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165 Million Pages Have Been Scanned and Uploaded to Help Transform Paper-Based Claims Process to Digital Environment

WASHINGTON—The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has reached another milestone in its disability claims transformation process – over 30 percent of the current disability claims inventory is now digital and accessible to claim raters in VA's electronic claims processing system, which has now been fielded ahead of schedule at all 56 Regional Offices across the country. This effort is a key part of transforming outdated paper processing into an electronic system that is delivering disability claims decisions for Veterans more quickly. In addition, all incoming paper claims are transformed into digital records for electronic processing using VA's new claims processing software and electronic repository.

"A key element that slows our process is the thousands of tons of paper documents we handle each year related to Veterans' claims," said Undersecretary for Benefits Allison A. Hickey. "While we continue to expand our ability to process claims electronically, we still have to handle those we receive in paper form—the Veterans Claims Intake Program (VCIP) is our answer to this and helps us move into a fully digital environment."

On Sep. 28, 2012, VA established the VCIP program to maximize the use of electronic intake for all claims, creating digital, searchable files. The document conversion service, part of VCIP, has now been implemented at all 56 VA regional claims processing offices across the country. VCIP is a capability that enables high-speed document scanning to help VA end its reliance on paper-based claims. With VCIP, a new paper claim that is received at a regional office is recorded in VA's electronic claims processing system—called the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS)—and shipped to one of three document conversion locations to be scanned and converted into digital images. The document images, which are made keyword searchable in the conversion, are placed into a VBMS electronic folder for use by the VA employees who work the Veteran's claim.

Digital conversion improves processing timeliness by eliminating paper folder transport, reducing manual data entry, streamlining the review of medical records, and standardizing correspondence with Veterans and beneficiaries. To date, VA has converted more than 165 million pages of claims documents to digital images, and continues to add over 1 million images into VBMS every day.

"Finding a key piece of evidence in a thick paper file folder takes time," said James Thomas, a claims specialist at the Salt Lake VA Regional Office. "With digital claims records, we can find all the key information related to the claim with a key stroke."

At the same time, VA is working closely with the Department of Defense (DoD) and Veterans Service Organizations to urge Veterans and separating Servicemembers to file their disability claims electronically and, when possible, to file a [Fully Developed Claim](#) through the joint DoD/VA online portal, *eBenefits* (www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits). Registered *eBenefits* users with a Premium account can file a claim online, track the status, and access information on a variety of other benefits, including pension, education, health care, home loan, and vocational rehabilitation and employment programs. Additionally, *eBenefits* users can take advantage of 50 self-service features that both VA and DoD have made available.

VA is continuing to implement several initiatives to meet Secretary Shinseki's goal to eliminate the claims backlog in 2015. 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. In June, VA announced that under an initiative launched in April to expedite disability compensation claims decisions for Veterans who have waited a year or longer, more than 65,000 claims nationwide – or 97 percent of all claims over two years old in the inventory – had been eliminated from the backlog.

Today, VA's total claims inventory remains at lower levels not seen since August 2011 and the number of claims in the VA backlog – claims pending over 125 days – has been reduced by nearly 12 percent since the "oldest claims first" initiative began.

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 DoD through the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES).

Veterans can learn more about disability benefits, and register and/or upgrade to a free Premium account on the joint Department of Defense/VA web portal *eBenefits* at www.ebenefits.va.gov.

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