



Post Service Officer Bulletin June 2021

Post Service Officer Guide

- The Director, National Veterans Service, shall prepare and publish a revised edition of the **"VFW GUIDE FOR POST SERVICE OFFICERS"** during the first quarter of each **even** numbered calendar year. If you need a copy of the guide, please call state HQ or you can purchase one on the VFW Store.
- Each Department Service Officer (hereinafter referred as to DSO) shall ensure that all VFW Post, District and County Council Service Officers in the Department have a current edition of the VFW Guide.
- **SEC. 4. GUIDE FOR POST SERVICE OFFICERS**
The VFW Manual of Procedure, Sec 218, Mandates that each Post Service Officer have the latest edition of the Guide for Post Service Officers. These may be purchased through your VFW Store, Post Quartermaster, Department Quartermaster, or Department Service Officer.

Service Officer Responsibilities

- **What is a Post Service Officer?**
PSO's are ambassadors of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Many PSOs get out of their Posts and take the word about veterans benefits to those who cannot come to them, whether in community centers, nursing homes, places of worship, Vet Centers or just around town. The knowledge PSOs carry with them can help veterans and their survivors obtain the help they often desperately need.
- **What is a Department Service Officer?**
DSO's file claims timely, review VA decisions, conduct hearings, advocate for veterans and their families, meet with veterans, develop evidence, answer requests for assistance and compile the departments monthly reports to both VFW NVS and Act 66.
- **What is a Post Service Officer's job?**
 1. Know the VA eligibility rules established by law.
 2. Provide Veterans and survivors counsel to the best of your ability.

3. Help Veterans and survivors complete VA Forms.
4. Advise veterans to submit all forms to the DSO for completion.
5. Keep your Post/Members and survivors aware of all events, news, and information relevant to local, state and federal Veterans Services, and changes in the law.

Post Service Officer Responsibilities

- Post Service Officers can assist with and review the veteran's claims documents and supporting evidence.
- The PSO must not take possession of any documents.
- The PSO will direct veterans to deliver all documents to their respective Department Service Officer (DSO).
- VA awards benefits based on the date of claim, so it is vital that claims should be sent to the DSO immediately by the veteran.
- Claims must not be withheld until all the supporting evidence is obtained, as there may be a loss of monetary benefit to the claimant.
- Will never release confidential information, such as what conditions were claimed or address of the claimant, etc. to parties other than the claimant or VFW accredited representatives.
- Inform the veterans (**preferably in writing**) that all application forms, evidence, etc., in connection with claims should be submitted to the Department Service Officer.

VA Benefits and Services

- **Compensation:**
VA can pay a monthly compensation if the veteran is at least 10% disabled as a result of Military Service. A Veteran can be given a service connection for his or her disability and be rated at 0%. This provides for treatment of the disability but because the disability is considered to be minor, no compensation is given.
- **Non-Service-Connected Pension:**

Non-Service-Connected Pension is a benefit paid to wartime veterans who have limited or no income, and who are age 65 or older, or, if under 65, who are permanently and totally disabled.

Veterans who are or seriously disabled may qualify for Aid and Attendance (A&A) benefits and Special Monthly Compensation (SMC).

These are benefits that are paid in addition to the basic pension rate.

- **Healthcare:**

Hospital, outpatient medical, dental, pharmacy and prosthetic services

Domiciliary, nursing home and community base residential care

Sexual trauma counseling

Specialized health care for women veterans

Health and rehabilitation programs for homeless Veterans

Readjustment counseling

Alcohol and drug dependency treatment

Medical evaluation for disorders associated with military service in the Gulf War, or exposure to Agent Orange, radiation and other environmental hazards

- **Education:**

VA administers education benefits for active duty troops, veterans, reservists, and qualifying dependents

Post 9/11 GI Bill (Chapter 33) and Montgomery GI Bill (Chapter 30) for active duty veterans

MGIB Selected Reserve (Section 1606) for Reservists

Dependents Educational Assistance (Chapter 35) for dependents

<http://explore.va.gov/education-training>

- **Home Loans:**

The VA offers a number of home loan services to eligible veterans, some military personnel, and certain surviving spouses.

Types of VA loans are:

- Guaranteed Loans
- Refinancing Loans
- Special Grants

- **Life Insurance:**

Service-members Group Life Insurance (SGLI) is low-cost term life insurance for service members and Reservists

Traumatic SGLI is automatically included in SGLI and provides for payment up to \$100,000 for service members who lose limbs or incur other serious injuries

Veterans Group Life Insurance (VGLI) is a renewable term life insurance for veterans who want to convert their SGLI up to an amount not to exceed the coverage they had when separated from service. Must apply within 1 year and 120 days from discharge.

Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance, also called “RH Insurance” is for service-connected veterans.

- **Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC)**

Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) can be payable to certain survivors of:

- Service-members who died on active duty
- Veterans who died from service-related disabilities, including disabilities that can be proven to be service-related (did not have to be receiving disability benefits before death)
- Certain Veterans who were being paid 100% VA disability compensation at time of death

- **Burial:**

VA offers certain benefits and services to honor Nation’s deceased veterans

VA can furnish a monument to mark the grave of an eligible veteran

VA Forms

- **VA Form 21-22** Appointment of Veterans Service Organization of Claimants Representatives

- This form allows the VFW to represent the veteran and/or claimant in their VA Disability Claim.
- Only an accredited Service Officer can sign these
- **POST SERVICE OFFICERS CANNOT SIGN THESE**

- **VA Form 21-526EZ** Claim for Disability Compensation

- **VA Form 21-527EZ** Claim for Non-Service-Connected Pension

- **VA Form 21-534EZ** Claim for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) or Survivor’s Pension

- **VA Form 21P-530** Burial Benefits

- **VA Form 21-0996** Intent to File a claim. This gives the veteran/claimant one year to file and saves the date

All VA Forms can be found at www.va.gov/vaforms or contact your local accredited service officer

What's new - June 2021

- **PA VETConnect** – www.dmvpa.gov/vetConnect a referral resource for veterans and their families. Resources include VA Benefits, employment, financial assistance, mental wellness, substance use, PTSD and more.
- **VA Plans Expansion of Benefits for Disability Claims for Conditions Related to Certain Toxic Exposures** – The VA announced two major decisions related to presumptive conditions associated with Agent Orange and particulate matter exposures during military service in Southwest Asia. VA will begin implementing provisions of the William M. Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 (Public Law 116-283), adding three conditions to the list of those presumptively associated with exposure to herbicide agents, more commonly known as Agent Orange. Those conditions are bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinsonism. If Veterans or spouses wish to file a claim, please have them contact their nearest VFW accredited service officer.
- **COVID-19 Funeral Assistance** – FEMA has a special program that can provide up to \$9,000 in funeral reimbursement assistance for COVID-19 related deaths. Please call 1-844-684-6333
- **Steer Clear of VA 'Claim Sharks'** – There has been a rise in Unaccredited VA disability claim reps. Companies or persons will charge the veteran 5 times the amount of the veteran's retroactive compensation, potentially costing them thousands of dollars.
- **VA Creates new contact number for veterans** – 1-800-MyVA411 (1-800-698-2411) is available 24/7 and is for ALL VA related inquiries.
- **Board of Veterans' Appeal:** Currently there are over 40,000 legacy appeals (VA Form 21-0958 NOD) and over 40,000 Appeals modernization act (VA Form 10182) currently waiting for a decision by the veterans' law judges. We tell Veterans it will be well over one year to get a decision from the judge.
- **VA no longer uses the VA Medical Centers for exams for VA Disability Claims:** All Compensation and Pension exams will be done by a third-party contractor such as LHI, QTC, VES, etc.

Each Quarter the DSO will be sending out monthly bulletins/updates

Please instruct all Veterans/Claimants to send their VA paperwork to:

Veterans of Foreign Wars
1000 Liberty Ave Room 1601
Pittsburgh PA 15222

Questions/Comments contact:
Liz Salvador, Department Service Officer
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VA COMPENSATION & PENSION

Understanding Mental Health Examinations

HOW IS A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION EVALUATED BY VA?

When you submit a claim for a particular mental health condition, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will process your claim as a claim for any mental health conditions that may be reasonably defined by:

- ▶ The description of the claim
- ▶ The symptoms that you describe
- ▶ The information and evidence that you submit, and
- ▶ Any other information and evidence obtained

Since mental health conditions share similar symptomatology and findings, in order to make sure the correct mental health condition is evaluated as it relates to your claim, VA does a thorough review of all of the medical and non-medical evidence surrounding your claim.

For VA purposes, you can only be rated for one mental health condition. VA will review the entire body of evidence to gain a clear understanding of how your mental health condition symptoms impact your social and industrial functioning and which diagnosed mental health condition(s) may be related to your claim.

When determining the actual evaluation of the mental health condition, VA refers to Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV or DSM-5) findings to assign appropriate evaluations using the Mental Disorder Criteria in the VA Schedule for Rating Disabilities.

WHY IS A REVIEW MENTAL HEALTH EXAM NEEDED?

Future mental health exams are only required or allowed under certain circumstances:

- ▶ When assigning a pre-stabilization rating
- ▶ When the evidence of record clearly shows the likelihood for improvement

Sound medical evidence is required, indicating the likelihood of improvement, to warrant a future exam. Other than those reasons listed above, there are no automatic future exams required or allowed by regulations.

REMEMBER: The examiner is only involved in performing the claim exam. They do not make the rating decision. Only a VA regional office can answer questions regarding your claim.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO ATTEND MY MENTAL HEALTH EXAM?

When a mental health examination is requested to confirm your continued entitlement to disability benefits, it is important that you attend your scheduled disability examination. If for some reason you are unable to attend your mental health examination you must notify VA and request your examination to be rescheduled. However, if you fail to attend your scheduled mental health examination without adequate reason, the VA will review the current evidence of record and may be required by law to do one of the following:

- ▶ Continue payment for the disability(ies) for which the examination was scheduled, if there is no change in severity of your disability(ies) as supported by evidence of record,
- ▶ Discontinue payment for the disability(ies) for which the examination was scheduled, or
- ▶ Reduce payment for the disability(ies) for which the examination was scheduled to minimum evaluation established by law.

It is very important that you attend your review examination to ensure that the abovementioned actions do not occur in the absence of the findings that would have been obtained through your examination. VA wants to ensure that the appropriate disability rating is assigned based on your individual examination findings.

WHY HAS MY DIAGNOSIS CHANGED?

A change in diagnosis of a mental health condition can happen when there is

- ▶ A progression in the mental health condition resulting in the additional symptomatology better fitting the criteria of a different mental health condition diagnosis,
- ▶ A correction of an error in the prior diagnosis, or
- ▶ A development of a new and separate mental health condition

Remember that there can only be one evaluation for a mental health condition, so any change in diagnosis will reflect the most accurate diagnosis and symptomatology.

For more information, visit <http://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/claimexam.asp>



U.S. Department
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Your VA Claim Exam
KNOW WHAT'S NEXT

Your VA Claim Exam

KNOW WHAT'S NEXT

If you've filed a claim for disability compensation or pension benefits with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), you may receive a phone call or a letter asking you to come to a claim exam, also called a compensation and pension (C&P) exam. This exam is a normal part of the VA claim process and helps VA determine the claim decision. The exam may be completed by a VA examiner or a VA partner. Make sure you know what to expect before going to your exam by reviewing the tips below.



Helpful Tips

TIPS SHEET | JANUARY 2021

TIP #1: It's important to attend your VA claim exam.

Missing your exam could cause VA to delay its decision on your claim or rate your claim "as-is" (i.e. only using the information that is in your file).

TIP #2: If you need to reschedule your exam, do it as early as possible.

Make sure you contact VA or VA partner immediately to reschedule your exam if you have a conflict with your exam time. Unless it's an emergency, try not to reschedule on the day before or day of the exam.

TIP #3: Make sure VA has your current contact information.

Make sure both your nearest VA regional office and VA medical center have your current address, phone number, and email information. It is important your contact information is accurate in both places so they know how to contact you about your exam.

TIP #4: Call and confirm your exam with VA.

Call and confirm your exam time and location at the number provided to make sure you and VA or VA Partner have the correct appointment information.

TIP #5: Submit all your medical evidence with your claim application or to a VA regional office before you go to your exam.

You may bring medical records or evidence with you to your exam, but the examiner cannot submit any new information to be added to your claim file on your behalf. Make sure you submit all evidence and treatment records to a VA regional office before your exam so the examiner can have a complete picture of your health status.

TIP #6: Be prepared to attend multiple claim exams if you are claiming more than one disability.

If necessary, VA may request more than one claim exam if you submit a claim for several disabilities. VA will do its best to schedule multiple exams for the same day to limit your time spent.

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

*my***VA**
Putting Veterans First

FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/

Reach out to your local Veterans Service Organization

Call 1-800-827-1000

HELPFUL TIPS

TIP #7: Get there early.

Plan to give yourself time to get to your exam location and arrive about 15 minutes early. Examiners may not agree to perform your exam if you are late.

TIP #8: Remember, physical contact may not be required as part of your exam.

The VA claim exam is not a treatment exam; it's an exam that allows VA to review the disabilities you are claiming. Depending on the information included in your claim application, the examiner may only need to ask a few questions to complete the exam.

TIP #9: Be truthful and honest when you answer questions during your exam.


When the examiner asks you questions during your exam, be truthful and honest: don't exaggerate your symptoms or pain, but don't downplay them either. The examiner is looking to capture information on the disabilities you have claimed. This will help you get the most accurate rating possible.

TIP #10: Do not ask the examiner about the status of your claim during your exam. They don't know.

The examiner performing your exam is only responsible for conducting the exam and providing the results to a VA claims processor. They do not make any claim rating decisions and often do not know the full claims process. If you have questions about your claim, call 1-800-827-1000, contact your accredited representative, such as a Veterans Service Organization, or check eBenefits to find out more about your claim status.

TIP #11: Remember, the length of your exam does not affect your claim decision.

Exams can range anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour or more. Each exam is different depending on the Veteran and the information that has been included in the claim application. Don't forget, the examiner will spend time before and/or after your appointment reviewing your medical records. Even if your visit is short, your claim is still being carefully reviewed.

 Disabilities determined by VA to be related to your military service can lead to monthly non-taxable compensation, enrollment in the VA health care system, a 10-point hiring preference for federal employment and other important benefits. Ask your VA representative or Veterans Service Organization representative about Disability Compensation, Pension, Health Care, Caregiver Program, Career Services, Educational Assistance, Home Loan Guaranty, Insurance and/or Dependents and Survivors' Benefits.

VA



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Your VA Claim Exam
KNOW WHAT'S NEXT 