

VA Standardizes Veterans Claims Forms

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WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs last year proposed changes to regulations to eliminate informal claims that were not filed electronically. In addition, VA proposed requiring the use of a specific standardized form when veterans apply for VA benefits. The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States and other major service organizations fought against the proposals, saying that the elimination of informal claims was draconian and did not keep with VA's mandate to be "veteran friendly." Despite such protests, VA recently finalized its regulations, meaning that effective today, VA will eliminate "informal claims" and substitute its newly-established "**Intent to File a Claim**" form to act as a date-of-claim place holder. VA also mandates the use of certain other standardized forms for benefits, such as for compensation, pension and appeals. These new forms can be downloaded at: <http://www.va.gov/vaforms/>. As this change goes into effect, here are some things veterans and their representatives will need to know:

- These changes are a standardization of the forms and applications that claimants and their representatives are required to use. Effective March 24, service officers must use the forms mandated by this change. These forms include:
 - Disability compensation: eBenefits or paper Form 21-526EZ, Application for Disability Compensation and Related Compensation Benefits
 - Needs-Based Pension: paper Form 21-527EZ, Application for Pension
 - Survivors: paper Form 21-534EZ, Application for DIC, Death Pension, and/or Accrued Benefits
- Intent to file a claim: While VA has standardized its forms and applications, veterans and their representatives must know that the following are the only three ways a claim may be informally initiated, thus protecting the effective date of an award upon adjudication:
 - Filing paper Form 21-0966, "**Intent to File a Claim**" form;
 - Calling the **VA National Call Center, 1-800-827-1000**, and requesting that a Call Center agent complete an "**Intent to File a Claim**" form for the veteran over the phone; or

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—Initiating, and then saving, an un-submitted claim either using eBenefits (for veterans) or the Stakeholder Enterprise Portal (SEP), for veterans service officers.

- Upon receipt of an “intent to file a claim,” the veteran has one year to gather evidence to support a claim and to file a claim for benefits on a standard claim form.
- Under the new VA regulations, 38 CFR 3.157 is rescinded and records and transcripts from state, county, municipal, recognized private or government hospitals or institutions, including uniformed services facilities, will no longer be accepted as informal claims in certain circumstances — rather the veteran has up to **one year** (from the date of medical records establishing an increase in disability) to file the **“Intent to File a Claim”** form.
- Appeal of a VA decision: The change also mandates the use of the standardized notice of disagreement form, VA Form 21-0958, when an individual wishes to initiate an appeal of a VA decision. Before March 24, this was only an optional form.
- Veterans who notify VA of their intent to file a claim without using the new **“Intent to File a Claim”** form will not be able to preserve their effective date, and may further delay the adjudication of their benefit claim. VA still has an obligation to furnish the requisite paperwork to veterans who are seeking to claim their benefits, but VA warns that the requisite paperwork will likely take months to arrive, meaning veterans will lose out on benefits.

Read more [here](#).

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ABOUT THE VFW: The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. is a nonprofit veterans service organization comprised of eligible veterans and military service members from the active, Guard and Reserve forces. Founded in 1899 and chartered by Congress in 1936, the VFW is the nation's largest organization of war veterans and its oldest major veterans organization. With nearly 1.9 million VFW and Auxiliary members located in more than 6,800 Posts worldwide, *“NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS.”* The VFW and its Auxiliaries are dedicated to veterans’ service, legislative advocacy, and military and community service programs. For more information or to join, visit our website at www.vfw.org.

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