reasonably certain to continue throughout life;
- is suffering from a disability that will continue throughout life and that makes it impossible for the veteran to maintain a gainful occupation; or
- is suffering from a disease or disorder that has been determined to permanently and totally disable the person.¹⁶

To determine if a veteran is totally disabled, VBA may combine the disability ratings for service-connected disabilities with the disability ratings for nonservice-connected disabilities. However, if the veteran’s service-connected disabilities have contributed to making him or her eligible for the pension benefit, the veteran will receive the greater of the pension benefit or the VA disability compensation benefit. A veteran cannot receive both disability compensation and a VBA pension benefit.

Net Worth Limit

No benefit is paid to a veteran who has *significant wealth*, defined as a net worth large enough that it would be reasonable for part of that wealth to be used for the veteran’s maintenance.¹⁷ The net worth limit is increased by the same percentage as the Social Security cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) each year.¹⁸

There was no set net worth limit or definition of *significant wealth* until October 2018, when the VA established an annual net worth limit, a 36-month look-back period, and a five-year penalty period.

- **Net worth limit.** From December 1, 2023, to November 30, 2024, the net worth limit is \$155,356.¹⁹ According to Title 38, Section 3.274(b)(1), of the *Code of Federal Regulations*, net worth equals the sum of a claimant’s assets and annual income. A veteran with assets and annual income above the annual net worth limit would not receive a pension.
 - Debts are not directly included in the calculation of net worth. This is because certain expenses are already factored into the VA’s definition of *assets*. Title 38, Section 3.275(a)(1), of the *Code of Federal Regulations*

¹⁴ 38 U.S.C. §1521(a). Title 38, Section 3.1(n), of the *Code of Federal Regulations* defines *willful misconduct* as “an act involving conscious wrongdoing or known prohibited action. A service department finding that injury, disease or death was not due to misconduct will be binding on the Department of Veterans Affairs unless it is patently inconsistent with the facts and the requirements of laws administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs.”

¹⁵ For more information on disability compensation and programs for service-disabled veterans, see CRS Report R44837, *Benefits for Service-Disabled Veterans*, coordinated by Scott D. Szymendera.

¹⁶ 38 U.S.C. §1502(a).

¹⁷ 38 U.S.C. §1522.

¹⁸ For more information on the Social Security COLA, see CRS Report 94-803, *Social Security: Cost-of-Living Adjustments*, by Paul S. Davies and Tamar B. Breslauer.

¹⁹ VA, “Pension Benefits,” <https://www.va.gov/pension/veterans-pension-rates/>.

defines the term *assets* as all property that an individual owns minus any mortgages or other related encumbrances. Additionally, certain assets and income are excluded from the calculation of net worth, as described in Title 38, Sections 3.274 and 3.275, of the *Code of Federal Regulations*. For example, a claimant's primary residence and up to two acres of a residential lot are excluded from the claimant's net worth. Certain unreimbursed medical expenses are also excluded.²⁰

- **36-month look-back period.** During the 36 months before filing a claim for benefits, any assets transferred (sold, given away, put in trust, etc.) by the claimant at less than fair market value would be counted as assets for the purposes of determining net worth and could, depending upon the amount transferred, delay eligibility for benefits for up to five years.²¹ Other major means-tested programs, such as Medicaid and Supplemental Security Income, have similar look-back rules. These rules are to prevent individuals from transferring or selling assets to reduce their net worth solely for the purpose of receiving VA pension benefits.
- **Five-year penalty period.** This is a period of nonentitlement as a result of a VA determination that the claimant transferred assets during the look-back period for the specific purpose of meeting pension eligibility requirements. The penalty period cannot exceed five years and would begin on the first day of the month after the last transfer.²²

Maximum Annual Pension Rate

The MAPRs vary depending on the needs of the veteran, but the base rates are set in statute.²³ The MAPRs are adjusted by law each year to reflect a COLA equal to the COLA for Social Security benefits.²⁴

The pension benefit for a qualifying veteran is calculated by subtracting the annual countable income of the veteran and the annual countable income of certain dependents from the MAPR.²⁵ Countable income includes earnings, retirement or survivors' programs, interest, dividends, and unemployment compensation, among other types of income.²⁶ If a veteran's countable income exceeds the MAPR, the veteran will not receive a pension.

²⁰ If an unreimbursed medical expense (1) is paid by a claimant or dependent for VA or medical purposes, (2) is an expense for a claimant or a relative who is a member of the household, and (3) exceeds 5% of the applicable MAPR, then the total amount is deducted from the veteran's countable income for the purpose of pension eligibility. Deductible medical expenses may include those enumerated in Title 38, Section 3.278 (c)(1), of the *Code of Federal Regulations*. See 38 C.F.R. §3.272 (g)(1).

²¹ The look-back period will not include any date prior to October 18, 2018 (38 C.F.R. §3.276(a)(7)).

²² VA calculates the length of penalty period by dividing the total covered asset amount by the monthly penalty rate and rounding the quotient down to the nearest whole number. The result is the number of months for which VA will not pay pension. The monthly penalty rate is calculated by dividing the MAPR for a veteran in need of "Aid and Attendance" with one dependent by 12 and rounding down to the nearest dollar (38 C.F.R. §3.276(e)). Section 3.276(e)(4) provides an example for determining the penalty period.

²³ 38 U.S.C. §§1521(b)-1521(g).

²⁴ 38 U.S.C. §5312.

²⁵ 38 C.F.R. §§3.273, 3.274.

²⁶ See VA Adjudication Procedures Manual M21-1, Part IX, Subpart iii, Chapter 1, Section I for a complete list (https://www.knowva.ebenefits.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ssnew/help/customer/locale/en-US/portal/ (continued...))

MAPRs vary based on:

- the number of dependents a claimant has,
- whether the claimant requires additional care (known as *Aid and Attendance*²⁷), and
- whether the claimant is housebound.

Claimants who require Aid and Attendance and are housebound receive only one benefit amount—whichever MAPR amount is greater.

Dependents

Dependents include non-veteran spouses and some children. If a child’s net worth is greater than the net worth limit, he or she is not considered a dependent.²⁸

Dependent Child Eligibility

A surviving, unmarried child of a wartime veteran is considered a dependent if he or she is:²⁹

- under the age of 18,
- under the age of 23 and attending a VA “approved educational institution,”³⁰ or
- unable to care for his or herself due to a disability incurred before the age of 18.

Aid and Attendance³¹

The necessity for Aid and Attendance is presumed when one or more of the following conditions are met:

- The claimant needs another person to help with performing personal functions required for daily living, such as bathing, feeding, and dressing.
- The claimant needs to stay in bed, or spend a significant portion of the day in bed, due to an illness.
- The claimant is a patient in a nursing home due to a loss of mental or physical capabilities related to a disability.
- The claimant’s eyesight is limited (i.e., even with glasses or contact lenses, the claimant has 5/200 or less in both eyes or concentric contraction of the visual field to five degrees or less).³²

55440000001018/content/554400000177524/M21-1-Part-IX-Subpart-iii-Chapter-1-Section-I-Counting-Specific-Types-of-Income?query=countable%20income).

²⁷ Criteria for determining the need for Aid and Attendance include whether a claimant needs another person’s help to perform activities of daily living, such as eating, dressing, or showering (38 C.F.R. §3.352).

²⁸ 38 C.F.R. §3.274(d).

²⁹ 38 U.S.C. §101(4)(A).

³⁰ A VA “approved educational institution” includes a school, college, academy, seminary, technical institute, university, or other educational institution that a veteran’s child between ages 18 and 23 attends with approval granted by the Secretary of VA (38 U.S.C. §104(a)).

³¹ Definitions of *Aid and Attendance* and *housebound* can be found in Title 38, Section 3.351, of the *Code of Federal Regulations*. For a general overview, see VA, “VA Aid and Attendance Benefits and Housebound Allowance,” http://benefits.va.gov/pension/aid_attendance_housebound.asp.

³² VA, “VA Aid and Attendance Benefits and Housebound Allowance.”

The claimant is not required to demonstrate the need for around-the-clock care but must demonstrate a regular and ongoing need for the Aid and Attendance of another person.

The need for Aid and Attendance increases the pension amount. However, if care is provided and paid for by VA or Medicaid, the total monthly pension benefit is decreased.³³

Housebound

A claimant who is housebound may be eligible for an increased pension if he or she has either:

- a single permanent disability evaluated as 100% disabling and, due to such disability, is permanently and substantially confined to his or her immediate premises; or
- a single permanent disability evaluated as 100% disabling and has another disability or combination of disabilities evaluated as 60% or more disabling.

A person is considered housebound when confined to a dwelling³⁴ and immediate premises due to a disability, and it is reasonably certain that this confinement will continue throughout the individual’s lifetime. This includes cases where the claimant is unable to leave the dwelling without the assistance of another, such as when a disability prevents the claimant from being able to drive.

MAPR Amounts

The MAPRs are listed in **Table 3** for households with one veteran claimant and up to one dependent. The MAPRs are listed in **Table 4** for households with two veteran claimants who are married to each other and have no dependents. Households with more than one dependent should add \$2,831 to their MAPR amounts for each additional dependent.³⁵

Table 3. 2024 Veterans Pension Rates for Households with One Veteran Claimant

Does Veteran Qualify for Aid and Attendance Benefits?	Does Veteran Qualify for Housebound Benefits?	Number of Dependents in Household	MAPR Amount (in U.S. \$)
No	No	0	16,551
		1	21,674
No	Yes	0	20,226
		1	25,348
Yes	No	0	27,609
		1	32,729

Source: VA, “Pension Benefits,” <https://www.va.gov/pension/veterans-pension-rates/>.

Notes: A veteran who qualifies for both Aid and Attendance benefits and Housebound benefits is given the greater of the two amounts, not both.

³³ See 38 U.S.C. §5503. Per Section 5503(a)(2)(d)(1)(b), claimants who reside in state veterans nursing homes where VA pays a per diem for their care may not have their pensions reduced.

³⁴ A dwelling includes the claimant’s home or any other place the claimant is living, such as a care facility or a family member’s home (38 C.F.R. §3.351(e)).

³⁵ VA, “Pension Benefits.”

Table 4. 2024 Veterans Pension Rates for Veterans Who Are Married to Each Other and Have No Dependents

Benefits Status	MAPR Amount (in U.S. \$)
Neither qualifies for Housebound or Aid and Attendance benefits	21,674
One qualifies for Housebound benefits	25,348
Both qualify for Housebound benefits	29,021
One qualifies for Aid and Attendance benefits	32,729
One qualifies for Housebound benefits and one qualifies for Aid and Attendance benefits	36,395
Both qualify for Aid and Attendance benefits	43,791

Source: VA, “Pension Benefits,” <https://www.va.gov/pension/veterans-pension-rates/>.

Incarcerated Veterans Pension Provision

The pension benefit for a veteran convicted of a felony or misdemeanor is terminated on the 61st day of federal, state, or local imprisonment.³⁶ Payment may resume upon the completion of imprisonment if the veteran continues to meet the eligibility requirements. If VA is not promptly informed of the veteran’s incarceration, benefits could be suspended until the overpayment is satisfied.

Pension benefits can be apportioned to family members if a veteran remains eligible to receive a pension but for the fact that the veteran is incarcerated, and the veteran’s dependent(s) meet the income requirements for Survivors Pension (without consideration of the veteran’s income). VA would pay the lesser amount of either the pension benefit the veteran was entitled to before its discontinuation or the survivor pension benefit the dependent is entitled to based on current income. If a veteran or dependent is a fugitive felon (defined in Title 38, Section 3.666(e), of the *Code of Federal Regulations*), pension benefits would be discontinued along with any apportionment of those benefits to a spouse or dependent family member.³⁷

Survivors Pension

Most survivors of deceased veterans are eligible for the Survivors Pension if the deceased veteran had met the requirements described in the “Veterans Pension” section, and the survivor’s net worth is below the net worth limit.

Eligibility Criteria

The surviving spouse or dependent child of a deceased veteran is eligible for the Survivors Pension benefit if the deceased veteran and surviving spouse or dependent child meet the eligibility requirements described in the following sections.

Surviving Spouses

In addition to the veteran meeting the period of war service and discharge requirements described in the Veterans Pension Eligibility Criteria section, the spouse must not have remarried after the

³⁶ 38 C.F.R. §3.666.

³⁷ 38 C.F.R. §3.666.

veteran's death, the spouse's net worth must not exceed the net worth limit set by Congress, and the spouse's countable income must not exceed the MAPR for which he or she is eligible.³⁸

Dependent Children

For eligibility requirements, see "Dependent Child Eligibility."

A surviving child who is in the custody of a surviving spouse is not independently entitled to the Survivors Pension. Rather, the surviving spouse is eligible for a higher MAPR based on the number of dependent children. If the child is not under the legal custody of the surviving spouse, the pension may be paid to the child's guardian.³⁹

Net Worth

The net worth for a surviving spouse or child is calculated like that of a veteran for the Veterans Pension. See "Net Worth Limit" for the description of how net worth is calculated.

For a surviving spouse with custody of a deceased veteran's child, the child's income may also be included when it is considered "reasonably available" to the surviving spouse's expenses for "reasonable family maintenance."⁴⁰ However, a veteran's surviving child's current work income would be excluded from countable income if the income is less than the income level at which a federal income tax return must be filed.⁴¹ Postsecondary education or vocational rehabilitation or training expenses paid by the child are also excluded from net worth calculations.⁴²

If the surviving spouse or child were receiving any proceeds from a life insurance policy on the veteran, those payments would be excluded from countable income.⁴³

Maximum Annual Pension Rate

As with the Veterans Pension, the MAPRs for Survivors Pensions are set in statute.⁴⁴ The annual amount is adjusted automatically by law each year to reflect a COLA equal to the COLA for Social Security benefits.⁴⁵ Surviving spouses who qualify for Aid and Attendance or are housebound are eligible for higher MAPRs than those who do not. The requirements and qualifications for the Aid and Attendance and Housebound benefits are the same for a surviving spouse as for a veteran. The MAPR increases based on the number of dependents a surviving spouse has, as shown in **Table 5**. Claimants with more than one dependent should add \$2,831 to

³⁸ VA, "VA Survivors Pension," <https://www.va.gov/pension/survivors-pension/>.

³⁹ 38 C.F.R. §3.24.

⁴⁰ 38 C.F.R. §3.23(d)(5)-(6). Reasonable family maintenance expenses include costs for basic necessities (such as food, clothing, shelter, etc.) and others, determined on a case-by-case basis, that are necessary to support a reasonable quality of life.

⁴¹ The income level at which a tax return must be filed (the filing requirement) is equal to the standard deduction. For tax year 2023, the filing requirement is \$13,850 for a single taxpayer under the age of 65. See Internal Revenue Service, "Publication 501 (2022), Dependents, Standard Deduction, and Filing Information," Table 1, https://www.irs.gov/publications/p501#en_US_2023_publink1000220691.

⁴² 38 U.S.C. §1503(a)(10).

⁴³ 38 U.S.C. §1503(a)(12).

⁴⁴ 38 U.S.C. §1541.

⁴⁵ 38 U.S.C. §5312. For more information on the Social Security COLA, see CRS Report 94-803, *Social Security: Cost-of-Living Adjustments*, by Paul S. Davies and Tamar B. Breslauer.

the MAPR amount for each additional dependent. The below rates are in effect from December 1, 2023, to November 30, 2024.

Table 5. 2024 Survivors Pension Rates for Qualified Surviving Spouses

Does Spouse Qualify for Aid and Attendance Benefits?	Does Spouse Qualify for Housebound Benefits?	Number of Dependents	MAPR Amount (in U.S. \$)
No	No	0	11,102
		1	14,529
No	Yes	0	13,568
		1	16,989
Yes	No	0	17,743
		1	21,166

Source: VA, “2024 VA Survivors Pension Benefit Rates,” <https://www.va.gov/pension/survivors-pension-rates/>.

Medal of Honor Pension

Since 1916, Medal of Honor recipients have been entitled to special monthly pensions. Under the Veterans Benefits Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-330), Congress increased the monthly payment from \$100 to \$1,000 and directed the Secretary of VA to increase the pension amount on December 1 of each year to reflect the same percentage increase as the Social Security COLA.

The monthly Medal of Honor pension amount for 2024 is \$1,671.16.⁴⁶ Eligibility for this pension is based solely on receipt of the Medal of Honor and is paid to any eligible individuals who elect to receive it. Receipt of this special pension does not reduce any other benefits under U.S. law, and the benefit does not increase if a veteran receives more than one Medal of Honor.⁴⁷ The program is significantly smaller than the Veterans Pension and Survivors Pension programs. As of August 2024, there are only 62 living Medal of Honor recipients.⁴⁸

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⁴⁶ See VA, “2024 VA Special Benefit Allowances Rates,” <https://www.va.gov/disability/compensation-rates/special-benefit-allowance-rates/>.

⁴⁷ 38 U.S.C. §1562.

⁴⁸ National Medal of Honor Museum, “Frequently Asked Questions,” <https://mohmuseum.org/the-medal/>.

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