



**The ALS Association**  
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## Media Release

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### **VA Grants Disability and Health Benefits to Military Veterans with Lou Gehrig's Disease; The ALS Association Calls New Policy a Historic Victory for Veterans**

CALABASAS HILLS, Calif. (September 23) -- The Department of Veterans Affairs published groundbreaking new regulations today that grant military veterans diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's Disease full access to health and disability benefits, regardless of where or when they served in the military. The new rules take effect immediately.

The decision to establish a presumption of service connection for ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis) is a tremendous victory for veterans living with the disease and is the culmination of years of work by The ALS Association to expand benefits for those diagnosed with the fatal neurodegenerative disease made famous by baseball legend Lou Gehrig.

The Association has been the leading organization advocating for this policy change at the VA for many years. In 2001, The Association strongly supported the VA's decision to grant benefits to veterans of the 1991 Persian Gulf War and has championed legislative efforts to build on that policy so that it applies to all veterans with ALS.

According to studies, military veterans within the last century are nearly twice as likely to develop ALS as those with no history of military service, regardless of where or when they served in the military.

Most recently, The Association advocated for legislation (H.R. 5454) introduced by Congressman Henry Brown (R-SC) that would have established ALS as a service connected disease. Thanks to the combined efforts of the VA Secretary James Peake, members of Congress, The Association and veterans across the county this legislation no longer is needed.

"Veterans are developing ALS in rates higher than the general population, and it was appropriate to take action," VA Secretary James Peake said. "ALS is a disease that progresses rapidly, once it is diagnosed. 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

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easier to process, and for them and their families to receive the compensation they have earned through their service to our Nation."

"We are extremely grateful to Secretary Peake, Congressman Brown and Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) for standing on the side of veterans with ALS across the country," said Gary Leo, president and CEO of The Association. "Thanks to their leadership, veterans with ALS will receive the benefits and care they need, when they need them. Thanks to their efforts, no veteran with ALS will ever be left behind."

Veterans living with ALS across the country also played a vital role in advancing this critical policy change, which was first identified as a priority by The Association's Veteran's Affairs Issue Team. Jeff Faull, a Navy veteran from The Association's Greater Philadelphia Chapter, Brigadier General Tom Mikolajcik (USAF Ret.), who helped found The Association's South Carolina Chapter and Jim Thew, a Navy veteran from the Greater Chicago Chapter, all testified to Congress and helped lead the effort to improve benefits for all veterans with ALS.

"Veterans living with Lou Gehrig's Disease now have one less hurdle to face on an already difficult road," said Steve Gibson, The Association's vice president of government relations and public affairs. "Our heroes who have served in the military and those serving today can now be reassured that our government will fight for them just as they fought for us."

ALS, a fatal progressive, neurodegenerative disease, is striking at this nation's heroes the hardest ([ALS in the Military: Unexpected Consequences of Military Service](#)); however, the reasons are not known at this time.

The ALS Association is a leader in the fight against Lou Gehrig's Disease. The mission of the organization is to lead the fight to cure and treat ALS through global, cutting-edge research, and to empower people with Lou Gehrig's Disease and their families to live fuller lives by providing them with compassionate care and support.

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