

**TDVS Benefits Bulletin**  
**20-6**

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**TDVS Updates**

National Veterans Legal Services Program Updates

Since July of 2019, TDVS has sent 209 Board of Veterans' Appeals denials to NVLSP for review. NVLSP has offered appellate representation at the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims to approximately 15% of these claimants. TDVS has received very positive reviews of the service that NVLSP provides. Please remember to use the TDVS power of attorney to ensure that all your claimants are afforded this opportunity. Additional details about TDVS's partnership with NVLSP can be found in the [TDVS Partnership with the National Veterans Legal Services Program Fact Sheet](#).

VetraSpec Updates

On May 27, 2020, VetraSpec added a General Communication Log feature for Tennessee VetraSpec users.

- VetraSpec created this feature because they were aware that several customers used a fake veteran record to log general office communications. Since this was not ideal, they created a General Contact Log.
- You may use this to log any and all communications in your office **not** associated with a veteran record.
- The entries will **NOT** be associated with a veteran, even if you enter the vet's name. If you need to enter a communication for a specific vet, please continue to go into that vet's record and use the Communication tab.
- You may use the General Contact Log whether or not you are in a vet's record.
- If you are in a vet's record and get a phone call, simply click the General Contact Log tab at the top right of the screen, enter your contact entry, submit it, and continue working in the vet's record. You may also open this tab in a new form/window and leave it up for the day.
- You will find links to this new feature on the lower left of the Home/Search screen and in the tab bar, to the left of "My Tasks" if you are in a vet's record.

- For reporting purposes, on the Reports tab, in the Communication column, you will find a link to a report called "General Contact Log".

## **VA and Veteran Benefit Updates**

### C&P In-Person Examination – Restart

On May 28, 2020, VA [announced](#) it was resuming in-person Compensation and Pension (C&P) exams as VA medical centers reopen in select locations across the county. One of the locations includes the catchment area for the James H. Quillen VA Health Care System in East Tennessee. A few important considerations:

- If veterans do not feel comfortable receiving in-person exams they may opt to schedule their exam for a later date without impact to their disability claim.
- Telehealth and acceptable clinical evidence (ACE) process will continue to be used to complete C&P exams whenever possible both inside and outside the select locations that are reopening.
- Claims should not be denied for failure to attend an in-person C&P examination beginning March 1, 2020, when the President declared a national emergency, through the duration of the national emergency.
  - If you discover a claim has been denied for failure to attend an in-person C&P examination, please contact the Appeals Division at [tdva.vbanas@va.gov](mailto:tdva.vbanas@va.gov) or 615-695-6385, so we can work with VA to remedy the issue.

VA anticipates resuming in-person C&P examinations in additional locations as the Veterans Health Administration determines it is safe to reopen additional VA medical centers.

### VA Form 20-10207 – Priority Processing Request

The VA has introduced Form 20-1027 to be used when requesting expedited processing of a VA claim. This form must be submitted with evidence of the reason for priority processing, unless the evidence is already of record. For example, a request for priority processing based on extreme financial hardship must include evidence of foreclosure, eviction or past-due bills, whereas a request based on age generally does not require additional evidence.

The criteria to expedite a pension claim are now more limited than those to expedite a compensation claim:

**Pension:** The Pension Management Center (PMC) provides priority processing for pension claimants who are homeless, terminally ill, former prisoner of war (FPOW), Purple Heart recipient (original claims), or Medal of Honor recipients. Outside of these criteria, the pension workload is prioritized based on the date of receipt of claim.

**Compensation:** In addition to the reasons listed above, the VBA provides priority processing for benefits claimants for claimants who are 85 or older, or for those experiencing extreme financial hardship. *PMC no longer provides priority processing due to age or financial hardship.*

*Please Note: The 20-1027 does NOT expedite processing by the TDVS Appeals Division. You must call or email the Appeals Division to request priority processing for claims or other forms that are time sensitive.*

VA's Adjudication Manual's (M21-1) section on priority processing can be found here – [Claims That Require Priority Processing.](#)

## **Quality Review Insights**

### 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 also 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](mailto:tdva.vbanas@va.gov).

### Digital Filing

The 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](#)

## **Practice Like a Pro**

VA's Adjudication Procedures Manual (M21-1)

The [M21-1](#) is the Veterans Benefits Administration's (VBA) policy manual for how it develops and decides claims for benefits. Think of it as a playbook that outlines each step VBA employees take from the time VA receives a claim for benefits to its decision. It's a valuable resource that you should familiarize yourself with if you truly want to practice like a pro.

#### COVID-19 and Remote Claims Assistance

Here's VA's [written guidance](#) for Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Claims and Appeals Processing.

VA has provided [guidance](#) to Regional Offices allowing them to temporarily accept uncertified service verification documents unless there is reasonable evidence of fraud or forgery.

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*