

VA Achieves Major Milestone in Backlog Reduction

August 24, 2015

This week, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) reached a historic milestone in its efforts to improve the delivery of benefits and services to America's Veterans, their families, and Survivors. The backlog of disability claims (claims pending more than 125 days) is now below 100,000 – an 84-percent reduction from its peak of 611,000 claims in March 2013 and the lowest ever in our history since we started measuring the backlog in 2007.

This dramatic reduction was achieved through the dedicated efforts of Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) employees, 53 percent of whom are Veterans themselves, and with the support of Veterans Health Administration physicians and staff who have gone all out to provide Veterans with the medical examinations they need to support their claims. Through VBA's transformation efforts and with the help of Congress, our partners in Veterans Service Organizations, and state and county Veterans service departments, we are on track to complete nearly 1.4 million claims this fiscal year – exceeding 1 million claims for the fifth year in a row.

This milestone was reached without sacrificing quality. In fact, through our transformation efforts, the accuracy of disability decisions has improved from 83 percent in 2011 to 91 percent today. When measuring the accuracy of the individual medical issues inside each claim, accuracy is now 96 percent. And on the eight separate error categories against which our decisions are measured (such as, correct decision on relationship to military service, correct evaluation assigned, and correct effective date), VA makes the correct decision 98 percent of the time. Reaching 98-percent accuracy in each of these eight categories is an important measure of confidence for all Veterans, and VA will continue to drive to sustain quality at the highest possible levels.

VA employees are dedicated to getting Veterans the benefits they have earned and deserve as quickly and accurately as possible; however, we know that some claims will continue to take longer than 125 days to process due to Veterans' personal circumstances and VA's legal duty to assist Veterans in the development of their claims and ensure they are provided their full entitlement to benefits. VA will always consider additional evidence or new medical conditions added throughout the claims process; however, late evidence or new contentions stop the momentum made in processing the claim, as they usually require a new round of evidence-gathering, medical examinations, and analysis. VA's legal duty to assist Veterans in fully developing their claims is an obligation we take seriously.

Since 2011, VBA has undergone the most significant transformation in its history to improve the delivery of VA benefits and services. This aggressive transformation involved people, process, and technology initiatives to streamline and modernize the way VBA processes claims so that Veterans do not have to wait more than 125 days for a high-quality decision.

As we mark this important milestone in VA's history, we commit to continuing our improvement efforts; we will never waiver in our dedication to providing the best possible service to Veterans, their families, and Survivors.