

ISSUE BRIEF: FIXING VA'S BENEFIT CLAIMS PROCESSING SYSTEM

The Situation

- As of February 10, 2014, there were 677,584 claims for veterans' disability compensation and pensions awaiting decisions by the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), nearly a 20% reduction from the 821,143 claims pending one year earlier. Far too many claims, nearly 60 percent, have been pending longer than VA's target goal of 125 days.
- During the 12-month period ending in November 2013 the average time it took to process a claim was 286 days with nearly 90 percent accuracy, which is a slight increase in accuracy from one year ago, but still far below VA's target of 98 percent.
- VBA's workforce has doubled over the past decade, but the number of veterans filing claims rose even faster to 1.17 million in 2013. Furthermore, the overall number and complexity of issues being claimed per veteran remains high.

The Challenge

- In 2011, VA Secretary Shinseki established an ambitious goal of zero claims pending more than 125 days, and all claims completed with 98 percent accuracy.
- To meet the Secretary's goal, VBA developed and implemented a new organizational model and has now fully implemented its new Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS) into all Regional Offices.
- However, in order to achieve lasting success in eliminating the backlog, VBA must remain focused on creating a claims processing system focused on quality, accuracy, accountability and timeliness that is designed to decide each claim right the first time.

The Solution

- DAV urges Congress to support VBA's ongoing transformation of the benefits claims processing system, while providing aggressive oversight to ensure it is completed properly.
- DAV urges Congress to ensure that sufficient funding is provided to VBA to continue developing and maintaining its new Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS), as well as to support the complete digital conversion of all active paper claims files.
- DAV urges Congress to enact legislation that promotes the use of private medical evidence in rating decisions and expands the use of interim ratings for veterans who file complex and multi-issue disability compensation claims.