

AIVetGuide

Evidence Guide

Organize medical, service, lay, and nexus evidence.

Important

Use this guide as educational preparation only. It is not legal advice, medical advice, or a guarantee of VA benefits. For official help, contact VA or an accredited representative.

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Evidence That Can Support a VA Disability Claim

Evidence is any information that helps VA understand whether a condition is service connected and how severe it is now. This guide helps veterans organize evidence in a clear way.

Evidence map

Think of evidence as a bridge: current condition + service event or secondary connection + link between them + current severity.

The four evidence buckets

Bucket	Examples
Current condition	Diagnosis, test results, treatment notes, medication list, therapy records, imaging, sleep study, audiology exam, mental health notes.
Service event or exposure	Service treatment records, duty records, deployment records, MOS duties, incident reports, accident reports, line-of-duty records, exposure information.
Nexus or connection	Medical opinion, documented continuity of symptoms, service records plus medical reasoning, or explanation that a service-connected condition caused or aggravated a new condition.
Current severity	Frequency, severity, duration, functional limits, work impact, missed days, assistive devices, medication side effects, flare-ups, ER visits, hospitalizations.

Medical evidence checklist

- ☐ Current diagnosis or documented symptoms.
- ☐ Dates of treatment and provider names.
- ☐ Medication list, dosage changes, side effects, devices, therapy, injections, surgery, or emergency care.
- ☐ Objective testing where relevant: imaging, labs, audiology, sleep study, range of motion, pulmonary function, nerve testing, or psychological evaluation.
- ☐ Records that show functional impact, not just the name of the diagnosis.
- ☐ Recent records for increased-rating claims showing that the condition has worsened.
- ☐ Private medical records or VA Form 21-4142/21-4142a if you want VA to request non-VA records.

Service evidence checklist

- ☐ Service treatment records showing sick call, injury, symptoms, profiles, medication, therapy, or follow-up.
- ☐ Personnel records showing assignments, duties, deployments, MOS, performance changes, disciplinary changes, or duty limitations.
- ☐ Incident records, police reports, accident reports, line-of-duty determinations, or safety reports.
- ☐ Deployment or exposure information where relevant.
- ☐ Unit records, buddy statements, photos, letters, emails, or other records that support the event or timeline.

Lay and buddy statement guide

Lay evidence can come from the veteran or from someone who observed events, symptoms, or changes. It should be specific and factual. Strong statements usually explain who the writer is, what they saw, when they saw it, how often it happened, and how it affected the veteran.

Statement section	What to write
Who	Name, relationship to veteran, how long they have known the veteran.
What happened	Observed event, injury, symptoms, behavior change, pain, sleep issue, work impact, or limitations.
When	Dates, approximate timeframe, deployment, duty station, post-service period, or before/after comparison.
How often/severe	Frequency, severity, duration, triggers, flare-ups, and patterns.
Impact	Daily life, work, family, sleep, movement, concentration, mood, or safety impact.

Nexus evidence

A nexus is the link between a current condition and military service, or between a new condition and an already service-connected condition. A medical opinion is not always required, but it can matter when the connection is not obvious from the records.

- The provider should identify records reviewed, relevant facts, diagnosis, and medical reasoning.
- The opinion should explain why the condition is connected to service or aggravated by another service-connected condition.
- For secondary claims, include both causation and aggravation if those theories apply.
- Avoid unsupported one-sentence opinions that do not explain the medical reasoning.

Evidence quality control

- [] Keep records organized by condition and date.
- [] Do not submit documents you do not understand without reviewing them.
- [] Avoid exaggeration. Accuracy matters.
- [] Use consistent dates and descriptions where possible.
- [] Address negative evidence directly if records mention improvement, noncompliance, post-service injury, or another possible cause.
- [] Make sure each document supports a specific point in your claim.

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Official Sources Used

These guides summarize public VA information and should be checked against the official source before filing or responding to a VA decision.

- [Evidence Needed For Your Disability Claim](#)
- [How To File A VA Disability Claim](#)
- [Upload Evidence To Support Your Disability Claim](#)
- [Supporting Forms For VA Claims](#)
- [VA Form 21-4142](#)
- [VA Form 21-4142a](#)
- [Public Disability Benefits Questionnaires \(DBQs\)](#)

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