

AIVetGuide

Appeals, Increases, and Secondary Claims

Choose the right next-step category after a decision or worsening condition.

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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Denied, Underrated, or Getting Worse?

This guide explains common next steps after a VA decision or when a service-connected condition worsens. It is designed to help veterans sort options before acting.

Do not guess

The best option depends on the problem. Read the decision letter first, identify the reason, then choose the option that matches the missing evidence or alleged error.

Common paths

Path	When it may fit
Supplemental Claim	You have new and relevant evidence for a previously decided issue.
Higher-Level Review	You want a senior reviewer to look again based on the evidence VA had at the time of the prior decision. New evidence is not submitted in this lane.
Board Appeal	You want a Veterans Law Judge to review the issue. Board options and timelines can vary by docket.
Increased-rating claim	A service-connected condition has gotten worse and you have updated evidence of severity.
Secondary claim	A new condition was caused or aggravated by an already service-connected condition.
Individual Unemployability	Service-connected conditions prevent the veteran from keeping steady substantially gainful work.

Decision tree

1. If VA denied because there was no current diagnosis, gather current medical evidence before filing again.
2. If VA denied because there was no in-service event, gather service records, incident records, or lay statements that support the event.
3. If VA denied because there was no nexus, consider whether medical reasoning or secondary-service-connection evidence is needed.
4. If VA granted service connection but rating seems too low, compare symptoms and severity evidence with the applicable rating criteria and consider updated evidence.
5. If VA used the wrong date, review Intent to File, claim history, medical evidence dates, and effective-date rules.
6. If VA overlooked evidence already submitted, consider whether Higher-Level Review is appropriate.
7. If you have new and relevant evidence, consider whether Supplemental Claim is appropriate.
8. If the situation is complex or high-value, seek accredited representation before the deadline.

Evidence plan for an increase

- [] Recent medical records showing worsening symptoms or treatment escalation.
- [] Symptom log showing frequency, severity, duration, and flare-ups.

- ☐ Work impact evidence: missed work, accommodations, reduced hours, warnings, safety issues, or inability to perform tasks.
- ☐ Daily-life impact evidence: sleep, movement, driving, household tasks, personal care, social limitations, concentration, or mood.
- ☐ Lay statements from spouse, family, coworkers, supervisors, or friends who observe the worsening.
- ☐ DBQ or medical opinion when appropriate.

Evidence plan for a secondary claim

- ☐ Identify the already service-connected condition.
- ☐ Identify the new condition claimed as secondary.
- ☐ Gather medical evidence showing the new condition exists.
- ☐ Gather medical reasoning explaining causation or aggravation.
- ☐ Include treatment history showing how the conditions interact.
- ☐ Use lay evidence to explain timeline and daily impact.

Questions for an accredited representative

- ☐ Which review option fits the decision letter and why?
- ☐ What is the deadline for this decision?
- ☐ Is any evidence missing?
- ☐ Should this be a Supplemental Claim, Higher-Level Review, Board Appeal, increase, secondary claim, or TDIU claim?
- ☐ How should favorable findings be used?
- ☐ Does the decision raise effective-date issues?

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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.

- [VA Decision Reviews And Appeals](#)
- [Choosing A Decision Review Option](#)
- [Supplemental Claims](#)
- [Higher-Level Reviews](#)
- [Board Appeals](#)
- [Types Of Disability Claims And When To File](#)
- [Individual Unemployability If You Cannot Work](#)
- [VA Form 21-8940](#)

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