



VETERANS SERVICE AGENCY

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VA Claims Processing Information

Claims Processing - *The average new claim processing time is approximately 12 to 24 months and appeals may take several years.*

We understand this backlog is extremely frustrating to all concerned, especially to our veterans and their families. The reasons for this backlog are numerous, complex, and, in all fairness to the VA, beyond their immediate control. The VA, however, is working hard to correct the problem. There are many claims-related issues that the VA must resolve, such as documentation, evidence, and procedures, which must follow federal law and regulation, and must be determined before the VA can make a decision on your claim. These requirements vary depending on the nature of the claim.

Status Requests for Pending Claims - *In order to reduce unnecessary demands on the VA staff processing your claim, our staff will not check on claims until at least six months has passed from the date the claim was filed.*

Frequent checking on the status of a claim prevents the VA from doing their job. Our staff will continue to verify that your claim has been received by the VA and is being processed. If you still desire a status request before six months, you may call the VA toll free at 1-800-827-1000, 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. NOTE: If you call the VA, you will get a telephone counselor. The information they provide is what is currently available in their computer system. Because of the backlog, this information may not reflect recently submitted claims. Please be patient, but feel free to contact our staff if you have any concerns or questions regarding the submission of your claim. You may also wish to enroll in www.ebenefits.va.gov.

Purpose of a County Veterans Service Office - *The County office is available to help Orange County's resident veterans through the claims process.*

We are not employees of the Federal Government. We are a County Veterans Service Office (CVSO) and are here as an advocate for veterans and their families to assist them in obtaining VA benefits. Our office will help you with determining potential benefits eligibility, completion of necessary forms, obtaining supporting evidence, and if necessary, preparing an appeal.

How Can You Present the Best Claim to the VA? - *Accuracy and organization are key.*

Incomplete or inaccurate claims and a lack of supporting evidence are major contributing factors to the nationwide claims backlog. Not surprisingly, it takes longer for the VA to process an incomplete claim than a well-documented claim. Failure to submit requested records and information, as well as failure to attend required VA medical exams, also contributes to the backlog, and contributes to delayed or even denied claims. Although the VA has a duty to assist in developing claims, this duty is limited, and ultimately, the burden of proof is on the applicant.

What is Involved in the Claims Process?

- Your completed claim is submitted to the VA Regional Office that will process and adjudicate your claim.
- The VA then reviews your claim. They may request additional supporting information to help them decide all issues.
- The VA may schedule a medical examination (C&P exam) if they feel it's appropriate.
- The VA will try to obtain any VA medical records or military service medical records needed to decide your claim.
- The VA will try to obtain any private medical records that you mention in your claim.
- The VA will adjudicate your claim and make a decision based on the available evidence.

Our Commitment to You – *Orange County Veterans Service Agency is committed to helping you through the process. We will:*

- Provide you with accurate and comprehensive counseling concerning the benefits available to you.
- Help you complete and submit all necessary claim forms.
- Attempt to obtain evidence to support your claim, as necessary.
- Assist with any follow-up action that is needed or requested by the VA.
- Actively cooperate with the veterans' service organization to insure adequate representation of your claim during the VA decision process.
- Manage your claim during and after VA adjudication of your claim.
- Review VA's decision to ensure you receive all benefits to which you are entitled.

What We Cannot or Will Not Do – *While we have a commitment to providing veterans with the best possible service, there are limitations to what we are able to do.*

- We cannot pay for any records or other evidence. If a doctor or agency asks for payment, our department does not maintain funds for this purpose.
- We do not have control over your claim once it has been submitted to the VA.
- We will not attempt to persuade the VA to hasten the processing of your claim out of turn. As an advocate, we cannot ask the VA to process one veteran's claim over another.
- We cannot change eligibility requirements, which have been determined by Congress and must be administered by the VA.
- We will not knowingly submit anything false or inaccurate to the VA or other agencies.
- Please bear in mind that there may be instances where we will not be successful in obtaining certain benefits. This normally occurs because of a lack of crucial evidence or a client's ineligibility based on statutory requirements.

What You Can Do to Help with the Claims Process – *Your involvement is essential.*

It is important that you be an active partner in this process. In order to achieve the goals mentioned above, we need your full cooperation with our staff. We cannot hope for a favorable decision without your full support. If the VA or our office contacts you, please bring in all VA letters, and requested evidence so we may fully assist you. This will help us better manage your claim. If you submit information directly to the VA or through another service organization without our knowledge, it may reduce our ability to serve you and effectively manage your case.

For assistance or more information, contact the Orange County Veterans Service Agency at 291-2470 or visit the County website at www.orangecountygov.com.