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Distinguishing Benefits Involving Aid & Attendance

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11.0—Veterans' claims.

Aid & Attendance (A&A) is one of the more vague and misunderstood areas of veterans benefits.

While many have heard of A&A as a form of additional compensation for veterans who need help caring for themselves, fewer realize that there are multiple paths to Aid & Attendance, each with its own eligibility requirements, compensation levels, and legal nuances. Even VA adjudicators are often unfamiliar with the requirements for this rare benefit, leading to inconsistencies and mistakes that further confuse claimants and advocates. This can result in gaps in evidence, leading to

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overlooked or denied claims for veterans who are among the most in need of support.

In this article, we will clarify the sources of Aid & Attendance benefits available to veterans:

- **Special Monthly Compensation (SMC) Levels L, R1, R2, and T**
- **VA Pension Aid & Attendance (also called Enhanced or Improved Pension)**

This article is not intended to be a comprehensive source of information about Aid & Attendance, simply a resource for distinguishing these overlapping benefits. Veterans are also encouraged to enlist the aid of a VA-accredited advocate if they are pursuing a related claim or appeal.

What Is VA Aid & Attendance?

Broadly speaking, Aid & Attendance is a benefit for veterans who require the help of another person to perform the activities of daily living due to physical or cognitive impairments. However, the benefit can be delivered via several different programs, each governed by its own legal standards, and the compensation rates can vary significantly.

Because these cases are relatively rare—and legally intricate—even VA adjudicators can be inconsistent in their application of the rules. That is why understanding the distinctions between these types of Aid & Attendance is essential before applying.

Special Monthly Compensation (SMC) Level L

SMC Level L is the entry tier for Aid & Attendance under the Special Monthly Compensation structure.

Eligibility for SMC-L

To qualify for SMC-L, a veteran must prove that their **service-connected disabilities** require the **regular aid and attendance of another person** to perform activities of daily living (ADLs).

Importantly, VA **often incorrectly assumes** a veteran must have a schedular 100 percent disability rating to qualify for SMC-L. That is not required under the law. What matters is the **functional impact** of the service-connected disabilities, not the rating percentage.

What Counts as "Activities of Daily Living"?

The need for help with ADLs is a cornerstone of any Aid & Attendance claim. Examples include:

- Personal hygiene tasks such as bathing, dressing, and grooming
- Assistance with eating, toileting, or medication management
- Adjusting prosthetics
- Staying in bed except for therapy or treatment
- Needing supervision to avoid environmental hazards
- Vision limited to 5/200 or less in both eyes (even when corrected)

These are only examples of ADLs. Claimants do not necessarily need to have any of these but must demonstrate similar needs to qualify.

Compensation for SMC-L

As of 2025, the monthly compensation rate for **SMC-L is \$4,767.34** for a single veteran without dependents. The amount increases with qualifying dependents or additional conditions.

Tips for SMC-L Claims

- VA is required to consider entitlement to SMC when a claim is filed, but Aid & Attendance is often overlooked due to vague or insufficient medical evidence.
- Veterans should submit **strong documentation**, ideally a **completed VA Form 21-2680** (Examination for Housebound Status or Permanent Need for Regular Aid and Attendance) signed by a medical professional.

Special Monthly Compensation (SMC) Level R1

SMC-R1 is a **higher tier** of compensation than SMC-L, and it applies to veterans who require a more intensive level of care.

Eligibility for SMC-R1

To qualify, a veteran must:

- **Already qualify for SMC-L**
- Require **ongoing, continuous care**, which may include around-the-clock assistance

Unlike some believe, **the caregiver does not need to be a licensed professional**; spouses or other family members can qualify. What matters is the level and continuity of care being provided.

Compensation for SMC-R1

As of 2025, SMC-R1 pays **\$9,559.22 per month** for a single veteran without dependents.

Special Monthly Compensation (SMC) Level T

SMC-T mirrors SMC-R1 in most respects, with **one key difference**: the veteran's qualifying condition must be linked to a **Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)**.

Given the high risks and functional impairments associated with TBIs, VA has authorized elevated compensation levels for affected veterans.

Compensation for SMC-T

The monthly compensation for SMC-T is **\$10,964.66**, matching the highest SMC tier (R2).

Special Monthly Compensation (SMC) Level R2

SMC-R2 is the **highest Aid & Attendance compensation tier** and is reserved for veterans requiring **professional medical care at home** that approaches the intensity of hospitalization.

Eligibility for SMC-R2

A veteran must:

- Already qualify for SMC-R1
- Require additional **specialized care** exceeding R1 criteria
- Receive care from a **licensed medical professional**, such as a certified nurse or home-care provider

This benefit level generally applies to veterans who would otherwise need to be institutionalized but are receiving equivalent in-home care.

Compensation for SMC-R2

Like SMC-T, compensation is **\$10,964.66 per month** for a single veteran without dependents.

VA Pension Aid & Attendance (Enhanced Pension)

Separate from Special Monthly Compensation, the **VA Pension³ Aid & Attendance⁴** benefit—also known as **Enhanced Pension or Improved Pension**—is often confused with SMC A&A. However, Enhanced Pension differs in several major ways.

Key Differences

- **No service-connected disability is required**
- Based on **financial need**, including **income and net-worth limits** ("means testing")
- Veteran must have served during a **wartime period** and received an **honorable discharge**
- Must be **age 65 or older** or **permanently disabled** or a **patient in a nursing home** due to a long-term disability or receiving **Social Security Disability Insurance or Supplemental Security Income**

Aid & Attendance Requirements

As with SMC-based Aid & Attendance, the veteran must prove they need help with ADLs such as bathing, dressing, feeding, or protection from daily hazards.

Compensation for Enhanced Pension

For 2025, this benefit pays up to **\$2,358 per month** for a single veteran.

Final Thoughts

If VA overlooks a veteran's Aid & Attendance eligibility or denied their claim, the veteran should not assume VA was correct. This area of VA

³ U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, *Eligibility for Veterans Pension*, <https://www.va.gov/pension/eligibility/> (last visited April 23, 2025)

⁴ U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, *VA Aid and Attendance benefits and Housebound allowance*, <https://www.va.gov/pension/aid-attendance-housebound/> (last visited April 23, 2025)

law is highly technical, and even many VA adjudicators have limited experience with it.

Veterans and advocates should take care to research all requirements for the SMC level that they feel is most relevant, as well as any preceding levels that may need to be satisfied as well.

A VA-accredited advocate or attorney may be able to help a veteran understand their eligibility, gather the right evidence, and challenge any improper denials or omissions.

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