

TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION OF CLINICIANS PERFORMING VA DISABILITY EXAMINATIONS

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) directive updates VHA policy for an education and certification program for clinicians who perform compensation and pension (C&P) disability examinations for Veterans and Servicemembers.
- 2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGES:** This directive updates VHA Directive 1603, Certification of Clinicians Performing VA Disability Evaluations, dated April 22, 2013, by adding additional required courses (also called modules) for training and for certification for clinicians who perform C&P disability examinations for Veterans and Servicemembers and clarifying for which clinicians specialty training is required.
- 3. RELATED ISSUES:** None.
- 4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Office of Disability and Medical Assessments is responsible for the contents of this VHA directive. Questions may be referred to the Office of Disability and Medical Assessment at 202-461-6699.
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** VHA Directive 1603, dated April 22, 2013, is rescinded.
- 6. RECERTIFICATION:** This VHA directive is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working day of November 2021. This VHA directive will continue to serve as national VHA policy until it is recertified or rescinded.

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TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION OF CLINICIANS PERFORMING VA DISABILITY EXAMINATIONS

1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) directive establishes policy for the implementation of an education and certification program for clinicians who perform compensation and pension (C&P) disability examinations for Veterans and Servicemembers. **AUTHORITY:** 38 U.S.C. 5301A, 7301(b); 38 CFR 3.159, 3.326.

2. BACKGROUND

a. VHA performs nearly three million Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability examinations yearly. The quality assurance program of the Office of Disability and Medical Assessment (DMA) as well as reports from VA's Office of the Inspector General (OIG), have revealed variation among the Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) in the performance and quality of VA disability examination reports. As a result, VHA and Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) determined there is a need for a training and certification program for all clinicians performing VA disability examinations.

b. Health care providers traditionally examine patients to diagnose and treat illness. However, VHA also conducts C&P disability examinations of Veterans and Servicemembers for VBA to adjudicate claims for VA disability benefits rather than for treatment, and special criteria and examination procedures apply to those examinations. C&P disability examinations are forensic medical/legal examinations for VA disability compensation or pension claims, and as such require specialized knowledge and skills. Training is critical to ensure that clinicians conducting the disability examinations understand that disability examination reports have legal ramifications. They must also understand what VBA needs to know to make a valid determination on disability benefit claims. Given the importance of a thorough examination of the Veteran or Servicemember to his or her eligibility for future benefits, it is critical that standards are enforced consistently and applied fairly across all VISNs.

c. The training and certification program courses (also called modules) to meet the requirements identified in this directive are available on VA's Talent Management System (TMS) at <http://www.tms.va.gov>. **NOTE:** To locate the courses search for the keyword "DMA C&P" within the TMS search tab.

3. POLICY

It is VHA policy that all clinicians designated to conduct VA disability examinations must complete the required training and post-training tests, and become certified by DMA; new clinicians must be certified prior to being allowed to perform any VA disability examination. DMA will monitor and track completion of certification requirements this directive identifies and will maintain a certification database that lists all clinicians who complete the certification requirements.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. **Under Secretary for Health.** The Under Secretary for Health, or designee, is responsible for oversight of DMA.

b. **Office of Disability and Medical Assessment (DMA).** DMA and the Employee Education System (EES) are responsible for the development, evolution, management, and implementation of the ongoing clinician training and certification program, which includes:

(1) Working collaboratively with the Employee Education System (EES) to:

(a) Produce the training modules;

(b) Document, track, and monitor clinicians who have successfully completed the required training; and

(c) Validate certification to perform a specific type of disability examination by clinicians who have completed the training and post-training test for a specific type of disability examination.

(2) Coordinating the certification process with VA medical facilities and VISNs and providing each VA medical facility with a validated list of certified clinicians.

(3) Monitoring VA medical facilities for compliance with this directive.

c. **Employee Education System (EES) Office.** The EES Office is responsible for:

(1) Production of VA disability training modules in direct collaboration with DMA and field-based subject matter experts who perform VA disability examinations;

(2) Developing and maintaining the web-based training and testing sites; and

(3) Ensuring access to course completion and testing data.

d. **Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) Director.** Each VISN Director is responsible for:

(1) Ensuring the completion of required training and certification of all clinicians performing VA disability examinations (including Fee-For-Service providers) within their areas of responsibility. This does not include providers associated with or accessed through examination management contracts.

(2) Distributing additional instructions from DMA on the certification process and required training to VISN facilities.

e. **VA Medical Facility Director.** The VA medical facility Director is responsible for:

(1) Ensuring that all clinicians performing VA disability examinations (including Fee-For-Service providers) within their area of responsibility are certified based on this directive. This does not include providers associated with or accessed through examination management contracts.

(2) Ensuring that clinicians performing any type of VA disability examinations (for VHA this means all VA employees and Fee-For-Service providers) complete the following interactive web-based training modules and successfully complete its post-training test:

- (a) "General Certification Overview Course";
- (b) "Medical Opinions"; and
- (c) "Aggravation Opinions".

(3) Ensuring that clinicians performing the specific specialty examinations noted below also complete the training for that specialty and successfully complete its post-training test:

(a) Joint, Feet, and Spine examinations must complete the training titled "Musculoskeletal Examination";

(b) Mental disorders examinations must complete the training titled "Initial Mental Disorders Examination";

(c) Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) examinations must complete the training titled "Initial Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Examination"; and

(d) Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) examinations must complete the training titled "Traumatic Brain Injury Examination".

(4) Ensuring clinicians complete new training as may be required to enhance the efficacy of the disability examination process.

(5) Ensuring that all clinicians performing VA disability examinations (including VA employees, Fee-For-Service providers, and contractors) complete VHA designated mandatory training, which may be outside the DMA certification requirement, including:

(a) Training on Military Sexual Trauma (MST) and the disability examination process. This is a one-time requirement; and

(b) Any new training VHA deems required.

(6) Ensuring any VHA clinician may take the disability examination training and receive continuing medical education (CME) for completion. Residents and interns assisting with disability examinations as part of their graduate training curriculum under

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VHA DIRECTIVE 1603

the supervision of a VHA certified disability examination clinician are encouraged to complete the VHA trainings appropriate to their curriculum.