

TDVS Benefits Bulletin
20-10

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TDVS Updates

TDVS's October Lunch and Learn: Certifying Proof of Service by Service Officer

Certifying Proof of Service by Service Officer
October 14, 2020 @ 11:30-12:30 CDT

Annual Training Conference

This year's Annual Training Conference is blended into four mandatory sessions:

1. Three half day morning sessions (October 7-9, 2020) Three separate WebEx invitations have already been sent out.
2. Live virtual training with two date options to attend (October 27-28, 2020). Special Monthly Compensation: How to Ensure Veterans are Properly Compensated for Loss of Quality of Life Due to Service-Connected Disabilities. Invitations have already been sent out.
3. Pre-recorded session available for 24/5 to allow participants to participate on their schedule. (November 16-20, 2020) What Every Veteran Advocate Needs to Know About Discharge Upgrades (1.5 hours)
4. Final Examination (WebEx) (November 20, 2020)

All attendees will receive a certificate of attendance within 24-48 after each session. Schedule and Slide presentations once they are available will be [HERE](#).

VA and Veteran Benefit Updates

Direct Deposit Process Change

As highlighted in [last month's Benefits Bulletin](#), the Veterans Benefit Administration is transitioning to an online process for Veterans to initiate or change their direct deposit information. The transition to an exclusive online process will begin on **October 13th** rather than at the start of the new year. Here's VA's Official Message --



The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA) is transitioning to an exclusive online process on Oct. 13. This new process will allow Veterans to enroll in direct deposit and/or change bank account information and help eliminate fraudulent actions aimed at Veterans.

This is an earlier transition date than previously announced. Security threats while using paper forms and faxes are immense. This expedited change is needed to reduce hundreds of attempts, reported each month, to defraud Veterans through paper-based interactions.

While online changes with the more secure two-factor authentication process are strongly encouraged, any Veteran with questions about the process can call our helpline at 1-800-827-1000 (TTY: 711), or by going to their nearest VA regional office (if accepting in-person appointments) and change this information in person.

For additional information, please visit us at: <https://www.va.gov/change-direct-deposit/>.

No Cost Flu Shot Options for Veterans

Flu season is here and getting your flu shot has never been easier. Remember that getting vaccinated is the best way to protect yourself, as well as your loved ones, against the flu virus. This year, enrolled Veterans of the VA health care system have several options to get a flu shot. VA now offers more options, easy access, and seamless records. <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/flu/vaccination/>

Quality Review Insights

Several of these quality review insights have been presented before, but they continue to be the most common issues identified during TDVS's quality review.

VetraSpec and Open Database

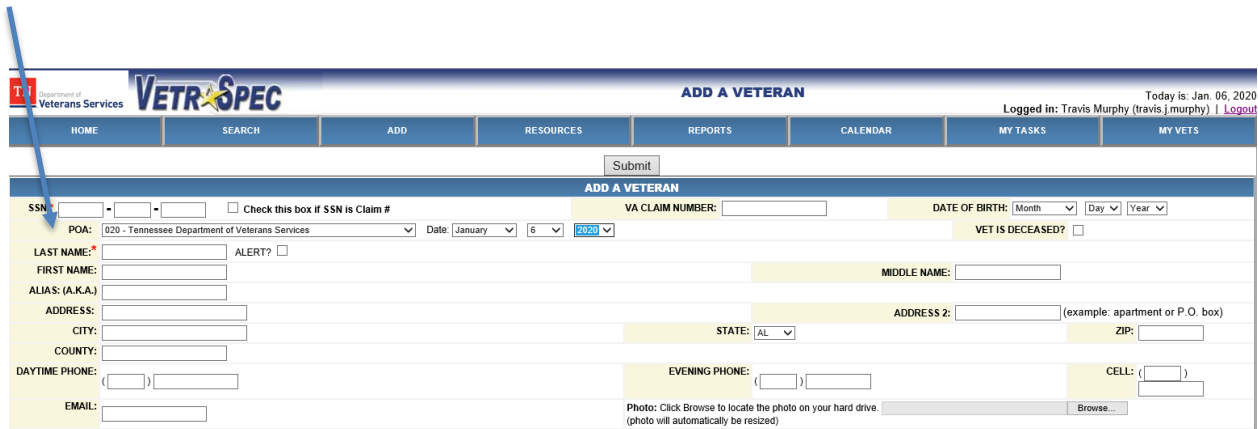
REMINDER...Please remember to change the Office and CVSO information to reflect the office (Region/Office/County) and individual (CSO) assisting the client in order to improve the accuracy of VetraSpec's report functions.

OFFICE AND CVSO INFORMATION	
REGION/OFFICE/COUNTY:	Nashville Field Office
CSO:	Travis Murphy - TDVS
CLAIM MANAGED BY:	Travis Murphy - TDVS
RECORD LAST EDITED BY:	Travis Murphy (TDVS) on Dec. 02, 2019
RECORD ORIGINALLY ENTERED BY:	Travis Murphy (TDVS), on Jun. 27, 2019
IS THIS RECORD CONFIDENTIAL?	No
Save	

VetraSpec by DataSpec, Inc. | www.dataspecinc.com | 1-877-568-7732 | [Help](#)
Use constitutes agreement of the TOS

Power of Attorney

Please remember that you need to edit the “More Details” screen in VetraSpec in order to assign or update power of attorney (POA). The VA Form 21-22 in VetraSpec auto-populates with the POA that is established in that field.



The screenshot shows the 'ADD A VETERAN' form in VetraSpec. The POA dropdown menu is highlighted with a blue arrow. The form includes fields for SSN, VA CLAIM NUMBER, DATE OF BIRTH, LAST NAME, FIRST NAME, ALIAS, ADDRESS, CITY, COUNTY, DAYTIME PHONE, EVENING PHONE, CELL, and EMAIL. There are also checkboxes for 'Check this box if SSN is Claim #', 'ALERT?', and 'VET IS DECEASED?'. A 'Submit' button is located at the top of the form.

The Appeals Division continues to encounter instances where claims or related materials have been packaged using VetraSpec when the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) is the Power of Attorney of record. DAV is not an organization supported by TDVS. They have their own office and framework for claim submission in the State of Tennessee. If a county service officer is accredited with DAV and desires to utilize that POA, they should provide that assistance outside of VetraSpec and work through the DAV team at the VA Regional Office.

Reviewing VA systems prior to assisting a veteran will ensure that you hold the appropriate accreditation necessary to represent a veteran or other claimant before VA. The VSO hotline -- 855-225-0709 -- is another resource that may be used to determine whether a POA is of record when providing claims assistance.

Informal Conferences During Higher Level Review

One of the options for disagreeing with a VA decision dated February 19, 2019 or later is by filing a VA Form 20-0996 to request a higher-level review. Claimants can request an informal hearing as part of this option. If the claimant elects an informal hearing, please provide the Appeals Division's contact information in order to ensure appellate representation.

PRACTICE TIP... Complete Block 14 of the VA form 20-0996 by selecting 8 to 10 a.m. and 10 to 12:30 p.m. and provide TDVS's Appeals Division contact information -- 615-695-6385 and tdva.vbanas@va.gov.

Intent to File

A couple of notes related to VA's Intent to File (VA Form 21-0966) based on Appeals Division quality review.

First, avoid packaging an Intent to File (ITF) for a veteran if you will package an application for the specific benefit identified on the intent on the same day. If an intent and application for benefits are filed on the same day, the Appeals Division will file only the application because it would be associated with the accompanying intent making it irrelevant.

For example, a VA Form 21-0966 and VA Form 21-526EZ are packaged on the same day. Block 13 on the VA Form 21-0966 indicates the veteran intends to file for disability compensation. If filed together, VA would likely associate the VA Form 21-526EZ with the ITF making it irrelevant when filed at the same time as the application for benefits.

Second, it's routine for TDVS employees and CSOs to generate a POA and ITF when first seeing a client. Generally, this is the correct course of action. However, please be aware that if an ITF is already active a duplicate ITF – one submitted for the same benefits as an ITF that has already been submitted – will have no effect on benefit entitlement.

For example, if a veteran initiates a disability claim in eBenefits on January 5, 2019 but does not complete, an active ITF for disability compensation is established. On July 5, 2019, the veteran then visits a field office where a second ITF for disability compensation is prepared and filed. This second, or duplicate, ITF will have no effect on benefit entitlement. The veteran has until January 4, 2020 to file for disability compensation in order to receive the benefit of an earlier effective date.

Please see [VA's M-21 Adjudication Procedures Manual](#) for additional information.

III.ii.2.C.2.g. Duplicate ITFs
An ITF remains active for one year or until a claim is received, whichever occurs earlier. A duplicate ITF is an ITF submitted for the same benefit as an ITF which has already been submitted, for which a corresponding claim has not been received.

Any subsequent duplicate ITF submitted for the same benefit during the active period will have no effect on benefit entitlement.

Reference: For more information on the assignment of effective date following the submission of a duplicate ITF, see [M21-1, Part III, Subpart iv, 5.C.2.c.](#)

Digital Filing and Supporting VBA's Mail Automation Efforts

The Appeals Division provides quality review feedback that negatively impacts the Department's ability to file claims and associated materials digitally. Much of this feedback is also applicable to how TDVS can better support VBA's mail automation efforts.

The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) is working over the next 4 months to automate its mail processes in order to provide faster claims processing for veterans and claimants. In support of this effort VBA identified concrete actions VSOs can take to support faster claims processing:

- Use Electronic Filing
 - TDVS is already supporting this effort by using Digits-to-Digits or Direct Submit for nearly all claims and compensation mail filed through the Appeals Division.
- Double Check Form Completion
 - TDVS is already supporting this effort through its quality review program. We have frequently identified and shared information to support form completion and successful electronic filing.
 - VBA has requested service organizations take the following efforts to speed the delivery of benefits: VBA receives many forms that are incomplete and without signature - this delays claims processing
 - Submit legible, quality documents
 - Ensure all checkboxes are completely filled-in
 - If information is not applicable, leave the field blank; do not use "N/A"
 - Do not use acronyms for Veterans Service Organization names or claimed disabilities
 - Keep handwritten notes clear with BLOCK letters written in dark ink
 - Sign and date forms clearly with dark ink

- Digits to Digits (D2D) program remains the Appeals Division's preferred method to file eligible forms, which include the VA Form 21-22, VA Form 21-0966 and VA Form 21-526EZ. Tips to help ensure the forms you generate are D2D eligible can be found here - [Digits to Digits and Digital Filing Fact Sheet](#)

**Starting January 1, 2021, VA will no longer be accepting faxed submissions.

Practice Like a Pro

DBQs and Private Medical Evidence

As highlighted in [last month's Benefits Bulletin](#), in March 2020, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs removed the DBQs from its website. The National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP) made DBQ's available on their [website](#) recognizing that they are still an important tool that can be used to obtain medical information from private medical examiners to support a veteran's claim. TDVS also highlighted a couple of important notes about the DBQs NVLSP has made available before using.

Medical nexus opinions from private medical providers can be another important piece of evidence to support a veteran's claim. There are several relevant factors that should be considered before using nexus opinions from private providers as evidence in support of a veteran's claim. The examiner should:

- Review the veteran's claims file and note that fact in the opinion;
- Discuss the relevant facts;
- Provide a firm diagnosis;
- Adequately explain the reasons for their opinion; and
- Provide a probability (at least as likely as not) that the disability is related to service.

Often, private medical opinions that suggest a connection between a veteran's disability and service can be enough to [trigger VA's duty to assist](#) in providing a medical opinion.

COVID-19 and Remote Claims Assistance

As a reminder, additional updates related to COVID-19 and tips on providing remote claims assistance can be found in the [special TDVS Benefit Bulletin](#). TDVS has provided three updates during the evolution of the Novel Coronavirus outbreak.

TDVS Benefits Bulletins Can Be Found on the [VSO Tools](#) Portion of TDVS's Website