

VBA VSO Quarterly Meeting

FY25: Q1

December 19, 2024



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U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs



Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits Mike Frueh



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Office of Policy & Oversight



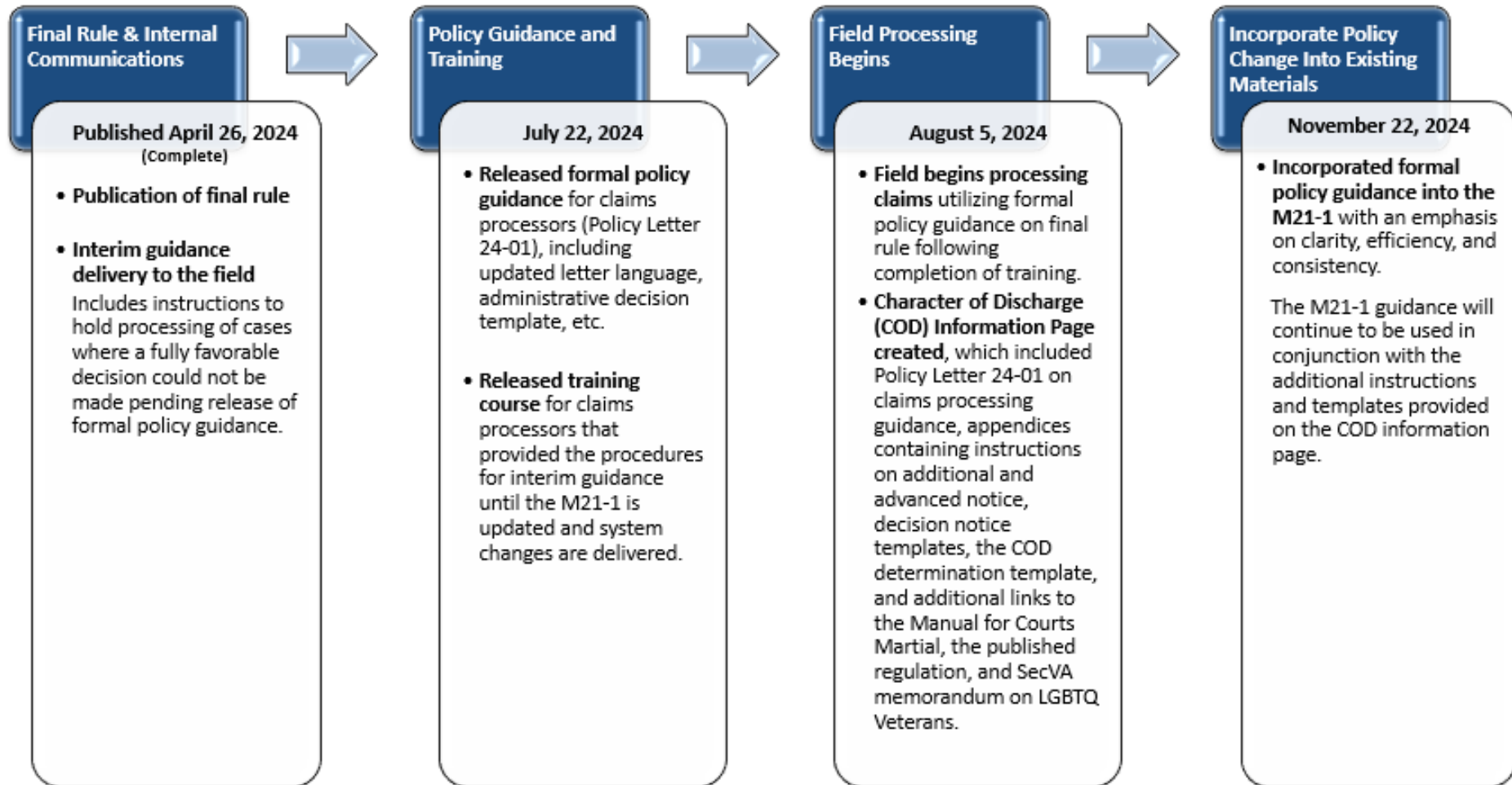
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Compensation Service

AQ95 Final Rule Implementation Update

- **AQ95 final rule, effective June 25, 2024:**
 - Removes the bar for aggravated homosexual acts,
 - Defines the bar of willful and persistent misconduct,
 - Adds a compelling circumstances exception and outlines factors that can mitigate the regulatory bars of moral turpitude and willful and persistent misconduct, and
 - Provides additional compelling circumstances that can mitigate the statutory bar of Absent Without Leave (AWOL) of 180 days or more.
- **Final rule also clarifies evidentiary considerations for when bars should be applied:**
 - Bars shall only be applied when they are clearly supported by the military record.
 - Benefit of the doubt will be resolved in favor of the former Service member under VA's authority in 38 U.S.C. 5107(b) and 38 C.F.R. 3.102.
 - Per 38 CFR 3.102, it is the defined and consistently applied policy of the Department of Veterans Affairs to administer the law under a broad interpretation, consistent, however, with the facts shown in every case. When, after careful consideration of all procurable and assembled data, a reasonable doubt arises regarding service origin, the degree of disability, or **any other point**, such doubt will be resolved in favor of the claimant.
 - Regulatory bars shall only be applied if the misconduct underlying the bar formed the basis of the discharge.
 - If the military decided that the misconduct did not preclude continued service, then it also should not preclude benefits eligibility. This limitation will prevent conduct unrelated to the basis of the discharge from contributing to a bar from benefits.

AQ95 Implementation Timeline



COD Information Page

- Character of Discharge (COD) Information Page was created August 2024
- Resource page for claims processors
- Includes:
 - ✓ Policy Letter 24-01 on claims processing guidance
 - ✓ Guidance on issuing advanced notice and COD decisions
 - ✓ Advanced notice and decision notice templates
 - ✓ Annotated Manual for Courts Martial Appendix 12, SecVA memorandum on LGBTQ Veterans, job aid on entering COD determinations

CHARACTER OF DISCHARGE (COD) INFORMATION PAGE

This Character of Discharge (COD) information page provides information and claims processing guidance to Regional Offices (ROs), Decision Review Operations Centers (DROCs), and Pension Management Centers (PMCs) when making COD determinations for former Service members (FSMs) under VA's final rule, [\(4095\) Update and Clarify Regulatory Bars to Benefits Based on Character of Discharge](#), that became effective on June 25, 2024. This guidance also applies to survivor benefit claims when a character of discharge (COD) determination is needed.

Important: On November 25, 2024, Policy Letter 24-01 is rescinded due to its incorporation into M21-1 X.iv.1.A. Due to system limitations, claims processors should use the updated versions of guidance on this page for letter templates, system inputs, and job aid.

Claims processors should not use document versions that have been rescinded.

Policy Letter (PL)	Instructions for Determining Whether New/Updated Advance Notice is Required	COD Decisions and Notification Letters	Advance Notice Templates	COD Determination Template	Decision Notice Templates	Other COD Information
<p>PL 24-01 (Rescinded 11/25/2024 due to incorporation into M21-1 X.iv.1.A.)</p> <p>PL 24-01 (Rescinded 09/30/2024 due to reissuance of PL 24-01.)</p>	<p>Instructions for Determining Whether New/Updated Advance Notice is Required - Version 1 (Rescinded 11/25/2024)</p> <p>Instructions for Determining Whether New/Updated Advance Notice is Required - Version 2</p>	<p>Instructions for Issuing COD Decisions and Notification Letters - Version 1 (Rescinded 11/25/2024)</p> <p>Instructions for Issuing COD Decisions and Notification Letters - Version 2</p>	<p>With POA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advance Notice <p>Without POA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advance Notice 	<p>COD Determination Template (Rescinded 11/25/2024 due to incorporation into M21-1 X.iv.1.A.)</p>	<p>COD - Eligible All: One Period of Service</p> <p>COD - Ineligible All: One Period of Service</p> <p>COD - CH17 Only: One Period of Service</p> <p>COD - Conditional Discharge: CH17</p> <p>COD - Conditional Discharge: No CH17</p>	<p>Entering Character of Discharge (COD) Determinations Job Aid</p> <p>MCM App 12 Punishments SecVA Memo</p> <p>eCFR 38 CFR 3.12 -- Benefit eligibility based on character of discharge Effective June 25, 2024 (current)</p> <p>eCFR 38 CFR 3.12 (Apr. 26, 2024) -- Character of discharge Effective Before June 24, 2024 - Archive (historical, do not use)</p>



Incorporation of Stakeholder Feedback

(1 of 3)

Veteran advocates shared concerns regarding the COD process, changes made under AQ95, and their incorporation into the M21-1 Adjudication Procedures Manual. The following outlines stakeholders' concerns and VA response:

1. Provide clear and thorough guidelines for front line adjudicators, implementing the changes covered under AQ95 with a Veteran-centric approach, and ensuring consistent and faithful application.
 - VA revised M21-1 procedures to explicitly note that bars should only be applied when clearly supported by the record, and if they form the basis for the discharge. The revised procedures also reaffirm that benefit of the doubt will be resolved in favor of the former service member in accordance with [38 U.S.C. 5107\(b\)](#) whenever possible.
 - In addition to clear and concise procedures, VA created an internal information page as a resource for all claims processors rendering COD determinations. This is a centralized location for all relevant information, templates, instructions, and policy guidance, and will ensure consistent application across COD determinations.
2. Clearly define the scope of relevant misconduct, and that multiple offenses originating from one instance should be considered as one offense.
 - VA expanded on this topic under revised [M21-1 X.iv.1.A.3.d](#) to clearly define the scope of willful and persistent misconduct, and notes that no single instance may support its application, and that multiple offenses that originate from a single event or circumstance are considered one instance.

Incorporation of Stakeholder Feedback

(2 of 3)

3. Clarify intent to preclude only those with serious misconduct, give the benefit of the doubt to the Veteran, and only consider those offenses for which the claimant was separated.
 - VA revised [M21-1 X.iv.1.A.3.d](#) to clearly distinguish between minor and serious misconduct and provided specific examples. In this section VA also reiterated that when there is conflicting evidence the claims processor may find the former service member's statement more credible and probative than other evidence of record, and/or resolve any reasonable doubt in favor of the former service member. VA further noted under [M21-1 X.iv.1.A.1.j](#), that the facts comprising the criteria for a bar to benefits must be the basis for the discharge from service.
4. Provide background information on compelling circumstances and clearly note that discrimination will be considered as a compelling circumstance.
 - VA extensively defined compelling circumstances under revised [M21-1 X.iv.1.A.1.t](#), and notes what must be considered in a compelling circumstances analysis of a COD determination. This section also notes that if discrimination, based on factors such as race or sex, was a factor in the discharge and characterization, the compelling circumstances exceptions would allow VA to find that a bar did not apply. VA also notes that discrimination can include, but is not limited to, religion, age sexual orientation, and gender identity.

Incorporation of Stakeholder Feedback

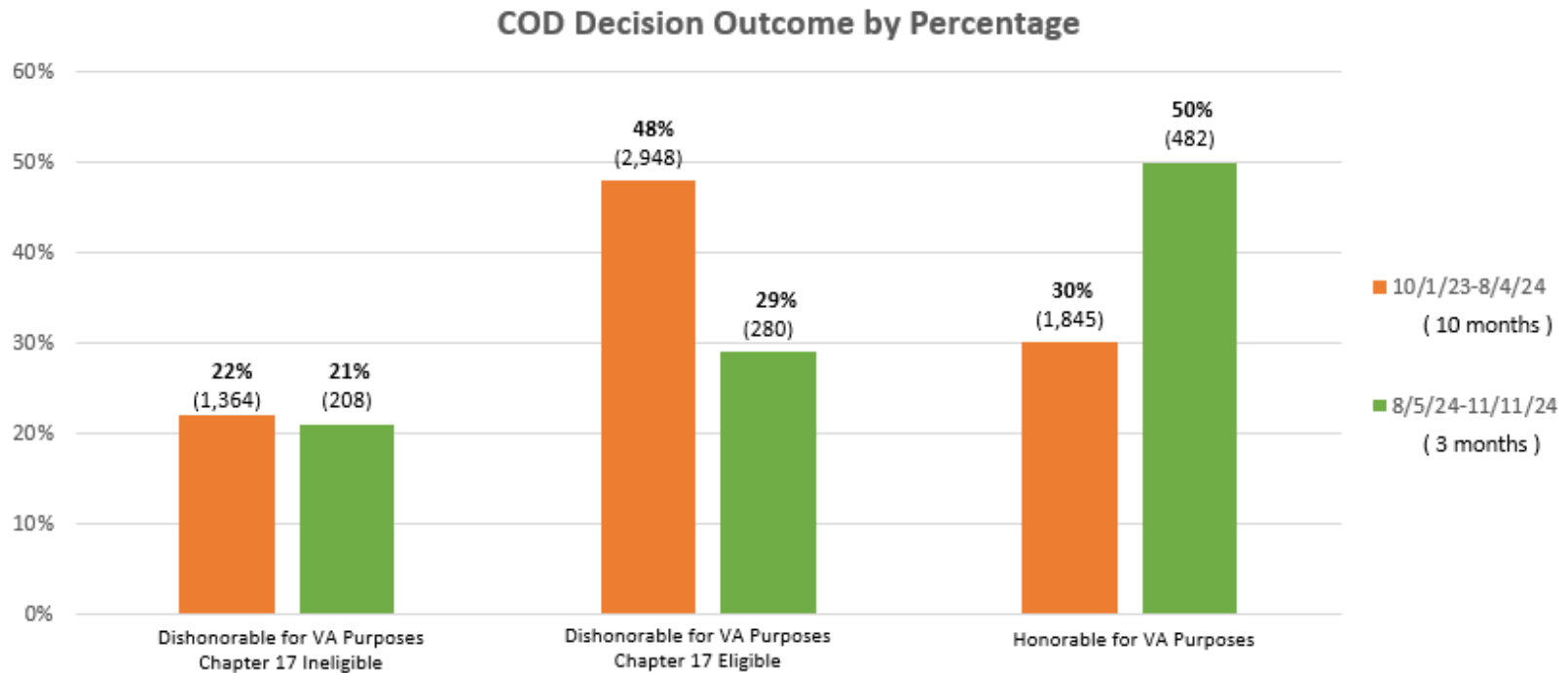
(3 of 3)

5. Incorporate guidance concerning non-compensable mental health conditions and how those may impact compelling circumstances.
 - VA revised [M21-1 X.iv.1.A.1.t](#) to specifically note mental or cognitive impairments that may be considered in the compelling circumstances exception, including such diagnoses as ADHD or personality disorders.
6. Clarifying language concerning moral turpitude and situations where this would apply.
 - VA revised [M21-1 X.iv.1.A.3.c](#) to addresses offenses involving moral turpitude and provides examples of offenses implicating and not implicating moral turpitude. In this section, VA reiterates its position to resolve reasonable doubt in favor of the former service member.
7. Clear guidance in re-adjudicating COD determinations that previously denied entitlement to benefits to ensure all evidence is considered, including the recent changes, and a new COD determination is rendered based on a new review.
 - VA devoted [M21-1 X.iv.1.A.1.p-q](#) entirely to this topic. These sections specifically instruct claim processors to complete a new review and consider the changes effective June 25, 2024 as a basis for rendering a new COD determination if a change is warranted.



Outcomes Following AQ95 Publication

(1 of 2)



Results: % eligible for both care and benefits increased by 20%, shifting the highest decision category from “healthcare only” to “eligible for both healthcare and most benefits.”

Outcomes Following AQ95 Publication

(2 of 2)

Under prior regulation (10/1/23 – 8/4/24):

- VA completed 6,157 claims with COD decisions rendered.
- 30% of former service members were found eligible for both care and benefits.
- 48% for care only, and 22% ineligible.



Under the current regulation (8/5/24 – 11/11/24):

- VA completed 970 claims with COD decisions rendered.
- 50% of former service members were found eligible for both care and benefits.
- 29% for care only, and 21% ineligible.



Human-Centered Design of COD Letters

December 2023: COD Letters Recommendations & Findings Report

- Collaborative project between VBA and the Veterans Experience Office (VEO) to redesign letters sent to Veterans regarding COD determinations.
- VEO engaged with Veterans representing a diverse range of experiences and backgrounds and who are customers of the VA.
- Identified the need for changes including conciseness and clarity, clear headings, clear recommendations, direct contact information, and overall design and layout. Updates held pending publication of final rule.

April to November 2024:

- Completed first iteration of updates in July 2024, and provided to claims processors as appendices to Policy Letter 24-01.
- Initiated second iteration to further refine language in August 2024.
 - New COD letters are simplified and clearly explain the basis for eligibility for VA benefits, eligibility for healthcare only, or a finding of ineligibility for VA benefits.
 - New COD administrative decision letter explains to former service members (FSM) the basis for any eligibility decisions for VA benefits.
 - VA is placing an emphasis on new terminology of "eligible for VA benefits" or "ineligible for VA benefits" to avoid the stigma of "dishonorable for VA purposes."
- Sought VSO and stakeholder input and feedback on the second iteration changes.



Feedback on COD Letters

Common Themes:

1. Simplify Language:

- Use shorter sentences where possible.
- Reading grade level is too high, and letters are not easily understood.
- References to the CFR should include a basic explanation of the reference.
- Although the phrase “not under conditions other than dishonorable” is statutory language, it is confusing due to multiple negatives.

2. Format:

- Order of information on letters, especially advance notice regarding the hearing.
- Consider importance of information when deciding placement.

3. Additional benefits information:

- Although FSM may not be eligible for Chapter 17 or VBA benefits, they may be eligible for other VHA benefits even with an OTH discharge.
- Expand on eligibility for certain healthcare benefits.

Human-Centered Design COD Letter Refinement

COD Letter Next Steps:

1. Incorporate findings from stakeholder review.
2. VEO will test the letters during the Discovery portion of the VBA-VEO Letters Project, between December 3, 2024, to January 21, 2025.
3. VBA will review and incorporate feedback within 60-days of receipt of the topline summary report from the VBA-VEO Project, tentatively scheduled to be provided by February 11, 2025.

DADT Overview

- Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) policy was in effect from February 28, 1994, until September 20, 2011.
- During that time, gay, lesbian and bisexual service members could not be open about their sexual orientation.
 - Under the policy, the services would not "ask" sexual orientation, and gay, lesbian, and bisexual service members could not "tell."
 - If their sexual orientation became known, service members were separated.
- Majority of service members discharged in relation to DADT were honorably separated.
- Policy was repealed in 2011, where those separated under DADT could request a discharge upgrade or other record correction.

DoD DADT Review

- On September 20, 2023, DoD began reviewing cases for FSMs who were administratively discharged under DADT.
- These reviews were for only those who received an Other than Honorable (OTH) or other administrative discharge.
- In October 2024, DoD announced completion of this review.
- DoD considered 851 cases and granted some form of relief to 824.
 - This may have included upgrade to honorable or general character of discharge, or corrections to re-enlistment codes, separation program designator (SPD) codes, and the corresponding narrative reasons for discharge on their DD Form 214.
- DoD mailed letters advising affected individuals how they can obtain copies of their new discharge certificates.
- DoD provided a list of impacted cases to VA.

VBA Response

- VBA initiated an outreach campaign and began developing guidance for claims processors on handling DoD DADT review cases:
 - Outgoing phone calls to each FSM to provide information on benefit eligibility and verification of address (complete).
 - Unique hotline for these FSMs and survivors to obtain information about potential VA benefits: **1-800-749-8387**.
 - Outreach letter with benefit eligibility information.
 - Policy and procedural guidance for claims processors to ensure accurate and consistent processing of incoming claims.
- Intent is to encourage as many affected FSMs and their survivors to file a claim or request a character of discharge determination.
- Outreach letters and policy guidance expected to be released by the end of December 2024.
 - Claims currently being held pending release of policy guidance.

Key Messaging: AQ95 and DADT Review Cases

- VA encourages former service members with OTH discharges and bad conduct discharges (adjudged at special court-martial) to apply for VA healthcare and benefits today.
- Even with a less-than-honorable discharge, a former service member may be able to access some VA benefits prior to an administrative review of their character of discharge.
- Too often, former service members are either incorrectly told, or self-select away from VA, based on the belief that their character of discharge makes them ineligible for VA benefits and services; however, in many instances, former service members may be found eligible to receive healthcare and/or compensation.
- VA is always looking for ways to get to “Yes” when it comes to providing benefits and services.



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Education Service

Education Service

Digital GI Bill | Project Updates

The DGIB team continues to make enhancements contributing to easier, faster, and more accurate than ever before benefits delivery to Veterans.

Continuous Improvement



Completed November month-end Monthly Housing Allowance (MHA) payments on November 25 for ~283K total claimants and \$521M in total payments. December month-end MHA payments are scheduled for processing on December 26.



Introduced user interface updates to My Education Benefits (MEB), providing Chapter 30 and 1606 applicants the ability to apply for benefits through MEB and experience pre-filled service history.

Release Updates



Successfully deployed Release 7 on December 7, introducing Benefits Manager Initial Operating Capability (IOC), the new system providing Veterans Claims Examiners (VCE) the ability to process non-33 claims for select new beneficiaries.



Conducting User Acceptance Testing (UAT) to prepare for Release 8, which will enable the decommission of Benefits Delivery Network (BDN) and introduce a new system, Workload Manager Lite, to track and manage VCEs' workload.

These updates contribute to the continued evolution of the DGIB Managed Service that increases efficiencies and reduces downtime, allowing VA to focus more on serving Veterans, service members and their families.

Education Service

Release 7 Overview

On Saturday, December 7, 2024, Digital GI Bill (DGIB) successfully deployed Release 7. Release highlights include:



Letters Improvements

- Updates to Payment Letters for CH35 claimants and Decision and Payment Letters for CH1606 and CH30 claimants



Automation Improvements

- Introduction of partial and full automation for Transfer of Entitlement (TOE) claims
- Automation improvements for CH33 and non-33 claims
- Additional automation enhancements for improved accuracy



Agile Enhancements to CH33, Claimant Service, Integration Hub, Letters, My Education Benefits (MEB), Payments, Enrollment Manager, and Rules



Non-33 GI Bill Application Updates

- CH1606 and CH30 applicants may experience a streamlined application with pre-filled service history from VADIR
- Updates to the backend for CH35 and Fry Scholarship applications to allow for future improvements



Enrollment Verification

- New non-33 (CH1606, 30, and 35) beneficiaries who are processed in Benefits Manager will be able to verify their enrollment through text and email



Enrollment Manager

- Removal of the Award Status column

Benefits Manager Initial Operating Capability (IOC) was introduced with DGIB Release 7. Claims processing in Benefits Manager will not begin until January 2025.



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Education Service

Benefits Manager Controlled Processing Approach

Benefits Manager Initial Operating Capability (IOC) was introduced on December 7 with Release 7. **Claims will not be processed in Benefits Manager until January 2025*, at the earliest.** Through a series of iterative releases that will increase Benefits Manager functionality, Education Service will begin processing new non-33 (Chapter 1606, 30, and 35) claims in Benefits Manager. Additional information will be shared as soon as available.

December 7, 2024

Release 7

Release 7 deployed and introduced Benefits Manager IOC.

December 7 to
mid-January 2025

BDN Claims Processing Continues

All non-33 claims continue process in Benefits Delivery Network.

January 2025

Claims Processing Begins in Benefits Manager

As system functionality increases, EDU controls the initial volume of new non-33 claims processed in Benefits Manager.

Spring 2025

Increased Volume of Claims Processed in Benefits Manager

EDU will increase the volume of claims processed in Benefits Manager over time as more functionality is introduced.

**Timing is subject to change*



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Loan Guaranty Service

Veterans Affairs Servicing Purchase (VASP)

- VA began accepting VASP loan submissions on May 31, 2024. Mortgage servicers had between May 31, 2024, and October 1, 2024, to comply with the VASP program and VA's new Loss Mitigation Waterfall.
- As of October 1, 2024, VASP implementation was completed.
- Additionally, VA implemented a targeted foreclosure moratorium through December 31, 2024, to ensure all loss mitigation options, including VASP, are considered during this transition period.
- LGY continues to conduct several touchpoints with industry including individual servicer meetings, group meetings, and presentations at industry events.

VASP Servicing Statistics

- A total of 54 servicers have submitted a VASP payment process to the VA Loan Electronic Reporting Interface (VALERI).
- The 54 servicers represent over 90%, or 3.4 million, VA-guaranteed loans.
- VA is currently working closely with servicers as they submit their initial VASP cases to ensure quality.
- One of the largest servicers and earliest adapters has submitted over 2,600 VASP loans for consideration.

Overall VASP Payment Process Submissions	6,920
VASPs Pending Review (Includes VA Awaiting Docs from Servicer)	1,677
VASP's Certified	5,138
VASP's Denied	105
VASP Active TPPs	1,595

As of December 12, 2024

Native American Direct Loans (NADL)

- March 13, 2023 – Loan Guaranty Service (LGY) lowered the NADL rate to 2.5% in an effort to counter inflation, material shortages, labor costs, and increased cost of insurance.
- The change was announced as a temporary measure, for a 24-month period, to end on March 13, 2025.
- Veterans can continue to benefit from the low 2.5% interest rate for the NADL program through March 13, 2025.

Native American Direct Loans

- NADL Performance
 - 3 new MOUs signed in FY24
 - Increased requests for NADL information resulting in 82 outreach events
 - 41 loans closed
 - 131 applications received
- Next Steps
 - Continued evaluation of market rate conditions.
 - Development of communications to remind audiences of the impending change.



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veteran Readiness & Employment Service

NEW PROCEDURES FOR CH 31 REAPPLICATIONS

BACKGROUND:

- VR&E currently has a 45% reapplication rate.
- VR&E Service requested an opinion from the Office of General Counsel (OGC) on VR&E's procedures for processing reapplications.
- OGC rendered the opinion that VR&E's current practice of processing a new application for the same benefits, without requiring a claimant to submit new evidence, is inconsistent with the provision of the cited law and regulations.
- As a result, VR&E Service is providing new procedures for processing reapplications.

POSITIVE EFFECTS FROM NEW PROCEDURES

The new procedures will significantly reduce the processing of Chapter 31 applications since the reapplication rate is 45 percent of the entire application processing workload.

In addition to this reduction, administrative actions required after processing reapplications will be eliminated, such as:

- Scheduling, and rescheduling, of initial evaluation appointments.
- Completion and mailing of VR-03, Appointment - Ch31 Orientation.
- Completion of additional VAF 28-1902b, Counseling Record - Narrative Report.
- The combined administrative burden reductions will decrease the number of days Veterans will wait to be seen for initial evaluations.

IMPACT TO CLAIMANTS' BENEFITS

VR&E staff must ensure the claimant is informed that once their case is closed, the claimant must select a decision review option to request additional VR&E services.

APPLICABLE LAWS:

- 38 U.S.C. § 7105(c) and 38 C.F.R. §21.412(a)(2) prohibit processing of new applications for the same Chapter 31 benefits.
- The Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017 outlines the decision review process for reviewing requests for additional Chapter 31 benefits, which include three decision review options.

Readiness and Employment System (RES)

VR&E's next-generation Readiness & Employment System (RES) replaces a 25-year-old legacy case management system with a web-based platform which integrates over 20 VA systems and data sources to enable more timely and efficient delivery of services and benefits to Veterans.

RES has the capability to:

- Automate repeatable processes
- Automate complex award calculations
- Provide intelligent document routing
- Provide modern user interface
- Leverage VA Enterprise Cloud (VAEC) for scalability of resources
- Provide a companion environment for continuous training of staff

RES Pilot Information

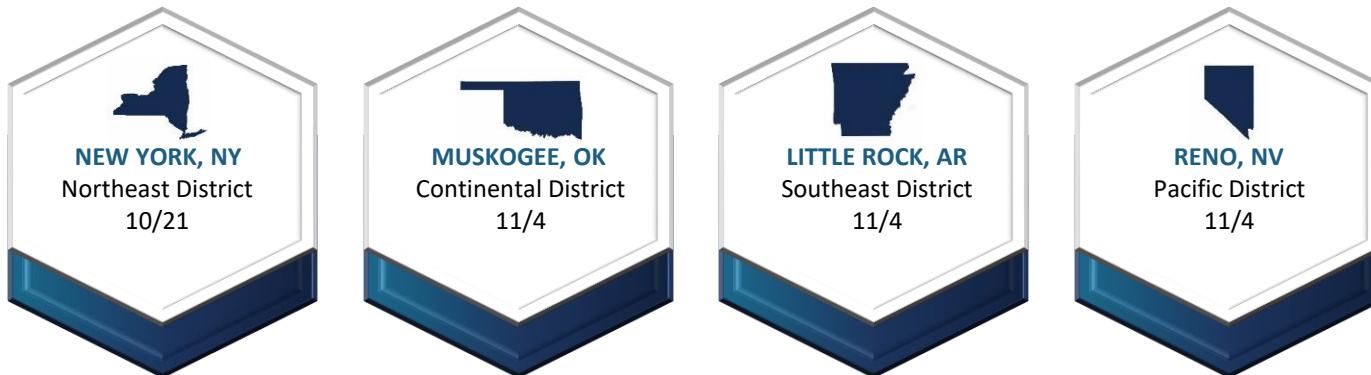
PURPOSE & GOAL

- The purpose of the RES Pilot for Phase 1 is to thoroughly test how RES performs in the real world. For this pilot, participants will only process applicants without prior VR&E history, with at least a 20% service-connected disability.
- The goal of the RES Pilot is to successfully process Chapter 31 applications from intake through award creation and accurate payment. Chapter 31 applications will flow through the following major process steps until completion.



BASIC INFORMATION

- Pilot Dates: October 21, 2024 – February 6, 2025
- Participation: Seven designated Pilot Participants fulfilling specific roles



RES Roadmap

Phase	Business Function	Description	Target Completion
Phase I	Chapter 31 – New Cases and Award Calculations (includes Ch31 first time applicants and Veterans with a 20% service-connected disability (SCD) rating or higher)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Configuration of Chapter 31 new cases and award calculations • Configuration of workflow processes • Integration with VA & external systems • Completion of all testing • Payments generated in new system 	Initial Operating Capability (IOC) Target Pilot completion – February 2025 Note: National rollout will occur after successful completion of pilot.
Phase II	Chapter 31 – Reapplicant Cases and Award Calculations (includes Ch31 reapplicants and Veterans with a 10% SCD rating or higher)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Configuration of Chapter 31 reapplicant cases and award calculations • Configuration of workflow processes • Data migration from legacy database (CorpDB) • Integration with VA & external systems • Completion of all testing • Historical Veteran cases live in new system 	March 31, 2026
Phase III	Chapter 36	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Configuration of Chapter 36 • Completion of all testing • Configuration of new workflow processes and changes to existing workflows to support new chapters 	March 31, 2027

RES Immediate Relief to the Field

The RES benefits application intake pipeline was activated on October 9, 2024, and was able to generate immediate relief to the field. RES auto populates data fields which previously required manual entry in the legacy case management system (CWINRS). This automation has saved over 1,285 hours of administrative time as of December 9, 2024. The time saved will increase counselor's opportunities to connect with Veterans.

As of December 9, 2024, four pilot sites are working over 200 cases in RES and are continuously identifying enhancements in preparation for national deployment in 2025.

Internal Review Team (IRT)

VR&E IRT consists of 1 Supervisory Program Analyst and 6 Program Analysts. The IRT aims to ensure consistency in the Quality Review process. To achieve this goal, the IRT seeks to identify and address the causes of inconsistencies in the Quality Review process through recommendations to improve or clarify policies, procedures, quality review tools, and training programs.

The IRT began Supervisory Quality Review Specialist (SQRS) training on December 2, 2024, with training scheduled to conclude on January 10, 2025.

Training highlights include, but are not limited to:

- Introduction to VR&E Quality Assurance Web Application (QA Web)
- Laws, Regulations, Policy, and Procedure
- Philosophy and Ethics of QA
- Introduction to QA Reviews (EDRPA, RSDA, FA, Ch36)
- Review of Reconsideration Process
- Introduction to Monthly Enhancement Training (MET)
- Review of each Review Instrument Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)
- Higher Level Review (HLR) Training
- Reviewer Shadowing



Quality Review Teams (QRTs)

VR&E QRTs consist of 4 Supervisory Quality Review Specialists (SQRs) and 45 Quality Review Specialists (QRSs) distributed between the 4 Districts to conduct Individual Quality Reviews (IQRs) for VR&E Case Managers.

VR&E will transition one review type at a time to the QRTs.

Northeast: Cleveland
1 Supervisor
10 Reviewers

Southeast: Montgomery
1 Supervisor
14 Reviewers

Continental: Denver
1 Supervisor
10 Reviewers

Pacific: Los Angeles
1 Supervisor
11 Reviewers

Impact of QRTs

Impact to Veterans:

- High quality, timely, and consistent services.

Impact to Case Management staff:

- Consistent feedback and clarification to allow for improvement.
- Identification of areas of concern.
- Training to improve quality.

Impact to VR&E Divisions:

- Reduced number of IQRs for Leadership to conduct each month (all IQRs transferred to QRTs after 9 months)
- Increased time to conduct other managerial tasks and support staff.

Impact to QRT Station VR&E Divisions:

- Additional Division staff.
- Access to QRT staff to for training and clarification as needed.

Additional Duties

Higher Level Reviews (HLRs)

- Each QRS will conduct approximately 2 HLRs per month

Data Analysis

- QRS' will conduct analysis of quality review data to identify trends, areas of concern, and processes requiring improvement.

Training to Improve Quality

- QRS' will provide training to individuals or groups to assist in improving quality, accuracy, and consistency of services.

Special Focus Reviews

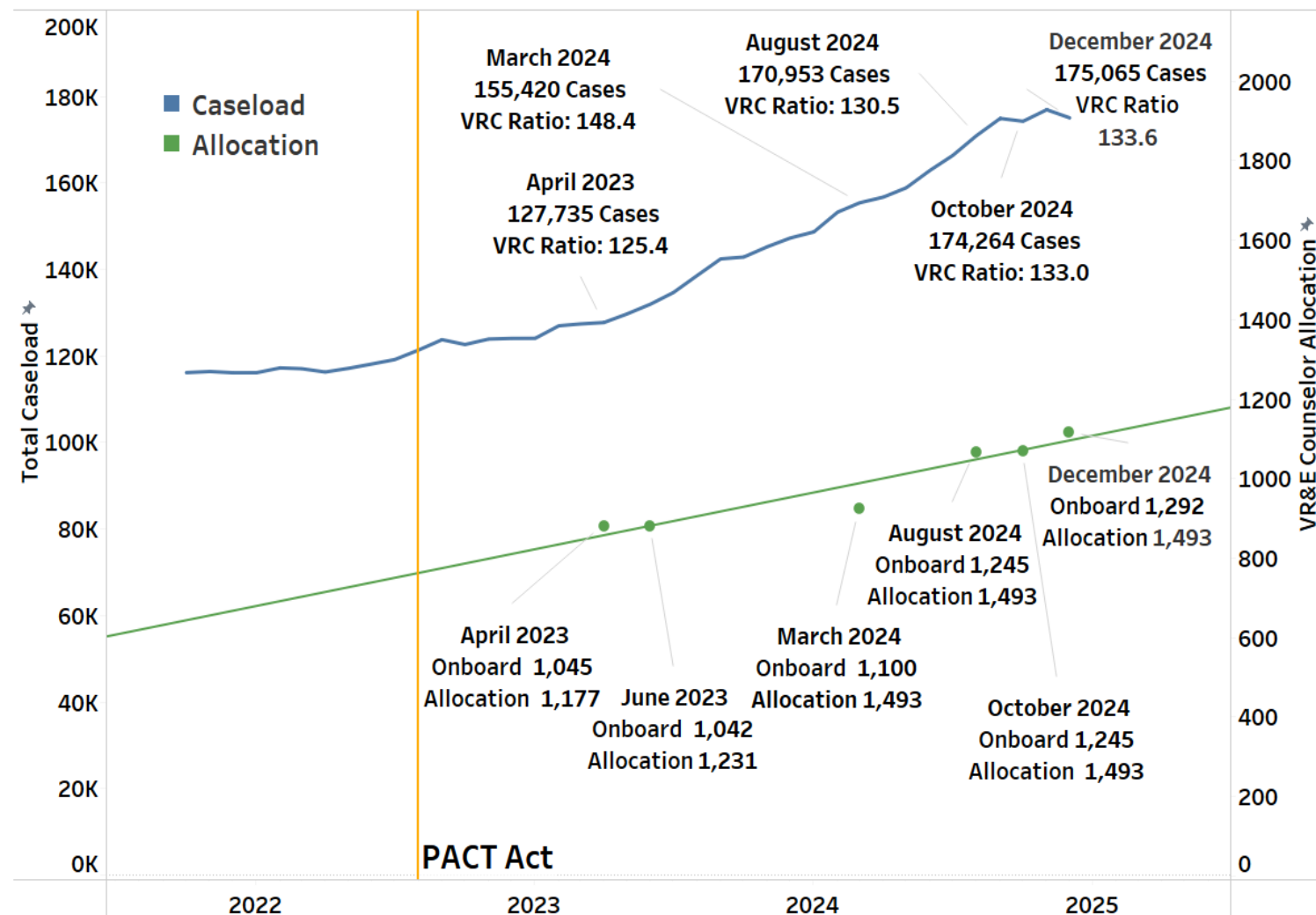
- QRS' may be tasked to conduct additional reviews for topics identified as risks or areas of interest.

Training Updates

Projects	FY 2024/2025
New Counselor Training (NCT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 sessions • 219 new VRCs trained • 132 Veterans trained as VRCs • 104 Rehabilitation degrees / 115 Non-Rehabilitation degrees • FY 2025 Session 1 – 105 VRCs trained, a 91% increase in the average number of VRCs trained in FY 2024
Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist (VRS) Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 sessions • 73 new VRs trained • 44 Veterans trained as VRs • 17 Rehabilitation degrees / 56 Non-Rehabilitation degrees • FY 2025 Session 1 – 30 VRs trained (merged with NCT)
New Division Leaders Training (NDLT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 sessions • 28 new division leaders graduated in FY 2024 • 10 Veterans in NDLT • 60 new division leaders currently enrolled in NDLT - Kickoff in January 2025
Competency Based Training System (CBTS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 856 (97%) Experienced VRCs completed CBTS in February 2024 • 82% overall average score (outstanding level) • Currently on strategic pause

National Workload

VR&E Program Growth with Allocation



As of December 12, 2024, in total 175,875 Chapter 31 participants with 87.8% active caseload

36,980 Veterans in applicant status

92,853 Veterans enrolled in training

10,582 Veterans actively seeking employment

44% program growth since PACT Act implementation



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Staffing

- Currently 1,493 Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRC) and Vocational Rehabilitation Specialists (VRS) allocated to the VR&E mission, an increase of 341 since the beginning of Fiscal Year 2023.
- As of December 2024, the VRC and VRS positions are 87% staffed, with 1,292 of the allocated 1,493 VRCs and VRS' onboard.
- VBA is actively engaged in nationwide hiring efforts using a variety of recruitment methods to increase the number of VRCs.
- VR&E has expanded the VRC hiring requirements to allow for other acceptable master's degrees to qualify for the position.
- VR&E has begun hiring VRS', a position with a lower educational requirement to qualify, to assist with case management.
- VBA allocated 45 new VRC Quality Review Specialists (VQRS), a position which performs quality reviews and training for other VR&E employees.

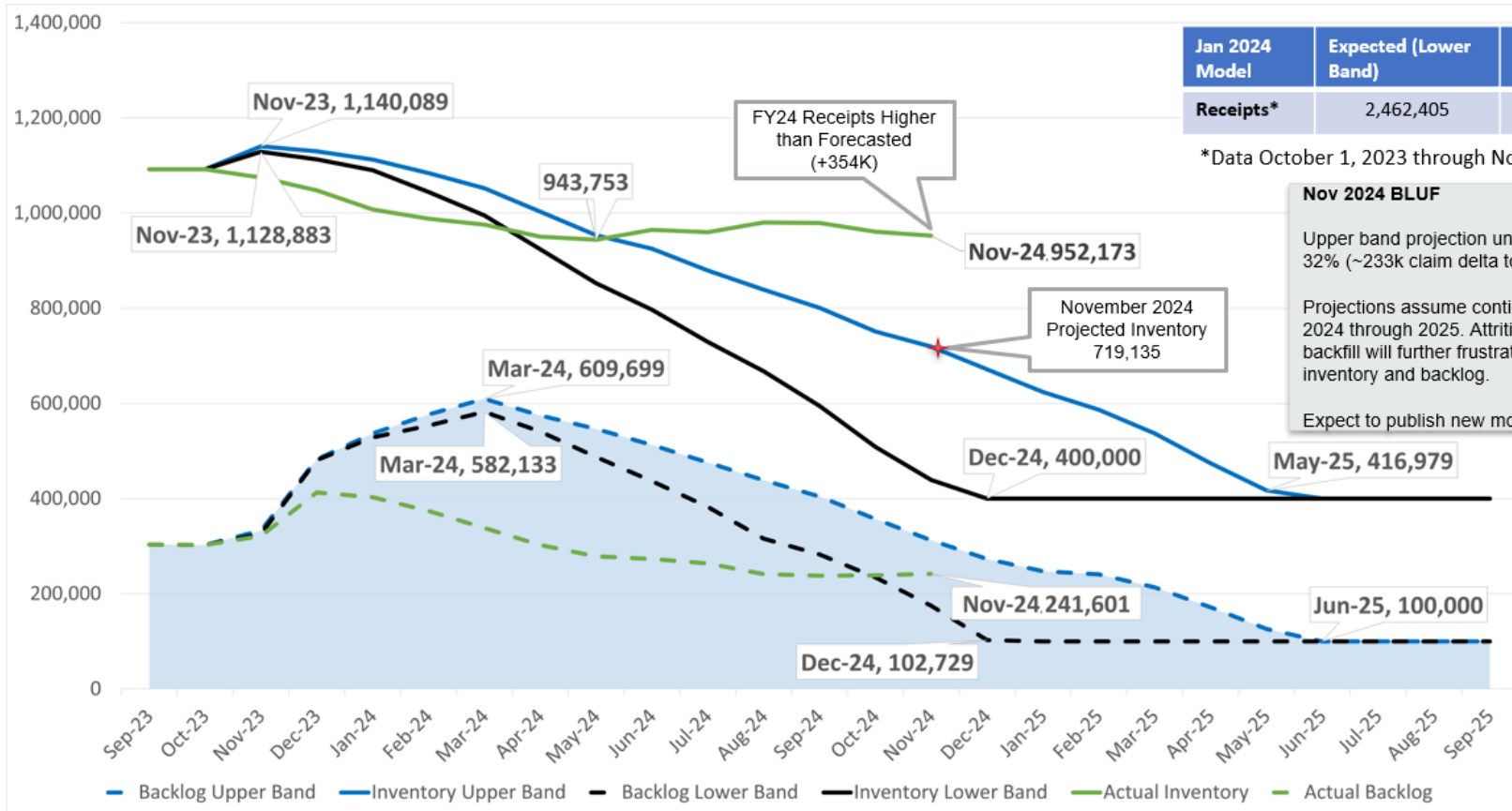




U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Office of Field Operations – Operations
Management

VBA Inventory and Backlog



Jan 2024 Model	Expected (Lower Band)	Actuals	Delta
Receipts*	2,462,405	2,816,831	+14.39%

*Data October 1, 2023 through November 30, 2024

Nov 2024 BLUF

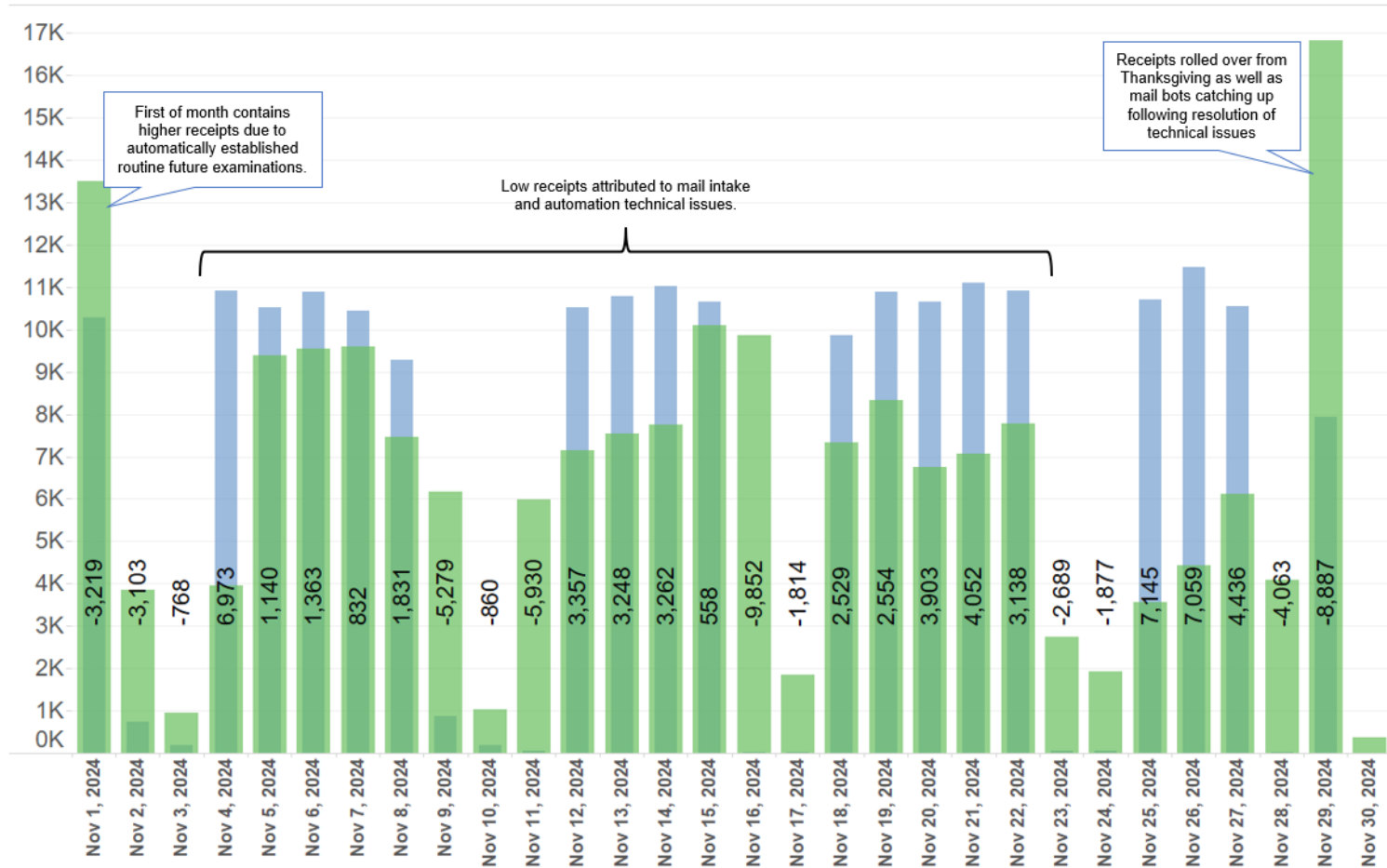
Upper band projection underpredicted inventory by 32% (~233k claim delta to actuals)

Projections assume continued staffing levels from 2024 through 2025. Attrition without sufficient backfill will further frustrate mission to reduce inventory and backlog.

Expect to publish new model in January 2025.

Production vs Receipts

Daily Production vs. Receipts



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Dependency Claims

- Approximately 20% increase in Fiscal Year 2024 dependency claim receipts.
- NWQ is actively working on IT solutions to increase and improve dependency claims processing.
 - Exploring improvement and expansion opportunities for RBPS claim processing.
 - Improving efficiency of contractor submissions into RBPS.



- Utilizing offramp data to redefine workload distributions resulting in increased claims successfully processed through RBPS.
 - Successful completions have increased from approximately 18% to 38%.

National Work Queue



Red Team Recommendations

- System Issues**
 - Move scheduled deployments to Saturday.
 - Prioritize a “blue/green” environment
 - +Real-time capacity to update on/off production status (est. FY26)
 - Mail Automation – move from literal translation to AI
 - Study and trend incorrect document types in automation
- Rework**
 - Modify VBMS Rule: Identify recommended assignee
 - Implement Prior Transaction vs Prior Assignment Routing (est. FY26)
- Workload Mgmt**
 - Batch identify # of claims processors required per specific claims, badge qualified processors & route claims (est. FY28)
 - Implement a hybrid “push/pull” system (est. FY27)
 - Share results with Training Optimization IPT
 - Revitalize Supervisory Workload Management TRNG Plan (Began during FY24)



Architectural Updates



Structure for requesting work:
+on-demand “pull” to current “push” system



Continual re-prioritization of claims



Employee “badging” system
Using employee-specific attributes,
Qualifications, Training, & Quality



Supervisory Workload Routing Training

Q4 FY 2023:

- Conducted Live, Virtual Training w/ 1st line supervisors

Intro to NWQ
Prior Assignment Routing
Deferrals
Claim Grouping
Special Missions / Projects
Local Assignment Rules

FY 2024:

- 1:1 consultations with RO managers to improve use of workload routing tools
- Launched Supervisory Workload Management Training
 - To date, have trained over 275 supervisors via SWMT

NWQ 2.0 Requirements Writing
Began FY'23; Fully Tested/Deployed FY'27



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Q&A



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MST PROGRAM IMPROVEMENTS

Military Sexual Trauma “They Spoke and We Listened”

Briefer:
Kenesha Britton, ADUSFO

MST Program Improvements

Trauma-Informed Plain Language

[2024] The new form, **21-0781**, titled "Statement in Support of Claimed Mental Health Disorder(s) Due to an In-Service Traumatic Event(s)," was released for use in June 2024. It includes clearer filing instructions and is written in plain trauma-informed language.

Trauma-Informed Plain Language

[2024] The MST grant and denial claim paragraphs are updated to articulate MST decisions better using trauma-informed, plain language.

Trauma-Informed Plain Language

[2024] A VA exam fact sheet detailing exam expectations was released on September 12, 2024.

Trauma-Informed Plain Language

[2023] MST Claims Fact Sheet has been improved to encourage survivors to file claims. It is written to manage expectations using trauma-informed principles and plain language.

Benefits Delivery at Discharge

Updated Rating Decision Text for MST claim decisions, incorporating trauma-informed language..

Benefits Delivery at Discharge

Removed the burden on BDD applicants from retelling traumatic experiences by eliminating the need for 21-0781 for Benefits Delivery at Discharge.

Added Resource Language

[2023-2024] My VA 411 Paragraph Added to MST Letters.

MyVA411

Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors can confidentially report incidents of sexual assault or sexual harassment at VA facilities by calling 1-800-MyVA411 (1-800-698-2411, option 9) MyVA411 will route complaints about sexual harassment at VBA facilities to VBA Client Relations through the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) currently used for the VA Hotline. VBA Client Relations leadership will work with the Office of Field Operations, District Offices, and Regional Offices to investigate the complaint

MST Resource

2023-2024 Created an MST Processing Map for active-duty soldiers to educate and inform in coordination with the Sexual Trauma Work Group.



ABOUT: MST Quality Update

About



MST accuracy was previously assessed through national quality reviews, as measured with Special Focused Reviews that evaluated denied MST-related claims. This limited approach did not provide a comprehensive view of actual MST quality. Additionally, the assessment of local quality as a performance measure was confined to reviewing three MST claims per claims processor based on a completed claim.



Beginning May 24, 2024, the MST Operations Center implemented a new quality review process to significantly enhance the measurement of MST's quality. Through In Process Reviews (IPRs), a rigorous assessment of quality across all claims processing cycles was completed, ensuring a thorough analysis is provided during the development cycle, the decision cycle, and the award and authorization cycle. This proactive approach has yielded heightened performance and accountability at every stage.



MST In-Process Review (IPR) Overview

FY24 MST In Process Review (IPR) By Position

Station	Position	Claims Reviewed	Task Based Percent
MST Surge Site	RVSR	2,668	96.42%
	Dev VSR	2,352	91.11%
	Post VSR	893	98.80%
MST Ops Center	RVSR	2,889	94.65%
	Dev VSR	2,254	89.94%
	Post VSR	683	98.40%

FYTD25 MST In Process Review (IPR) By Position (a/o 12/9/24)

Station	Position	Claims Reviewed	Task Based Percent
MST Surge Site	RVSR	1,946	96.48%
	Dev VSR	1,958	93.61%
	Post VSR	942	98.77%
MST Ops Center	RVSR	2,237	95.72%
	Dev VSR	1,821	94.31%
	Post VSR	593	99.07%

In Process Reviews

Total Accuracy	Development	Rating	Award	Time Frame
92.92%	88.71%	94.37%	98.39%	May 24, 2024, through July 3, 2024
93.81%	89.42%	95.15%	98.16%	July 4, 2024, through August 13, 2024
94.81%	91.34%	95.64%	98.72%	August 14, 2024, through September 16, 2024
95.45%	92.88%	96.06%	98.95%	September 17, 2024, through October 16, 2024
95.98%	94.07%	96.16%	99.17%	October 17, 2024, through November 18, 2024



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MST Decision Rates

Year	Grant	Percent	Denied	Percent
FY 2023	23,993	50.4%	14,680	30.8%
FY 2024	28,385	47.6%	17,286	29.0%
10/01/24 to 12/13/24	9,447	47.4%	6,269	31.1%

TOP 3 MST DENIAL REASONS

FY 2023		FY 2024		10/1/2024 to 12/13/2024	
No Diagnosis	8,208	No Diagnosis	10,028	No Diagnosis	3,670
Not Incurred/Caused by Svc	5,828	Not Incurred/Caused by Svc	6,608	Not Incurred/Caused by Svc	2,318
Not Secondary	440	Not Secondary	431	Not Secondary	210

Grant Rate by Gender

Gender Group	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025
Male	55.6%	55.9%	56.1%
Female	64.7%	64.9%	62.3%

Note: 2025 = 10/1/2024 through 12/13/24

MST Inventory Overview

Month	ADP	Monthly ADC	Inventory	Avg Daily Receipts	Avg Daily Completions
EOFY23	206.6	328.6	31,270	196	173
October	205.8	299.8	32,596	227	164
November	208.7	303.3	33,408	198	157
December	216.3	276.1	34,490	205	150
January	215.1	320.8	35,903	231	163
February	215.8	300.0	36,671	217	179
March	219.0	298.7	37,674	226	179
April	215.0	329.4	38,661	220	175
May	211.6	310.8	39,079	216	197
June	211.2	311.7	38,871	232	231
July	209.1	313.4	39,097	265	246
August	200.0	314.2	39,668	270	244
September	196.1	297.7	39,124	255	269
EOFY24	196.1	307.4	39,124	255	196.1
October	188.6	287.4	38,176	263	307
November	187.2	275.3	36,152	258	364
December (as of 12/9)	186.3	282.3	35,765	281	358

ADP: 

ADC: 

Inventory: 

Receipts: 

Completions: 



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MST Increased Inventory

Date	Inventory	% Increase (over prior Qtr.)
FY23	31,270	
FY24 Qtr. 1	34,490	10%
FY24 Qtr. 2	37,674	9%
FY24 Qtr. 3	38,871	3%
FY24 Qtr. 4	39,124	0.7%
FY24 EOY	39,124	25%

Growth Factors

- ✓ Increase in outreach (FY24)
 - ✓ Events: 2,873
 - ✓ Hours: 5,025
 - ✓ Attendees: 2,443,760
- ✓ 31% increase in MST-related claims resulting from the PACT Act legislation.
- ✓ Increased marketing and changes in legislation for MST Survivors

Questions

VSO Hotline: 855-225-0709