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Subject: VA Processes Nearly All Disability Claims Pending Over 2 Years, Moves to Complete Those Older Than 1 Year
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VA Processes Nearly All Disability Claims Pending Over 2 Years, Moves to Complete Those Older Than 1 Year

Over 65,000 Claims Eliminated from the Backlog in 2 Months

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today that as a result of the initiative launched in [April](#) to expedite disability compensation claims decisions for Veterans who have waited a year or longer, more than 65,000-claims – or 97 percent of all claims over two years old in the inventory – have been eliminated from the backlog.

Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) staff will now focus their efforts on completing the disability claims of Veterans who have been waiting over one year for a decision, while completing the final batch of oldest claims in progress.

“Over the past two months, VA has been dedicated to providing earned benefits to the Veterans who have waited the longest,” said VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki. “Thanks to our hard-working VBA employees, we have completed nearly all claims that have been pending two years or longer. We’ve made great progress, but know much work remains to be done to eliminate the backlog in 2015.”

“The success of this phase of the effort was due in part to the implementation of mandatory overtime for the Veterans Benefits Administration’s (VBA) claims processing staff, as well as the dedicated support of physicians from the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), who expedited exams to provide medical evidence needed to rate these pending claims,” said Under Secretary for Benefits Allison A. Hickey.

The remaining two-year-old claims will be finalized in the coming days except for those that are outstanding due to unique circumstances, such as the unavailability of a claimant for a needed medical exam, military service, vacation, or travel overseas.

In May, VA announced that it was mandating [overtime](#) for claims processors in its 56 regional benefits offices to increase production of compensation claims decisions, which will continue through the end of FY 2013. Today, VA has the lowest number of claims in its inventory since August 2011 and has reduced the number of claims in the VA backlog – claims pending over 125 days – by 10 percent since the initiative began.

Under this initiative, VA claims raters may make final or provisional decisions on the oldest claims in the inventory, which will allow Veterans to begin collecting compensation benefits more quickly,

if eligible. Veterans are able to submit additional evidence for consideration a full year after the provisional rating before VA issues a final decision. If no further evidence is received within that year, VBA will inform Veterans that their ratings are final and provide information on the standard appeals process, which can be found at <http://www.bva.va.gov/>. If a Veteran disagrees with a final decision and chooses to appeal, the appeal is entered into the appellate processing system, and is not reflected in the claims inventory.

VA continues to prioritize disability claims for homeless Veterans, those experiencing extreme financial hardship, the terminally ill, former Prisoners of War, Medal of Honor recipients, and Veterans filing Fully Developed Claims, which is the quickest way for Veterans to receive a decision on their compensation claim (<http://www.benefits.va.gov/fdc/>).

Claims for Wounded Warriors separating from the military for medical reasons will continue to be handled separately and on a priority basis with the Department of Defense through the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES). Wounded Warriors separating through IDES currently receive VA compensation benefits in an average of 61 days following their separation from service.

VA's inventory is comprised mostly of supplemental claims from Veterans already receiving disability compensation who are seeking to address worsening conditions or claim additional disabilities. Regardless of the status of compensation claims, Veterans who have served in combat since Nov. 11, 1998, are eligible for five years of free medical care for most conditions from VA. This eligibility was enacted through the National Defense Authorization Act of 2008.

Veterans can learn more about disability benefits on the joint Department of Defense/VA web portal eBenefits at www.ebenefits.va.gov.

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