

poses an almost unbearable strain on financial resources in the absence of health insurance. The Commission believes and recommends that the Veterans Administration should provide benefits similar to those in the Military Medical Benefits Act for these dependents.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 66

The Commission recommends that medical benefits, similar to those provided in the Military Medical Benefits Act, be provided for widows and children of veterans who die from service-connected causes.

Background to Recommendation:

The military medical benefits program provides inpatient and outpatient care, with some sharing of cost by the beneficiary, to the dependents of both those dying in service and deceased retired personnel. However, the VA hospital and medical care program applies only to veterans.

The military medical benefits program was expanded by PL 89-614 to include civilian contract care, subject to a 25 percent sharing of costs by the beneficiary, plus a deductible for outpatient treatment. The law, however, left without government health protection, the dependents of veterans who were discharged from service, without retired status, but who subsequently died from service-incurred disease or injury. There is no sound reason for this distinction. On the contrary, there is a Government obligation to provide care for the widows and children of these veterans. Such an obligation is analogous and almost equal to the traditional obligation and practice of providing medical care to veterans with service-connected conditions.

Therefore, the Commission recommends that the VA provide hospital and outpatient benefits for widows and children of veterans who die from service-connected causes. The plan would exclude widows and children eligible for medical services under the Military Medical Benefits Act or the Medicare Section of the Social Security Act. Under the proposal, eligible widows and orphans would share to a moderate extent in the cost of medical services they receive.