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# News Release

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Media Relations

Washington, DC 20420  
(202) 461-7600  
[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)

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## Joint Effort Aimed at Promoting Use of Fully Developed Claims

WASHINGTON – Today, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Disabled American Veterans (DAV), and The American Legion announced a new partnership to help reduce the compensation claims backlog for Veterans. The effort—the Fully Developed Claims (FDC) Community of Practice—is a key part of VA’s overall transformation [plan](#) to end the backlog in 2015 and process claims within 125 days at 98% accuracy. VA can process FDCs in half the time it takes for a traditionally filed claim.

“VA prides itself on our ongoing partnership with organizations that represent Veterans throughout the claims process,” said Undersecretary for Benefits Allison A. Hickey. “A Fully Developed Claim is the most effective way to ensure a Veteran’s claim never reaches the backlog—and is the basis for this new initiative between VA and what we expect will be an ever-increasing number of Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) and others who represent Veterans at various points of the claims process.”

“This new initiative takes a common-sense approach to working smarter to better serve our injured and ill Veterans,” said [DAV](#) Washington Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski “DAV is pleased to be working with the VA to help improve the disability compensation system.”

“We have been working with VA since last December on its fully developed claims process,” said James E. Koutz, national commander of [The American Legion](#). “Teams of our experts have already gone to VA regional offices in Denver, Pittsburgh, Baltimore and other cities to help identify best practices for FDCs, and to further train our own service officers.” Koutz said the Legion’s next visit in support of the FDC program is planned for June at the VA regional office in Reno, Nev.

Claims are considered to be “fully developed” when Veterans submit all available supporting evidence, like private treatment records and notice of federal treatment records, to VA at the time they first file a formal claim and certify they have no more evidence to submit. This is the information that VA needs to make a determination on a disability claim. The FDC program supports the sharing of best practices across Veterans Service Organizations, who help thousands of Veterans each year with their compensation claims, to identify up front all evidence necessary to support a Veteran’s claim. Veterans then certify that they have no additional evidence to submit, and VA can process the claim in half the time it takes for a traditionally filed claim.

VSOs have long played an integral role in submitting Veterans claims - often with representatives working within VA regional offices. VA has consulted with them throughout the development and implementation of VA’s plan to end the backlog in 2015 to ensure best practices and their unique insights were incorporated. The American Legion and DAV are the first to step forward to work with VA on the FDC program, and that program has led to a much more efficient process. Meaningful progress will be felt by increasing numbers of Veterans as more VSOs participate with VA in the FDC program. This initiative is just the latest example of the collaboration between VA and VSOs. In July, VA held a workshop to obtain the views of VSO representatives and to provide them with information on the effort to eliminate the claims backlog. The main focus of the workshop was VA’s emphasis on the shared goal of better serving Veterans and positive impact of filing Fully Developed Claims. These workshops will be replicated in VBA regional offices across the country.

“VA will continue to work with our VSO partners to provide the world-class health care and benefits that Veterans have earned through their service,” said Undersecretary Hickey.

This is the latest effort in support of the Secretary’s plan to reduce the backlog. Last month, VA announced an initiative to expedite compensation claims decisions for Veterans who have waited one year or longer. On April 19, VA began prioritizing claims decisions for Veterans who have been waiting the longest, by providing provisional decisions that allow eligible Veterans to begin collecting compensation benefits quickly. With a provisional decision, a Veteran has a year to submit additional information to support a claim before the decision becomes final.

On May 15, VA announced that it is mandating overtime for claims processors in its 56 regional benefits offices through the end of fiscal year 2013 to help eliminate the backlog, with continued emphasis on high-priority claims for homeless Veterans and those claiming financial hardship, the terminally ill, former Prisoners of War, Medal of Honor recipients, and Veterans filing Fully Developed Claims. As of May 17, the paperless claims processing system known as the Veterans Benefits Management System, or VBMS, has been deployed to 46 out of 56 regional office locations, and about 18% of VA’s current claim inventory is in an electronic format.

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). On average, Wounded Warriors separating through IDES currently receive VA compensation benefits in 2 months following their separation from service.

Veterans can learn more about disability benefits on the joint Department of Defense-VA web portal eBenefits at <http://www.ebenefits.va.gov> and find information about filing Fully Developed Claims here: <http://www.benefits.va.gov/transformation/fastclaims/>. Servicemembers returning from active duty in combat theatres are eligible for five years of VA medical care – regardless of the status of any disability claim submitted. Medical care is not withheld while disability claims are under review. For more information on enrolling in VA health benefits, please visit <http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/>.

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