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If Veterans don't help Veterans, who will?

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U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Fact Sheet

Office of Public Affairs
Media Relations

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Standard Claims and Appeals Forms Update

VA wants to make it as fast and easy as possible for Veterans and their survivors to file for and receive an accurate decision on their claim. VA is updating its regulations to require the use of standard claim and appeal forms, which brings VA processes in line with other government agency processes, such as those of the Social Security Administration and the Internal Revenue Service, which also require submissions on standard forms before they can pay benefits or issue refunds. This update is necessary because the lack of standardization process contributes to claim processing delays, inaccuracy and frustration among claimants.

This update will go into effect 180 days after publication of the final regulations in the Federal Register.

The update has three major components:

- It standardizes the traditional informal claims process by employing a new standard form, VA Form 21-0966, *Intent to File a Claim for Compensation and/or pension, survivors pension, or other benefits*, which an individual or his or her representative can submit in order to establish a potential effective date for benefits while they take up to a year to gather the evidence necessary to support the claim.
 - The *intent to file* form may be submitted in one of three ways: 1) electronically via eBenefits or the Stakeholder Enterprise Portal, 2) on the paper form mailed to VA, or 3) over the phone with a VA call center or other public contact representative.
 - The updated regulations allow VA to award increased benefits retroactive to the date of medical treatment as long as the *intent to file* form is filed within 1 year of the treatment and the required claim form is filed within the year after that.
- It mandates use of specified forms designed to capture information necessary to identify and support compensation, pension, and other benefit claims.
 - Compensation claims may be filed online through eBenefits, or submit [VA Form 21-526EZ](#), *Application for Disability Compensation and Related Compensation Benefits*, on paper.
 - Pension claims must be filed on [VA Form 21-527EZ](#), *Application for Pension*.
 - Survivors claims for dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC), survivors pension, and accrued benefits must be filed on [VA Form 21-534EZ](#), *Application for DIC, Death Pension, and/or Accrued Benefits*.
- It mandates use of a standardized notice of disagreement form in most cases when a claimant wishes to initiate an appeal of a VA decision.
 - Veterans initiate appeal of a decision with which they disagree by explaining their disagreement on [VA Form 21-0958](#), *Notice of Disagreement*. Veterans, survivors, and their representatives currently use the form on an optional basis.

How does this impact Veterans?

- The most important impact for Veterans is that this improvement and standardization of the filing process will lead to faster claims decisions. By establishing standard forms for Veterans to use, the filing process will become much more efficient, allowing the Veteran to more clearly notify VA of what he or she is seeking.
- VA is required to have certain information prior to processing a claim. This form simplifies for the Veteran the way they provide that necessary information to VA.
- VA encourages Veterans to file their compensation claims online through the eBenefits web portal. eBenefits guides claimants through the application process with a series of questions that elicit the information captured on the paper standard claim form. Veterans who cannot file online, or choose not to file online, may download the forms from www.va.gov/vaforms/ or call 800-827-1000 to have the correct form sent to their home. Completed forms may be mailed or faxed back to VA.

How does this help VA process claims more quickly?

- By requiring claims on standard forms – as other public agencies do – VA will be able to quickly identify what the individual is claiming and initiate the process to gather evidence for that specific issue. This step is often delayed as, under current regulations, non-standard claims and appeals can be difficult to identify.
- By helping VA identify claims and appeals, VA can expeditiously begin developing the evidence necessary to process the claim or appeal.
- Standardized forms are a key component of VA's transformation, which will help achieve the Department's goal to eliminate the backlog in 2015.

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