

2022

The Damages of Outstanding Veterans Disability Compensation Claims

Lisa Marie McKinney
Walden University

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Walden University

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Lisa M. McKinney

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

The Damages of Outstanding Veterans Disability Compensation Claims

by

Lisa M. McKinney

MA, American Military University, 2012

BS, Park University, 2003

Dissertation Submitted in Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Management

Walden University

November 2022

Abstract

The Department of Veterans Affairs failed to process service disability claims promptly, which resulted a backlog from 1993 to present. This impacted veterans by limiting medical care and affected their quality of life. For the past 30 years or longer, military veterans have complained about their quality of life and the status of their service-connected disability claim. The fundamental purpose of the study was to discover how veterans' quality of life was affected while waiting for their final word on disability comprehensive benefits and or their appeal cases. Human resource theory and the Institutional Analysis and Development assessment were used to understand organizational and professional identity. The qualitative research methodology encompassed Monday Morning Workload and Board of Appeals Reports, and National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics charts, as reference of data on how many claims were still pending. The research questions were related to the veteran's barriers with processing claims from paper to electronic submissions, the quality of life from failed return of claims, and lack of understanding of electronic portal eBenefits. The findings show the benefits claim process was a complex system. The research participants were not discouraged by the backlog, and 62% submitted a claim. Even with new acts, executive orders, and improved programs within VBA to reform process claims, the reality was that the backlog of disability claims will continue to exist. The implication for positive social change is military veteran should be initiative-taking in reaching out to representatives of the Disabled American Veterans, American Legion, Veterans of Foreign War, and other veteran groups to change their quality of life.

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Dedication

I want to dedicate my study to my mom, Devonia; father, Marlin; and my sisters Dixie, Cindy, and in-memory of my sister Danelle. Even though my mom passed in September 2016, and father passed on Christmas day, 2010, they give me the encouragement in my prayers to them every night. I would not of exceed without my best friends Melinda Chambers and Nina Green pushing me when things were tough.

I would like to thank all the Pennsylvania military veterans that participated in the survey and one-on-one interviews. My dissertation paper would not have happened without their true experiences to the questions during our one-on-one interviews in person, Zoom, and Facebook video.

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Most of all, I would like to thank Mom, Dad, and sister Danelle that are in heaven looking down on me. And the rest of my McKinney family clan: Dixie, Cindy, Shane, Janelle, Jennifer, Rafael, Curtis, and all the grandkids.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The veteran service-connectivity benefit claim process is one of the most significant complex issues for veterans and their family members. In the last 30 years or even longer military veterans have struggle with their health care, financial issues, and delays on compensation and pension benefits. The Veterans Affairs House and Senate Committees have been frustrated with the Department of Veterans Affairs' on how they been overseeing the backlog of disability claims since the Vietnam War era veterans to the 21ST Century and beyond (Moran, 2015). Chairman, House Veteran's Affairs Committee Jeff Miller is tired of the stonewalling that VA Secretary Robert McDonald with his latest subpoena on scandal-racked at the regional office of Philadelphia in May 2015 (Bennett, 2015). For the past 20 years, the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and or Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA) was brought under scrutiny for lack of accountability of disability claims with VA's Office of Inspector General in 2009 when VBA misplaced and or lost 437,000 claims (Wise, 2009; Finn, 2009). When VA's Office of Inspector General report was released the House and Senate Veteran's Affairs Committee and all the veteran's advocacy groups that support Veterans Benefits Administration were concern of the mishandling of benefit claims (Wise, 2009). The Vantage Point from Department of Veterans Affairs has an official blog called Disability Claims Backlog Reduced by 44 Percent Since Peaking One Year Ago on Tuesday, April 1, 2014, that started a discussion with military veterans (Leal, 2014). The responses from veterans indicated the delays of benefit compensations, talked about the tough times for

veteran families on the streets and or in the welfare system from financial issues after leaving the military service.

In 2008, the VBA allowed active military service members to submit their service-connectivity disability claim before leaving the military less than 60 days and or 60 to 180 if service member medical examination cannot complete (Halliday, 2014). If a veteran does not submit before leaving the service, it could take months to years to get the claim processed, or it may take longer because they no longer have supported medical documentation. The veterans that had submitted claims the last 60 years before 2011 had submitted hard paper copies that took over 125 days to years before a veteran received a word of approval or denial.

The state of Pennsylvania has two Veterans Area Regional Offices in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh area for Pennsylvania veterans. Based on VBA Monday Morning Reports from 2004 to 2017, Philadelphia VARO is one of the top ten that has the most backlog of disability claims over 125 days. As of September 30, 2017, the Monday Morning Workload Report showed 19,998,799 military veterans that serve active-duty service as military officers and enlisted members (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017). Plus, the Board of Appeals cases were near 100 thousand overall that needed to be reviewed, approved, or denied (BVA, 2018). In the same story illustrated, 819,185 veterans live in Pennsylvania. Of those 819,185 veterans, in September 2017, Pennsylvania's State Veterans' Commission showed only 125,847 received service-connectivity disability benefits (Pennsylvania DMVA, 2018). These numbers do not match up.

Background of the Study

Veterans are furious with the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) of the Department of Veterans' Affairs for the lack of responsibility with veterans' service-connectivity disability claims and appeal cases during the past 30 years. In the last 30 or more years, the VBA has provided inconsistent backlog numbers for both disability claims and appeal cases with nationwide and individual state submissions (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018, BVA 2018, and Bascetta, 1978, 2000, and 2005).

Today's veterans do not realize that, historically, U.S. military veterans have been fighting for a decent quality of life concerning financial stability for a long time. The first effort toward financial stability for military veterans was put forth in 1776 by the Continental of Congress, which passed the first pension law to help injured veterans with their quality of life (DVA, u.d.). It was 13 years later in 1789 when the quality of life for veterans, their family members, and their survivors improved with the first federal pension (DVA, u.d.). The improvement in veterans' quality of life did not last long when the Revolutionary War and Civil War veterans' paper applications overwhelmed the Bureau of Pension when the President and Congress moved the responsibilities to the Department of Interior. Even though Congress has passed acts to improve veterans' quality of life, one that stands out is the Consolidation Act of 1873, which made pensions equal regardless of rank (DVA, u.d.).

When the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee forwards new or updated benefit acts or amendments to both senate and congress for approval; the President will sign them into law. Most of these new laws has established requirements

and deadlines for Department of Veterans Affairs to follow, requiring updated policies and regulations. Unfortunately, most of these new and amendment laws for veterans' benefits claims will add more claims to the backlogs that already exists with Veterans Benefits Administration. In table 3, the article talks about the *Supported Disability Benefit Acts from 1776 to 2019* on pages 56 to 69 showing the history that each President tried to help military veterans with benefits to health improvements. Under table 3, on page 62, The Agent Orange Act of 1991 signed by President George H.W. Bush on February 5, 1991, was the possible start the backlog that no one knew about because lack of tracking where each Vietnam War Era veteran was going between Regional Offices. It was 6 years later when President Clinton signed Veterans Claims Assistance Act of 2000, which updated Public Law 106-475 of Chapter 51 of the U.S.C. Title 38 with improvements in the rate percentage and added section 5100, on which claimants can get assistance to submit benefit claims. Under table 3 on page 64, many laws or bills were introduced to Congress concerning VBA on veterans' claims processing and appeal backlogs from 2003 to 2014 were never signed until February 17, 2017. Our congress failed the military veterans and Department of Veterans Affairs for 19 years, until President Trump that took over to allow his presidency to fix the backlog issue with VBA. Based on multiple investigations by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) and U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) reports from 1978 to present had shown the VBA did not provide appropriate training to employees, and senior management was lacking leadership skills. Most of the time, Congress will combine the Veterans' Benefits

Act with new actions and updated requests from previous Veterans' Benefits Act that the President signs once or twice each term.

For 128 years, military veterans had submitted their injury service-connectivity disability claims as paper copies until President George W. Bush released an Executive Order in March 2007 (eBenefits, 2018). The Executive Order called the President's Commission on Care for Returning Wounded Warriors (Dole/Shalala) for the military service members that were fighting over in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2003 to present (eBenefits, 2018). The President's Executive Order was for the Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense to work together on data base system called Veterans Relationship Management (VRM) and eBenefits portal (Reynolds, 2012). The eBenefits portal is to help military veterans, service members and their families access the portal to manage the disability claims, health care, education claims, and records programs (Reynolds, 2012).

VBA supported regional area offices that could not manage the overflow of hardcopy claims with limited personnel after the personnel cut in the early 2000s (VBA, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2013, and u.d.). From 2004 to 2011, the VBA had over one million disability claims, tripled the number of applications that included with the original backlogged cases before the Iraq war started in 2003 (VBA, 2004-2006). During the presidential race in 2008, both Republican and Democratic presidential candidates indicated to the veterans' that disability claims will be priority. The backlog was getting worse, so service members and veterans started to reach out to the media for action. Then, the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees requested a hearing about the

issue of the backlog of disability claims and appeal cases from the Board of Appeals. Even today, the congressional hearings are still talking about the same problem as they have been for the last 12 years. Senate and House Veterans Affairs' Committee meetings with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and Under Secretary of the Veterans Benefits Administration Division in 2013 and 2014; the committee members had numbers higher in pending and backlog numbers than the VA's numbers (Department of Veterans Affairs [VA], 2012; Griffin et al., 2014; Missal, 2016; Perez, 2014; Pummill, 2016; Shinseki, 2013; Veterans Benefits Administration [VBA], 2017). In addition, even though the VBA Monday Morning Workload Reports keeps track of benefit claims with appeal board cases, the numbers are inconsistent with the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs since 2007 based on Pennsylvania government website reports (PADMVA, 2009). In addition, every time you review a Monday Morning Workload Reports (MMWR), the excel format of spreadsheets constantly changes with newer format designs (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018).

There is still a problem today with filing a service-connectivity compensation disability claim with military veterans. It was up to the service members to get information on how to register until 1991 when the Department of Defense introduced the transition assistance program (TAP) to help service members adjust to civilian life after being separated from the service and help them submit VA claims for injuries (Congressional Research Service [CRS], 2018). Before 1991, service members did not receive this assistance and did not always know how to prepare a service-connected

compensation disability claim for injuries suffered while serving on active duty (CRS, 2018).

Veterans have a few options when waiting for a service-connected disability claim to be approved. One of those options is the educational benefits. Veterans can use the Montgomery GI Bill or Post 9/11 Bill to attend college, which could help provide direction and improve their quality of life. In addition, the Pennsylvania military veterans could reach out to the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veteran Affairs for programs that could help them with financial support.

Blogs from various veterans websites include comments specify the following “I got my rate percentage today, it’s only 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, and so on up to 100 percent,” and “Wow, my rate percentage is low, and I submitted a lot of service-connected injuries; they came back and indicated that some of the injuries were not combat-related or service-connected,” and so on from Vantage, Military.com, Facebook that supports VBA and other veteran supports groups in table 17.

Based on the June 29, 2019, Monday Morning Workload Report and 2017 reports from various articles, the total outstanding claims are 341,994 compared to 764,426 (VBA, 2017, 2019; Missal, 2016; VA, 2017). When researcher looked at the graphs on the VBA website, the VBA was using July 13, 2012, numbers to show how much they reduced their backlog numbers. As of April 2017, 380,330 nationwide disability claims are still pending with 100,402 claims past the 125-day requirement, and 292,035 applications were in the appeal process for approval (VBA, 2017). A good example that changed the numbers dramatically was a U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) report

on July 17, 2017, that indicated over 80% of Gulf War veteran's claims were denied. As of June 29, 2019, the state of Pennsylvania has 9,832 pending applications with 2,001 past 125-day rule in the Monday Morning Workload Report (VBA, 2019). What is interesting about the MMWR is the total number for this year completed is 27,581 in 2019 for state of Pennsylvania (VBA, 2019). The study will provide a table with the pending, past 125-day rule, and completed claims for the fiscal year to show the inconsistency in service-connectivity compensation. These outstanding claims are impacting the veterans' quality of life by creating financial hardship for applications not being reviewed promptly (Andrews, 2014; Carney & Kaper, 2014; Sisk, 2017).

From 1993 to 2018, the Fields Operations and Under the Secretary of Benefits and the Under Secretary for Veterans Benefits Administration had so many factors contributing to the issues of veterans' quality of life problem. Based on all the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) and GAO evaluations, one factor was poor leadership and management skills within both Veterans Area Regional Offices and Veterans Benefits Administration (Finn, 2011; Halliday, 2014; Kraus, 2017; Sullivan, 1997). The Veterans Area Regional Offices has inexperienced case reviewers, significant staff turnover, manual filing of claims, and difficulty distinguishing if a case is final or incomplete. Before the eBenefits network, both VA and regional offices had a weak administrative tracking system for requests and documents to be forwarded to another facility (Finn, 2011 and Finn, 2010). The Office of Inspector General investigations and veteran service officers from veterans' nonprofit organizations had proven the backlog still exists even with the eBenefits network (Missal, 2015; Sisk, 2017).

In the state of Pennsylvania, the DMVA has various programs that can help a veteran with financial issues affecting their quality of life. Based on the Service Veterans Commission briefs as of June 2019, the DMVA programs are only helping one-fourth of Pennsylvania veterans in Veterans Temporary Assistance, which has 2,077 claimants; Blind Veterans Pension with 428 veterans; Amputee and Paralyzed Veterans Pension with 7,503 claimants; Educational Gratuity with 568 claimants; and Disabled Veterans Tax Exemption Program, which has over 13,025 veterans (Burriss, 2019). The Pennsylvania has a Disabled Veterans Tax Exemption Program for 100% disabled veterans. One other program is the Blind Veterans Pension Program and the Amputee and Paralyzed Veterans Pension Program that pays out \$150 to all 100% permanent and total disabled veterans. Pennsylvania government has been fighting to increase the cost to \$200 dollars since fiscal year 2019, for some reason it gets passed the House, but the Senate keeps amended the bill to Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness that has not passed as of September 2022. One crucial program Pennsylvania DMVA created was the Persian Gulf Veterans Benefits Program that no longer is receiving applicants; it had 13,121 applicants, but only 10,046 received the benefits (Burriss, 2019). The DMVA has one other program that supports both active Reserve Units and Veterans' families, the Military Family Relief Assistance Program, which receives private and government donations (Burriss, 2019). The state of Pennsylvania has some programs to help veterans with financial stability, but the lack of communication from the Pennsylvania government the veterans' reached out to veteran's nonprofit organization for assistance.

Problem Statement

There is a problem in the Fields Operations and Board of Veterans Appeals of the Under the Secretary of Benefits that is administratively under the Veterans Benefits Administration at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). That problem is the backlog of disability claims, which is causing financial hardships for American veterans and their family members. Based on documentation and numbers from a variety of sources within the Veterans Benefits Administration, the processing time of service-connectivity claims and appeal cases has caused a significant backlog nationwide. From 2007 to present, both the House and Senate Veterans Affairs' Committee meetings have been complaining about the inconsistency with the delay and appeals numbers being higher than the VA's numbers (Griffin et al., 2014; Missal, 2016; Perez, 2014; Pummill, 2016; Shane, 2018; Shinseki, 2013; VA, 2012; VBA, 2017).

Effective January 3, 2011, the Department of Veterans Affairs and supported veterans' nonprofit organizations using a network portal called eBenefits under the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) website. Before the VA went to the eBenefits Network portal on January 3, 2011, they estimated a total of 764,426 outstanding disability claims (Missal, 2016; Shane, 2017; Wise, 2009; VA, 2017; VBA, 2017). The Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS) was developed to help the eBenefits electronic claims to become a fully digital paperless environment (Brewer, 2013). The VBMS was scheduled to be placed at all 56 Veteran Area Regional Offices by 2015 (Brewer, 2013). Based on OIG reports, the VBMS's are operational at all 56 regional offices.

In April 2017, 380,330 disability claims were still pending with 100,402 claims past the 125-day requirement, and 292,035 applications even in the appeal process for approval (VBA, 2017). Based on an audit by OIG dated September 28, 2009, over 437,000 veterans' claims were mishandled, misplaced, or even lost (DAO, 2009; Shane, 2011; Wise, 2009). The 437,000 claims were only 10%, and the other 90% were being worked on by case reviewers that hardly had any training on the U.S.C. Title 38 rate percentage. These outstanding claims are impacting the veterans' quality of life by creating financial hardship due to applications not being reviewed promptly (Andrews, 2014; Carney & Kaper, 2014; Sisk, 2017). Many factors are contributing to this problem. One of the contributing factors is the poor leadership and management skills within the State Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Veterans Affairs (Halliday, 2014; Hearing Subcommittee on Benefits, 2002; Finn, 2011; Reinkemeyer, 2019; Sullivan, 1997). The Fields Operations and Under the Secretary of Benefits has inexperienced Veterans Service Representatives (VSR) (leadership and management position), Rating Veterans Service Representatives (RVSR), and claim processors due to significant staff turnover, manual filing of claims, and difficulty in distinguishing if a case is final or incomplete. Before the eBenefits network, both VA Records Management Center and Regional offices had a weak administrative tracking system for requests and documents to be forwarded to another facility under the Control Veterans Records System (COVERS) at 56 regional offices (Finn, 2009). Based on the Office of Inspector General investigations reports, Congressional hearings, the military newspaper articles,

and articles from high-rank officials of veterans' nonprofit organizations had proven the backlog still exists even with the eBenefits network (Missell, 2015; Sisk, 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover the effects on veterans' quality of life while waiting for their final word on disability compensation claims and appeal cases from the Veterans Benefits Administration. Identifying these effects may result in improvement in the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. The VBA depends on military veterans and family to go directly to the VA website, e-mails from VBA Public Affairs and veterans' nonprofit organizations to update veterans on recent changes to their benefits.

There are so many contributing factors to this situation from issues with leadership, management, and concern for the service members that protect our country from harm's way (Finn, 2011, Halliday, 2015, and Reinkemeyer, 2020). One of the contributing factors is adding new policies and programs to get the results out faster to veterans (Shulkin, 2019). The programs need to have education training for VARO's VSR and RSVR. Additionally, VARO's need to hire more or replace VSR's immediately with background knowledge on health conditions. Another contributing factor is that many Generation X service members are retiring at the 20-year mark; they are getting out due to medical injuries suffered during war or peacetime or simply because they have completed their time of service. The third contributing factor is a lack of sufficient national service officers, veteran service officers, and or nonprofit organizations that

received certifications to process claims for each state. Lastly, there is a lack of communication with veterans.

Research Questions

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What barriers do U.S. veterans perceive with processing their claims on the Department of Veterans Affairs www.va.gov website?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How will the inconsistent numbers of pending disability claims affect the veterans' quality of life?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): Has the process to obtain veterans' benefits getting harder or easier with eBenefits portal?

Theoretical Foundation

The study will use the assessment of the institutional analysis and development framework (IAD) foundation to focus on the structure and foundation of the hundreds of thousands of veteran's disabilities claims that are incomplete and have an impact on veterans' quality of life, healthcare, and, most importantly, their financial stability. The study used the IAD and IHMC CmapTools (2014) to set various settings and scales with veterans from the late baby boomer and Generation X era. Understanding the logic, design, and performance of institutional arrangements in a variety of settings and different scales (p. 267) (Sabatier and Weible (2014). To support the theoretical framework the organizational and professional identity and human resource theory will be use throughout the study (IHMC, 2014; Shafritz, J. et al., 2016, p. 126). All three theories will support the IAD framework because of the Department of Veterans Affairs leadership and workforce support issues throughout the State Department of Veterans

Affairs. The professional identity theory and human resource theory might contradict each other after the results from interviews, questionnaires, and reviews of other scholarly articles.

The study concentrated on the social construction framework (SCF) under Democratic Policy Design using policy feedback theory (Sabatier & Weible, 2014, pp. 131-132; Shafritz, J. et al., 2016). Policy feedback theory will utilize the methods from IAD of “organizational and professional identity” with “human resource theory” to support the theoretical framework for this study (Shafritz, J. et al., 2016, p. 126; IHMC, 2014). The social construction will examine the “historical, contemporary, and cross-state or cross-national” to support policy changes (Sabatier & Weible, 2014, p. 132). The IAD and SCF will allow the veterans and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to see if there is still a problem with the processing of veteran’s disability compensation claims and whether the policies need a second review.

Conceptual Framework

The researcher will utilize the theoretical framework to determine how the operational procedures will affect a social phenomenon (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015). To support the social construction framework, the researcher will use the Office of Inspector General investigation reports and the United States Government Accounting Office reviews on the Department of Veterans Affairs to see if the VA shows improvements or not. As the researcher needs to keep in mind, the backlog numbers are estimates from 2004 to the present since the eBenefits portal has only been operational for the last eight years. To support the social construction framework, the researcher

plans to utilize the Excel spreadsheets from the VBA Monday Morning Workload Reports with Pennsylvania's DMVA submissions. The researcher will compare the Monday Morning Workload Reports to Pennsylvania's DMVA reports that went to the governor. The National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (NCVAS) completed an interesting study Comparison of VA Users and Non-Users FY 2016 that showed 9,734,303 used the VA Benefits and 10,657,889 did not (NCVAS, 2016). The NCVAS did assorted studies from FY 2015 (2016) and FY 2016 (2017). The most interesting one is the Profile of Veterans: 2016 Data from the American Community Survey that came out in February 2018. These reports are publicly available.

Nature of the Study

The qualitative case study is the experiences of military veterans fighting to have a better quality of life after leaving the military with injuries that limit them from getting a job. Not all damages of a service member received while on active duty deserve to be 100 percent, but the small ones later in life can change a veteran's livelihood in an instance. Then, the veteran needs to resubmit another update claim to get an increase from previous claim results or claim that represents a secondary claim of injury that did not receive a rate percentage from the first claim. An excellent example of a secondary application is developed for PTSD during trauma events while on active duty and lost their job for one reason or another. The researcher needs to find better ways to reach veterans instead of depending on the websites.

Definitions

Agent Orange: The U.S. Military used a chemical called Agent Orange herbicide to clear trees and plants during the Vietnam War and other areas from January 9, 1962, to May 7, 1975. The different regions were the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard ships or other vessels in or near Vietnam; Thailand military bases; C-123 airplanes; and testing areas that store outside regions of Vietnam. The Agent Orange and other Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pits, Depleted Uranium, Gulf War, Ionizing Radiation, and Toxic Embedded Fragments were used in the Persian Gulf War to the Iraq and Afghanistan War.

Board of Veterans Appeal (BVA) Process: The BVA was established in July 1933 to hear veterans' appeals on service-connectivity claims and other benefits decisions.

Control of Veterans Records System (COVERS): The COVERS is a system to keep track of disability paper claims folders within and between offices of VBA, VAROs, and a specific individual who is working on the disability claim.

Decision Ready Claims (DRC): The DRC was established in late 2016 to help veterans file a claim and receive a rating decision within 30 days. This program benefits the service-members that submit a pre-discharge or dependency, and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) claims. The DRC covers the following compensation claims: Direct Service Connection, Presumptive Service Connection, Secondary Service Connection, and Increased Disability Claim. By using a VSO under the DRC program,

the VSO can request a VA claim exam (Compensation & Pension (C&P) exam) if all relevant evidence at the time of submission.

Fully Developed Claim (FDC): In 2010, VA shortened the VA Form 21-526 form from 23 to 10 pages for downloading from the VA website www.va.gov/vaforms. Secretary Shinseki was hoping to reduce the paperwork and allow Rating Veterans Service Representatives (RVSR) and Veterans Service Representatives (VSR) to process the claims more comfortable and quicker decisions as a hard copy. The forms will be available by filling out the application through the e-Benefits portal

Military Transitions Assistance Program (TAP): The Military Transitions Assistance Program (TAP) was initially made available in Fiscal Year 1991 from the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The program was to help service members to transition to civilian life who were involuntarily separated when forces were forced to down structure in the late 1980s. The plan changed in 2011 with President Obama's and Congress's new act called Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) to Hire Heroes Act.

Monday Morning Workload Report (MMWR): The MMWR is a compile of 56 Veterans Regional Offices across the United States that supports the Field Office Under the Secretary of Benefits of Veterans Benefits Administration. The reports contain the data on incoming benefit claims for Compensation (Disability and Appeals), Pension, Education, and any other benefit claims that were file from Veterans, family members, dependents, and survivor members. In the last few years, the VBA's Office of Performance Analysis and Integrity took over MMWR for claims accuracy.

National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (NCVAS): NCVAS provides critical statistics to VBA on veterans' populations, claim process numbers, and conduct survey analyses for future decision-making activities.

National Service Officer (NSO): The Disabled American Veterans (DAV) and American Veterans (AMVETS) organizations use NSO's to serve and assist veterans in filling out benefit forms (online or hard copy) without any cost to a Veteran and family members. The NSO's provides extensive knowledge and experience on how the administrative process works at VARO's, Veterans Benefits Administration, and Veterans Health Administration.

Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF): Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) happen four weeks after Al Qaeda and Taliban attack the United States on September 11, 2001. President George W Bush initiated airstrikes on October 7, 2001, against the terrorist attackers that started the War in Afghanistan for 13 years that ended on December 28, 2014. And President Obama continued the operations under the name Operation Freedom's Sentinel with the United States military forces, both non-combat and combat.

Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF): In October 2002, Congress gave President George W Bush authorization to use force against Iraq. Five months later, President Bush launched the campaign of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) on March 20, 2003. The priority with OIF is to remove the regime by destroying the use of mass destruction weapons and threats by Iraq. One other area OIF was the focus on to help emerge the

new Iraqi leadership improve security, build a system of governance, and help with economic development.

Operations New Dawn (OND): The first original Operation of Dawn was in 1967 with Egyptian planned of the offensive against Israel. The military forces continue to use Operation Dawn in 1983 as Operation Dawn 1 on 10 April 1983 and 22 July 1983 as Operation Dawn 2 with Iranian offensive in the Iran-Iraq War. Operation Dawn came back again in 1997 when U.S. forces joint operation with Turkish Armed Forces I northern Iraq against Kurdistan Workers Party. Seven years later, Operations New Dawn join forces with U.S. and Iraqi to fight against insurgents in Fallujah Afghanistan (2004) to Trekh Nawa Iraq in the summer of 2010 to 2011. The OND continued in 2012 with the U.S. forces joined the Turkish Armed Forces again to fight against the Kurdistan Workers Party. The OND went into effect back in 2014 when Libyan conflict at the seize of the Tripoli International Airport by an Islamic fundamentalist.

Rapid Appeals Modernization Program (RAMP): RAMP is short-term for the Veterans Appeals Improvement Modernization Act of 2017 that President Trump signed in February 2017. RAMP did not come into play until February 2019 for the new appeal process that is now in three stages.

Rating Veterans Service Representative (RVSR): The RVSR collaborates with the Special Missions or Pension Management Center (PMC) at the Veterans Service Center (VSC). They are responsible for reviewing the claim and scheduling the appointments with the Compensation and Pension (C&P) examination at VA Medical Centers. When

RVSR receives the results from C&P doctors, they will prepare the rating decision letter for VSR to sign.

Service-Connectivity Disability Claim: Service-connected (SC) means the disability was a result of disease or injury incurred or aggravated during active military service. The limitations are evaluated according to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Schedule for Rating Disabilities in Title 38, U.S. Code of Federal Regulations, Part 4. https://ecfr.io/Title-38/cfr4_mai

- Service-connected disability ratings are graded based on the degree of the Veteran's disability on a scale of 0 to 100 percent, in increments of 10 percent.
- Zero percent is a valid rating and is different than having no rating at all. Of Veterans rated SC 0%, only those receiving Special Monthly Compensation were included in this analysis.

U.S.C. Title 38: Title 38 is used for Veterans Benefits. It provides a breakout for pensions, bonuses, and veterans' relief. Additionally, Title 38 provides what service-connected injuries will receive by rate percentage.

Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA): The VBA was founded on July 21, 1930, under the Veterans Bureau. When President Herbert Hoover signed Executive Order 5398 to establish the Veterans Administration under the Public Law 71-536 on July 3, 1930, one year later July 1, 1931, Veterans Administration was entirely operated with VBA to provide financial and other forms of assistance to veterans, their dependents, and survivors. As of today, the VBA currently serves 5.2 million Veterans and survivors with compensation or pension benefits. With updated Veterans Benefits

Acts in the past 80 years, VBA added programs with rehabilitation and employment assistance, education assistance, home loan guarantees, and life insurance coverage benefits.

Veterans Service Officer (VSO): The VSOs are advocates to help veterans and family members to fill out the benefit forms (online or hard copy) without any cost to a Veteran and family members. All the VSOs can be found at American Legion or Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), and each state has counties and or local municipalities that have one or two VSOs as well. The VSOs has the same responsibilities as NSO; they have veteran and family member's best interest to help them with the benefits and health they deserve.

Veterans Service Representative (VSR): The VSR's work for VARO's. When a VSR receives a military veteran disability claim from the VBMS, they start to gather relevant evidence, conducts interviews, identifies any issues, and decide the claim. The VSR will generate the award and notification letters to a veteran on VBA decision and the reason it was approved and or denied.

Veterans Area Regional Office (VARO): Veterans Area Regional Offices are divided into four districts: Northeast, Southeast, Continental, and Pacific. Today, VBA has 56 regional offices under the Field Offices Department in Veterans Benefits Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS): The Veterans Benefits Management System is a web-based electronic program to scan veterans' disability

compensation claims. The VA Regional Office set up the VBMS as a three-fold red rope file record in 2010. As of 2016, all 56 VAROs has VBMS capability.

Work-in-Progress System (WIPP): WIPP is the tracking system that is used to transfer hard copy disability claims from one Regional Office (RO) to another for processing.

Assumptions

For years, the researcher believed that all our American veterans submitted their service-connectivity disability claims when they completed their active-duty service. It was not until August 2004, when the researcher filed their first service-connectivity disability claim with a Disabled American Veteran (DAV) National Service Officer (NSO) informed the researcher that not all veterans submit a service-connectivity application after separating from service. The NSO at DAV indicated that there is a misconception of who should send and receive a rate percentage to be taken care of by the Veterans Benefits Administration and the Veterans Medical Centers. That did not make sense since the military has been using a transition program in 1991 called Transition Assistance Program (TAP) to explain to service members about submitting a disability package to the Department of Veterans Affairs for injuries they received while on active duty.

As you can see in figure 3: Characteristics of Claims as of December 22, 2018, the data demonstrates the pending and backlogged claims back to World War II with other era claims (VBA, 2018). What is impressive is that the Vietnam War and Persian Gulf veterans have more pending applications than Iraq & Afghanistan. You can see

articles from the VBA Blog indicated the numbers are going down in the backlog, but when you read blogs from other nonprofit veterans' organization's websites and Military Times newspaper on websites, they are not going down. Then, researching articles on the website, confusing everyone even more. There is no consistency in what the Department of Veterans Affairs is saying at Congress hearings based on writeups from 2010 to present.

When you concentrate on researching deep into documents online, for example, public domain on VBA with appeal cases of information and return to clarification from VBA, how can VBA Appeals drop the numbers in 2018 based in table 13 when RAMP was not in place until February 2019. How can numbers drop so quickly in one year? Zarembo's (2015) article made a curious case in September 2005, where 167,412 appeal cases waiting for an answer and triple in October with 425,480. In the next 13 years, the appeal backlog cases quadruple with service members from Iraq and Afghanistan war. Zarembo (2015) mentioned from 2009 to 2015, more than 32,000 veterans had died before appeals were resolved based on VA data. The researcher reviewed some of the write-ups on appeal cases from Appeal Board logs that read cases closed due to the death of the veteran.

Based on news articles from various networks, employees were told to destroy old records that needed additional information from the top of the leadership chain (Redmon, 2019). Wise's (2009) article in Armed Sources mentions a VA OIG audit on 437,000 veterans claim folders that were misplaced or lost. On February 20, 2009, the VA OIG did an independent review on VBA's manager's mismanagement of 4.2 million benefit

claims folders under the Control of Veterans Records System (COVERS) at 56 regional offices across the United States (Finn, 2009). Of those 437,000 claim folders were not at the location they were assigned in COVERS with 296,000 were at VA Records Management Center instead of regional office locations (Finn, 2009). There were approximately 141,000 paper benefit claims folders were lost, and up to 49,000 were rebuilt from 2006 to 2009 with previous claims history that was declared lost or cannot find (Finn, 2009). Based on Finn's (2009) investigation, 100,000 benefit applications have not been review or process by Rating Veterans Service Representatives and Veteran Service Representatives in 2009.

As of February 20, 2009, VBA had assigned about 4.2 million claims folders to regional offices for benefit claims processing and safeguarding. We projected the claims folders for an estimated 437,000 (10 percent) veterans were not at the location shown in COVERS: Plus, look at the blogs from veterans indicating their injuries did not qualify for rate percentage then closed it, died while waiting for answer (CBS News, 2014; Wise, 2009), given a veteran 100 percent or less, and when someone missing a C&P exam; then drops the veterans' rate percentage (VAntage, 2019; Wise, 2009). Abe (2016) and Halliday (2015) OIG investigations had indicated that VARO Philadelphia stopped using their Destruction Log in December 2012.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study is surrounded by veterans' quality of life while waiting for their rate percentage on service-connected injuries that they received on active duty or old injury developed issues after the fact. It is exceedingly rare hearing about military

veterans having problems with financial situations on news media on television, unless they are doing a story about it. In the past year, the researcher had limited sources to help with the study until finding new techniques to help with the searching through Google. The stories about Vietnam veterans trying to track down their paper copy of disability claims were terrible because they did not know where to get help from 1970 to present. For the veterans that use computers, after each online article, there is a blog comment about destructive issues of veteran's health and getting their disability claim through the system. Around 2015, the VBA started the Vantage Point Blog on the website to get the word out on update changes to the benefits. The researcher was able to utilize the VAntage Point articles for the study. One of the problems with the Department of Veterans Affairs is using their website for communication to veterans and family member, and not everyone has a computer or smart phone. Even the social network Facebook has a list of veterans' nonprofit organizations to a VBA group called VA Comp & Pension Claims that was established in February 2014 see table 16. The veterans were slowly using VA Comp & Pension to ask and received answers employees that work at VBA until 2018 more veterans started to join the group.

The scope of the information is derived from the Congressional hearings; VA Office of Inspector General investigations and audits and evaluations, and General Accounting Office (GAO) on VBA and Veterans Regional Area Offices in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh; VBA public domain website that has Monday Morning Workload Reports and NCVAS graphs; and other supported scholar papers and articles from various media sources.

The scope of this study surrounds the state of Pennsylvania military veterans that had submitted a service-connectivity disability claim and waiting for their appeal that they did not agree with their outcome from Field Offices of Veterans Benefits Administration office. Based on all reports from Monday Morning Workload Reports, Pennsylvania is one of the top five states that has the most military veterans. The researcher plans to reach out to at least 500 or more, even though they did not submit a claim. The study will primarily concentrate on both the early and late baby boomers and Generation X service veterans. The first baby boomers fought in the Vietnam War, and late boomers fought in the Gulf War, Iraq, and Afghanistan War, and served in peacetime deployed in foreign countries and stateside for training operations. The Generation X service members are the ones that are fighting today in the Iraq and Afghanistan War and training in peace-time stateside.

Limitations

One of the critical constraints to this study is not to overstep any boundaries; for example, the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs offices; National Service Officer and or Veteran Services Officers from VFW; DAV; American Legion; counties that support veterans, and Department of Veterans Affairs. The researcher must explain to all veterans that this is a research study only and hopes to provide some insights to the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and all nonprofit veterans organizations that PA Veterans need help with their quality of life. By explaining the study, this should help the bias issues that might come into play. The researcher plans to hold interviews and fill in the questionnaires at locations of VFW,

American Legion, DAV, and county buildings across Pennsylvania. These buildings have someone there to help secure any incidents that develop. Plus, protocols will be in place and observed for each location.

Significance of the Study

This study will show how the Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Area Regional Offices in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, and the state of Pennsylvania's Department of Military and Veterans Affairs do not keep track of hundreds to thousands of veterans' benefits claims for almost 100 years that affect the quality of life. Pennsylvania's Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, Department of Veterans Affairs, and support veterans' nonprofit organizations have shown poor leadership and management practices with their own veteran's disability claims. For one, a major key factor for Pennsylvania's Department of Military and Veterans Affairs is that they will continue to have a disability backlog if the military is still fighting wars over in Iraq and Afghanistan and any other conflicts. The social change for the baby boomers and Generation X era is to understand and improve on information network technology. The study will show a positive social change with better communication practices between everyone that is involved with VA disability and benefit compensation claims processes. The policy changes will provide the necessary tools for the Pennsylvania Department Military and Veterans Affairs to work with veterans nonprofit organizations that have National Service Officers and Veteran Service Officers, and Fields Operation Department under the Under Secretary of Benefits, Veterans Benefits Administration.

Significance to Practice

Setting up protocols will help the researcher to practice interviews and to gather evidence for the study. The researcher needs to stay on top of any biases issues that come up during one-on-one conversations that relate to rate percentages. Additionally, the researcher needs to ensure data is accurate when enter, have a backup in place, and monitor the database from crashes. One of the essential practices the researcher will protect themselves from plagiarism during the writing of the study.

Significance to Theory

By using critical theories to the study, it will help the researcher to conclude one or two main approaches to support the research and future studies. When the researcher begins, their data collections with IAD and IHAC CmapTools will allow the veteran identity theory to be established with the military veteran's community. For the researcher to develop a conceptual and theoretical framework will utilize taxonomies and data technology systems that VBA uses for benefit claim processes. To support the organizational and professional identity theory, the information from 1993 to present of VA OIG, GAO Audit and Evaluations, and key veterans' nonprofit organizations that work hand to hand with VBA Regional Area Offices in Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

Significance to Social Change

With any findings from a study, the hope is to see an understanding of why this is happening and how we can fix the problem. This study should open the eyes of the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and all the nonprofit veteran

organizations with their policies, including the Department of Veterans' Affairs. The researcher is hoping to prove to the organizations that they cannot depend on their websites, Facebook, and bulletin boards alone to reach veterans. The networking alone does help a few veterans, not thousands. The researcher plans to forward the study once published to all nonprofit veterans' organizations; Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs; Philadelphia and Pittsburgh Veterans Regional Area Offices; and Department of Veterans Affairs to show them we need to improve on communication with veterans and not depend solely on their websites. The researcher feels that the total of participants will allow a positive outcome for the qualitative study.

Summary

At the beginning of writing Chapter 1, the literature had proven a need to draft research on the quality of life of a veteran while waiting for his or her service-connectivity disability claim.

The literature review in Chapter 2 will be limited because of a lack of studies on veterans' quality of life with the processing of disability claims. In the last five years, there have been studies related more to health care than disability claims. It was not until 2014 the Department of Veterans Affairs opened its public domain to see articles written in the past and present. Specifically, the VA Office of Inspector General investigation and evaluation reports. The Walden University Library is the key location to find scholar articles from various web databases.

In Chapter 3, the case study plan is to explain the methodology and research design for the qualitative study. Based on the literature review in Chapter 2, the literature will provide key code words for the database.

Going into Chapter 4, the study will set up the protocols to collect the data from Pennsylvania veterans that participate with the questionnaires and interviews. Once the interviews and surveys are finished each day, the researcher will enter everything into the database with coded words. The investigation team will set up coded terms based on the literature review. Once the data is into the database, the SPSS content analysis will provide an outcome to the study.

The researcher will provide the findings in Chapter 5. In Chapter 5, the researcher will provide a future research study. Plus, the study will give an insight to the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and Pennsylvania State Veterans Commission.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The inconsistency of not tracking the original service-connectivity disability claim and appeal claims has ruin veterans' quality of life for the past 30 years. The Veterans Benefits Administration Department is still overwhelmed with incorporating all the changes from the old to the new databases. For example, based on the literature review from a researcher, the claims numbers were incompatible because the VBA Monday Morning Workload Reports showed estimate numbers from Philadelphia and Pittsburgh VARO in 2004. When the researcher located the public database under the Pennsylvania governor website, the Governor receive monthly numbers from Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs not until 2007. When, the researcher went further into the Pennsylvania Department Military and Veterans Affairs website under Pennsylvania Service Veteran Commission Committee briefs, there numbers started from 2009 to the present of numbers that did not match up with VBA Monday Morning Workload Reports for Philadelphia and Pittsburgh VARO (DMVA, 2018).

From U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) investigation on veterans claim processing in 1978 to 2003 until they changed their named to U.S. Government Accounting in 2004 (Bascetta, 1978, 2000, 2005). The Veterans Administration founded the VA Office of Inspector General in 1978 to investigate the fraud, waste, and abuse hotline requests and the audits and evaluations reports within the Department of Veterans Affairs organization. Pretty much both GAO and the Office of Inspector General investigations used each other investigations to support their case for Congressional

request, VA Task Force, Department of Veterans Affairs senior official requests, Hotline on fraud, waste, and abuse with employees and mishandle the compensation and pension claims for past 50 years. Sullivan's (1997) utilized other investigations on Appendix II (Biography) that supported Bascetta (1978) VBA had issues with lack of training, management, and lack of accountability with Vietnam Era veteran and Gulf Era veterans from 1993 to 1997 claims. Based on VA Office of Inspector General archive reports, Sullivan (1997) Summary Report on Veterans Claims Processing Issues utilized other reports back to 1992 on issues affecting Board of Veterans Appeals and processing disability claims see page 40 and 41 provided detail of appeal cases (VAOIG, 2022 and Sullivan, 1997). Additionally, the researcher found cases that veterans are making false statements to receive 100 percent disability (Jongbloed, 2016 and Abely, 2016).

When a military service member receives injury during peace or wartime of their service, they were given guidance by veteran representatives in TAPS or by fellow veterans to apply for VA disability compensation and military pension. The researcher heard stories from military veterans, saying that they did not know what to do or who to talk to when submitting benefits claim. The veterans may also feel that they did not fight in any world wars, that they were only stationed stateside, and thought it was only for veterans that service in a foreign battle. Not all service members will submit an in-service disability compensation claim because service members hear bad situations from fellow veteran's claims. The study will show it is not just the backlog of applications and appeal process has hurt the quality-of-life issues with veterans and their family; it is the wait time for retroactive back pay that causes problems too.

Based on numbers from Field Operations Department of Veterans Benefits Administration for the Secretary of Veterans Affairs Administration, and House and Senate Veterans Affairs' Committee (House Representatives and Senators members) the backlog numbers were inconsistent based on the Monday Morning Workflow Reports that were open to the public on Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) web page in 2017 (VBA, 2017). The VBA numbers were lower than House and Senate VA Committees in 2013 and 2014 documentation reports (DVA, 2012, Griffin et al., 2014; Missal, 2016; Perez, 2014; Pummill, 2016; Shinseki, 2013; VBA, 2017).

Based on the House and Senate Committees on Veterans Affairs hearings from 1995 to present, had presented issues with leadership and management staff from the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to Director of Veterans Benefits Administration (Bertoni, 2014). The Committees of Veterans Affairs has hearings with senior officials from VA Office of Inspector General (OIG); Directors from Audits and Evaluation inspections, and General Accounting Office about their investigation and evaluations reports on all the supported Veterans Area Regional Offices (VAROs) and Veterans Service Centers for years about training issues, leadership, and management (Halliday, 2015). The United States Government Accountability Office and the Office of Inspector General of Audits and Evaluations inspections with Philadelphia and Pittsburgh VAROs from 1994 to present; the reports have shown issues with management, leadership, policies and regulations, training, and staffing issues with processing the disability claims and appeal cases for years (Finn, 2010, Halliday, 2015, Abe, 2016, and Wooditch, 2006). The Chief Financial Officer for the Department of Veterans Affairs requested an OIG Audit on the

VBA's Data Reliability in the Claims Processing Workload Reporting system that the Compensation and Pension (C&P) were using for veterans' compensation claims (Sullivan, 1997).

The Gulf War started the overflow and backlog of disability compensation and pension claims. Based on the audit review in 1997, the full-time employees in Adjudication Divisions from various regional offices managed over 2.7 million Compensation and Pension claims that awarded \$18 billion with veteran's benefits (Sullivan, 1997). The audit showed an issue with VBA's Work-in-Progress (WIPP) system by over-reporting a 5.3 percent of original compensation claims completed, processing time, and the inability of the WIPP system tracking the transfer from one Regional Office (RO) to another for processing, see Appendix III (Sullivan, 1997). One key area mentioned in the audit was the duplication of completed and incomplete claims counted as one claim (Sullivan, 1997).

Investigator plans to use various charts from the Annual Report of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs – Fiscal Year 1995 that Sullivan used in the audit to support the OIG claims (Sullivan, 1997). In Sullivan's (1997) report indicated VBA had backlogged due to outdated claim processing methods, which cause an increase in rate percentage adjudication and appeal cases. The study plans to use Appendix IV on page 93 that shows the claims adjudication and approval process and page 94 of the appeal process (Sullivan, 1997). Sullivan (1997) provided a summary of VA Claim Processing Issues to Veterans Administration with detail discrepancies and more than two hundred recommendations, suggestions, and discussion points to improve Compensation and

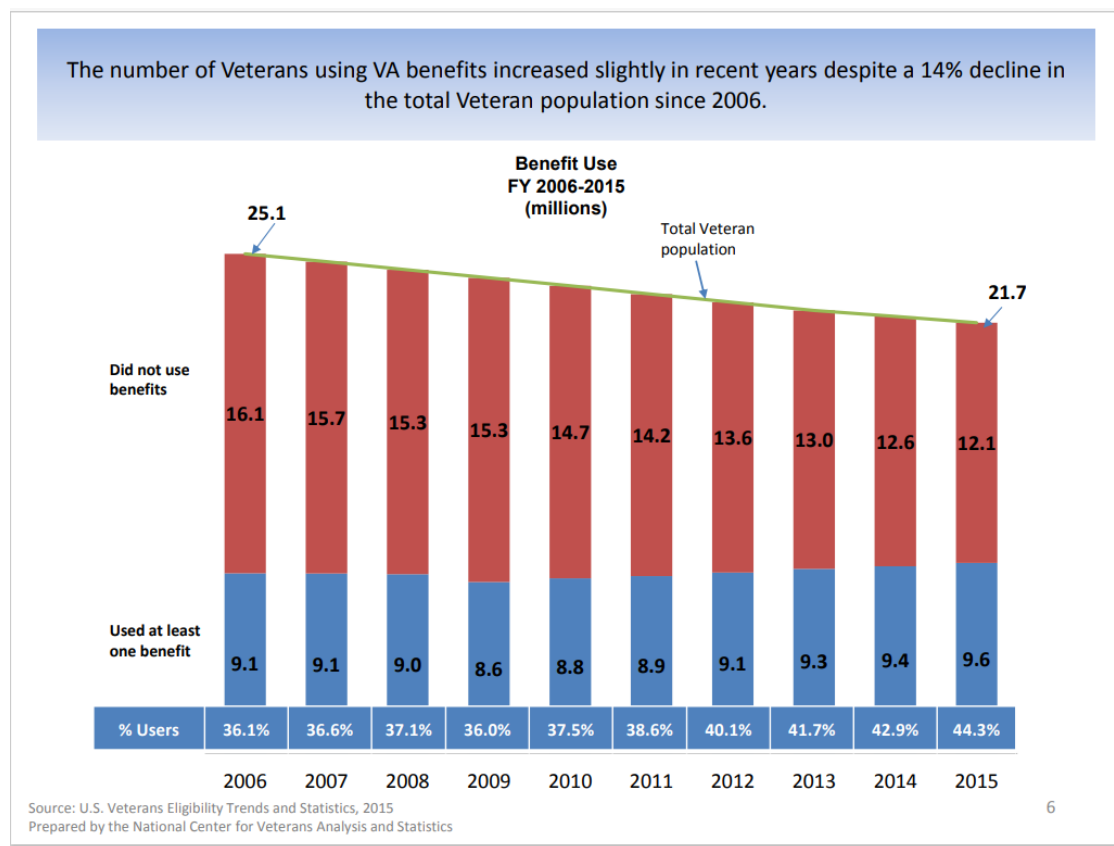
Pension claims processing with the Department of Veterans Affairs and Veterans Area Regional Offices across the United States. The other area of concern from the report was the VBA's Adjudication Division staffing. The staffing was 3,700 in the Fiscal Year 1990, then moved up to 4,200 by the Fiscal Year 1993 to help with the backlog to the Fiscal Year 1996 (Sullivan, 1997). The Federal Budget in 1997 hurt the Department of Veterans Affairs by reducing the staff levels to 1,500 by Fiscal Year 2002 in the Field Offices of VBA. One area of concern was the Board Veterans Appeal process time for decisions. It was in 1989 the Department of Veterans Affairs established the Court of Veterans Appeals (CVA) to assist with appeals that eventually caused more of the backlog problem based on Sullivan (1997 pg. 1) indicated "claims that take too long to process and claims that are not adequately adjudicate."

The study plans to use the Annual Report of the Secretary of Veteran Affairs from 1997 to present, since there are minimal scholarly articles on the process of veteran disability claims. Each Secretary of Veteran Affairs Annual Reports will show charts with numbers on compensation and pension claims and a total of full-time employees that oversee requests from mail process centers to adjudication divisions. The study will use the VA Office of Inspector General Audits and Evaluation inspections that support issues with processing the service-connected compensation claims and pensions. The congressional hearing statements for officials that testified in front of Senate and House Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs and Committee on Veterans' Affairs members. The VA OIG audit and evaluations started their own inspections before the Committee on Veterans' Affairs requested them to start in 2011.

In March 2007, President Bush signed an Executive Order 13426 called the *Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors* (Dole/Shalala, 2007) (M27-1, Part V, Chapter 1 pg. V-1-2, 2016). This Executive Order requested the Department of Veterans Affairs to create a web portal to give all active and reserve military members, veterans, and family members online access to benefits (M27-1, Part V, Chapter 1 pg. V-1-2, 2016). It took over three years for the eBenefits domain portal to be placed within the Department of Veterans' Affairs public website domain. For the next 3 years, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs kept requesting more money for the eBenefits portal because the portal had issues, and the contract was going over its limit with the contractor based on DVA fiscal year budgets in 2008 through 2011 (Lipowicz, 2010 and Shinseki, 2010). Effective January 3, 2011, the Department of Veterans Affairs released the eBenefits portal to all service members, veterans, and supported veterans' nonprofit organizations to use for submission of benefit claims under the Veterans Benefits Administration section of the DVA website. One other area that Department of Veterans Affairs did a study from National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics during President Bush and President Obama's era of 2005 through 2015 that provided two separate reports FY 2015 and FY 2016 (NCVAS, 2016; NCVAS, 2018). Figure 1 shows the percentage of how many veterans did use or not use one or all benefit programs from 2006 to 2015, under the NCVAS, 2016 report. Below the figure 1 is table 1, that NCVAS and Veterans Benefits Administration explain the total of veterans that are receiving service-connected disability from Fiscal Years 1986 to 2016 (NCVAS/VBA, 2018).

Figure 1

Unique Veteran Users Profile FY 2015 that was prepared in December 2016 by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics .



Note. Figure was pull from the 2016 report from National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. As you can see the difference of Veteran users and non-users from 2006 to 2015 (NCVAS, 2016)

The table 1 shows how many veterans are receiving service-connected disability from Fiscal Years 1986 to 2011 were paper submissions. The rest of the Fiscal Years 2012 to 2016 were placed in the eBenefits portal as an electronic submission for accountability of claims being forward to Regional Offices across the United States.

Table 1

*Service-connected Disabled Veterans by Disability Rating Group FY 1986 to FY
2016 (NCVAS/VBA, 2018)*

Fiscal Year	Total Veterans with a Service-Connected Disability	0 to 20 percent	30 to 40 percent	50 to 60 percent	70 to 100 percent
1986	2,225,289	1,255,399	495,655	224,588	249,647
1987	2,212,303	1,251,733	491,932	221,480	247,158
1988	2,198,857	1,246,938	488,117	218,394	245,407
1989	2,191,549	1,245,045	485,456	215,972	245,076
1990	2,184,262	1,242,103	483,479	214,399	244,281
1991	2,179,122	1,242,386	480,368	213,029	243,339
1992	2,180,936	1,245,352	479,501	212,178	243,905
1993	2,197,635	1,254,732	483,034	212,802	247,067
1994	2,217,908	1,266,403	487,251	213,807	250,447
1995	2,235,675	1,271,698	490,581	215,381	258,015
1996	2,252,980	1,272,924	494,802	217,648	267,606
1997	2,262,771	1,266,042	496,067	221,015	279,647
1998	2,277,049	1,255,055	499,907	226,586	295,501
1999	2,294,453	1,242,621	503,341	233,897	314,594
2000	2,308,186	1,227,207	506,019	241,260	333,700
2001	2,321,103	1,211,807	509,110	248,104	352,082
2002	2,398,287	1,209,274	527,820	266,886	394,307
2003	2,485,229	1,204,038	546,157	287,978	447,056
2004	2,555,696	1,200,715	558,306	304,341	492,334
2005	2,636,979	1,199,271	573,994	324,637	539,077
2006	2,725,824	1,207,358	594,765	345,832	577,869
2007	2,844,178	1,229,001	621,440	371,622	622,115
2008	2,952,285	1,237,868	643,882	398,679	671,856
2009	3,069,652	1,244,230	665,211	427,902	732,309
2010	3,210,261	1,258,882	689,599	459,657	802,123
2011	3,354,741	1,258,987	711,305	492,692	891,757
2012	3,536,802	1,266,501	729,813	532,192	1,008,296
2013	3,743,259	1,281,492	749,531	572,421	1,139,815
2014	3,949,066	1,294,797	765,587	609,450	1,279,232
2015	4,168,774	1,308,597	778,182	647,025	1,434,970
2016	4,356,443	1,318,939	785,687	675,865	1,575,952

Note. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration; 1985-1998: COIN CP-127 Reports; 1999-2016: Annual Benefits Reports

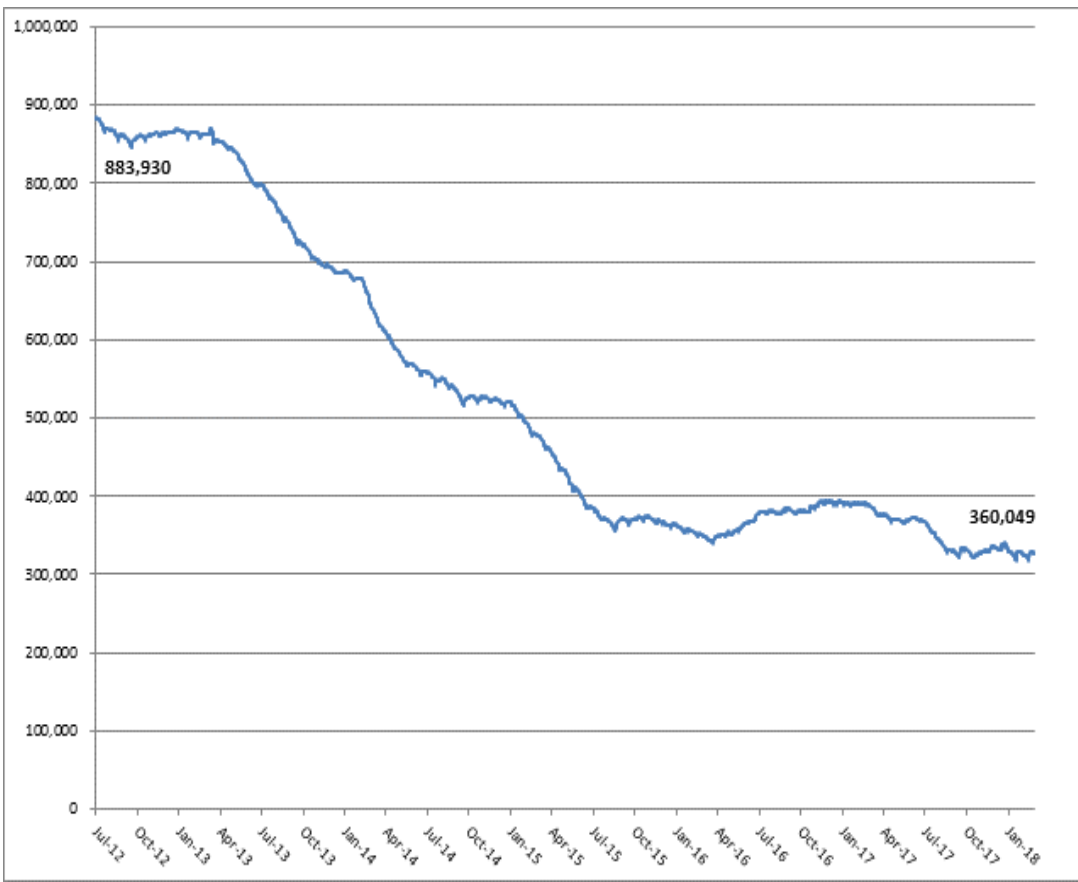
Prepared by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, Office of Enterprise Integration, Department of Veterans Affairs, Aug 2018

The Veterans Benefits Administration continues to use the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics for graphs to show of improvements with benefit claims.

Before Veterans Benefits Administration of Department of Veterans Affairs went to the eBenefits Network portal on January 3, 2011, they estimated a total of 764,426 outstanding disability claims (DVA, 2017; Missal, 2016; VBA, 2017). Leo Shane, Military Times, American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans websites with articles, and other journals will support dissertation reports had shown the numbers were inconsistency. The researcher went back to review the Veterans Benefits Administration Reports on Claims Inventory that displayed a graph based on quarters from July 2012 with 883,920 to January 2018 with 360,049 and another one March 2013 with 611,073 to September 2018 with 82,832 (See Figures 2 and 3) (VBA, 2018).

Figure 2

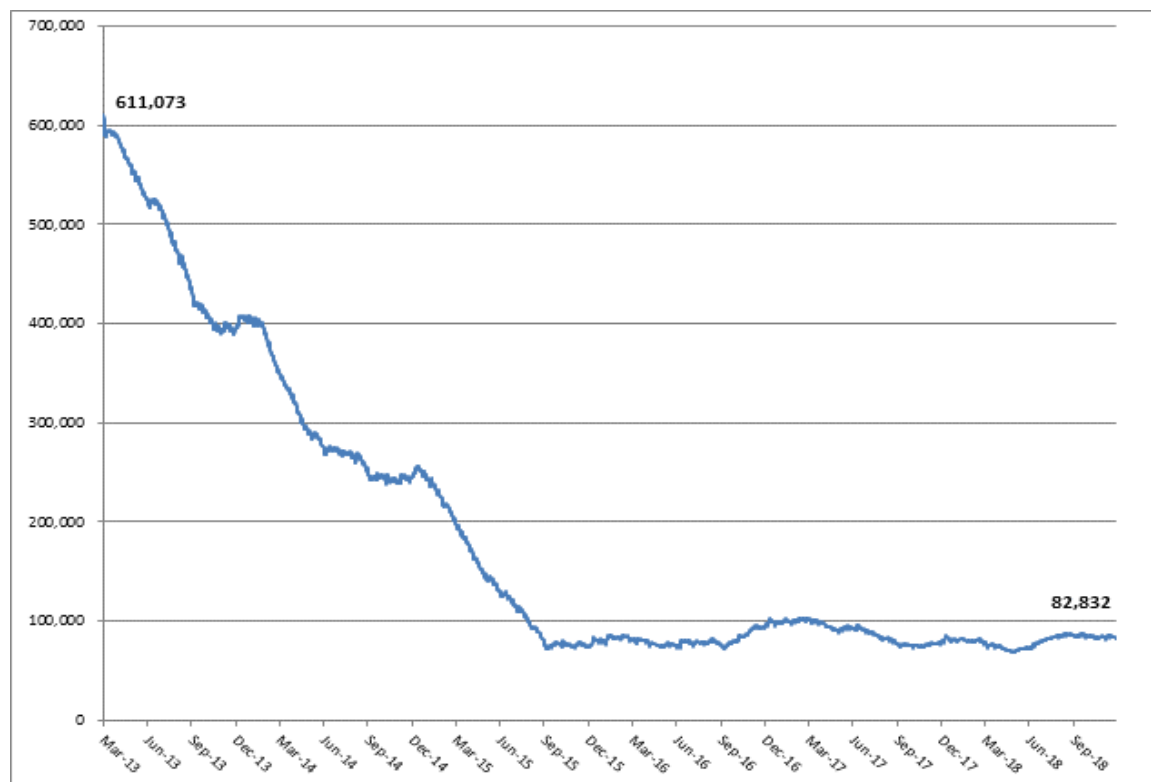
Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration Division: Claims Inventory from July 2012 to January 2018



Note. Based on Disability Report on the VBA website, the picture showed the date as of July 2012 to January 2018. VA’s claims backlog includes disability compensation and pension claims received by VA that require a rating decision. Once VA decides a claim, it’s no longer in the claims inventory. https://www.benefits.va.gov/reports/mmwr_va_claims_backlog.asp

Figure 3

Claims Backlog from March 2013 to September 2018



Note. Based on Disability Report on the VBA website, the picture showed the date as of March 2013 to September 2018. VA's claims backlog includes disability compensation and pension claims received by VA that require a rating decision. Once VA decides a claim, it is no longer in the claims inventory located at https://www.benefits.va.gov/reports/mmwr_va_claims_backlog.asp

The researcher decided to look at MMWR July 2012 for numbers, and they are inconsistent with the claims inventory that is on the website as of 30 December 2018. Based on the excel database for 073012 for total pending compensation is 831,717 with pending over 125 days is 564,865 (MMWR, 2012). As of April 2017, 380,330 disability

claims are still pending with 100,402 claims past the 125-day requirement, and 292,035 applications are still in the appeal process for approvals (VBA, 2017). These outstanding claims are impacting the veterans' quality of life by creating financial hardship for applications not being reviewed promptly (Carney & Kaper, 2014; Andrews, 2014; MMWR, 2018; Sisk, 2017). Many factors are contributing to this problem that went back to 1993 based on the Office of Inspector General (OIG) audit and evaluation investigation in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to inquiries from the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) in 1978 to 2004 (Bascetta, 1978). One of the contributing factors is the poor leadership, management skills, and staffing issues the Department of Veterans Affairs. The Department of Veterans Affairs' Compensation Disability Branch has inexperienced case reviewers, has significant staff turnover, uses the manual filing of claims, and has difficulty distinguishing if a case is final or incomplete based on OIG's reports from Finn, Halladay, Sullivan, and Reinkemeyer. Before the eBenefits network, both VA and Regional offices had a weak administrative tracking system for requests and documents to be forwarded to another facility. The Office of Inspector General investigations and Veteran Service Officers from veterans' nonprofit organizations had proven the backlog still exists even with the eBenefits network (Counsel, 2015; Sisk, 2017).

Literature Search Strategy

The literature for this study is from various public domains and multiple databases that Walden University is authorized to use. The articles, scholar papers, and hearing reports will be reviewed from 2010 to present from ProQuest Central under Walden

Library; Navy Times articles from EBSCO Host; Department of Veterans Affairs Website that includes Office of Inspector General Investigation Reports; news website; Congressional Hearings from Veteran Affairs Committees (House and Senate); and other scholar articles from Walden Library that is open to all dissertations. The researcher will utilize data analysis from various sources from VBA's Monday Morning Workload Reports and the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs. Each document has shown an issue with the delay in the processing of service-connectivity disability claims for our American veterans.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to discover the effects on the veterans' quality of life when waiting for their disability compensation claims and appeal cases to be finalized. Exploring these effects will help the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and veterans' organizations to find a better way to reach all veterans, instead of concentrating on the website to get the word out to veterans. Currently, the VBA relies on the veteran's organizations and fellow veterans to update veterans that do not have the internet on recent changes to their benefits. There are so many contributing factors to this situation from leadership, management, and caring for service members that protect our country from harm's way. One of the contributing factors to the 125-day backlog of claims is the service members that are retiring from military service with late submissions after they were out of service for five or more years later, and finally, realize they need extra income to take care of their injuries when they retire at 62 and Medicare takes over. The second contributing factor is that the Generation X service members are retiring at a 20-year mark, getting out due to medical injuries from war or peacetime, or completed

their time of service. And the third contributing factor is the lack of Veteran Service Officers for each state and supporting veteran organizations that help with disability claims and other benefits.

Veterans' Military Pension Literature Review

Most of Americans do not know the Department of Veterans Affairs had adopted President Lincoln's quote from his March 4, 1865, second inaugural address to be VA's motto is "To care for him who shall have borne the battle" since 1959.

The first pension law was in 1776 by the Continental Congress for the military soldiers (veterans) that were injury only. It was not until 1789, the Continental (Philadelphia) Congress passed its first federal pension legislation that extended to all military soldiers (veterans), dependents, and survivors (Anonymous, 2015). Since 1789, the military service members (veterans) that fought for the United States knew the government would find ways to help with their quality of life. Congress needed a government agency to manage all the military pensions from earlier wars before and after the Revolutionary War. This federal government agency was called the Bureau of Pensions under the Secretary of War in 1808.

In was in 1849, when the Bureau of Pension merged with the Department of Interior before they were overwhelmed with veteran's applicants after the Civil War, they had to hire more staff and doctors to review medical conditions (Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d). During the examinations to prove the symptoms of veterans' claims, the town doctors sign off and forward the complaints to the Bureau of Pension. The Union veterans were able to get the doctors to falsify disabilities that did not happen during war.

The Confederate soldiers (veterans) were not allowed to receive federal benefits until 1958 when Congress pardoned the soldiers (Skocpol, 1992). Most of the Confederate veterans had passed away when Congress exonerated their applications for a federal pension; their survivor family members received their retirement. Congress passed another act in 1862 called the Homestead Act to allow a veteran to purchase land at a discounted rate. The second act was the General Pension Act that upgraded benefits based on rank, disability, and extended dependent widows or orphans of a veteran. It was around 1873 when Congress changed the pension status by removing the service levels to allow all veterans to receive the same pension based on the Consolidation Act. Since Congress removed the ranks from disability pensions, it will enable all service members to receive equal pay for their service disabilities. The only difference is the rate percentage they received from their service-connectivity claim. Our volunteer service members that fought for Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps had protected our country through more wars overseas from 1911 through the present, while our Coast Guard (residential land) protected our coastlines from terrorist and illegal operations with American borders. Each conflict after the Civil War, Congress has improved veteran's benefits by reinventing Acts with new names to them.

It was not until September 2, 1958; Congress enacted the United States Code Title 38 (U.S.C.) – Veterans Benefits that provides Veterans Benefits Administration the guide to determine the rate percentage for each injury claim. The U.S.C. Title 38 provides details of other benefits that service members and family dependents can receive during specific periods. U.S.C. Title 38 Chapter 11 breaks down the wars and definitions that

help veterans and appeal lawyers to defend their clients during the appeals process and boards.

Most veteran scholar papers that talked about policy, health issues, education, and any other discussion had not mentioned one significant event that hurt veterans that served in the Army and Air Force. That event was the fire at the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) on July 12, 1973, that destroyed 80 percent of Army veterans' records from November 1, 1912, to January 1, 1960, and 75 percent of Air Force between September 25, 1947, and January 1, 1964, from last name of Hubbard to end of the alphabet. The fire at NPRC cause Vietnam Era veterans' issues with their submission of disability service-connected claims because the veteran could not prove their injury or claim with agent orange without service and medical records.

Theoretical Foundation

At this time, my research will use both theoretical and conceptual frameworks based on the depth of the study. For a theoretical framework, the researcher plans to use the Assessment of the Institutional Analysis and Development Framework (IAD) (Sabatier & Weible, 2014). Using the IAD will allow the research to develop the logic, design, and performance of understanding with a variety of settings and different scales (Sabatier & Weible, 2014). By using IAD and IHMC CmapTools (2014), this will allow the researcher to set various parameters and scales with veterans from the late Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y eras. One fundamental theory that will support IAD is the veteran identity theory based on scholars in the last five years. Whitaker (2014) had used veteran identity theory with veteran students to determine literacies in

education and take on jobs that require excellent writing and reading skills. Whitaker's veteran identity theory can be used with the Baby Boomer era on that lack of computer skills to use when a veteran needs to submit their claim through eBenefits portal and knowledge of the service-connectivity claim process. An organizational and professional identity that supports IHMC CmapTools will show the issues that the Department of Veterans Affairs leadership and management skills are lacking that supports the theoretical framework of this study (IHMC, 2014, and Shafritz, J. et al., 2016). On November 3, 2005, the Director Bascetta, of Education, Workforce and Income Security released the GAO review on "Improved Transparency Needed to Facilitate Oversight of VBA's Compensation and Pension Staffing Levels" to Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, Committee on Veterans' Affairs, House of Representatives (Bascetta, 2005). This report will show the organizational and professional identity theory based on VBA not expecting the influx of incoming claims and workload during the Iraq and Afghanistan War with service members retiring and being discharged after completing their term of service. What was interesting in this report the VBA full-time employees in Washington, DC, was 6,770 in 1998 that manage the Gulf-War veterans and other service members that retired and discharge (Bascetta, 2005). From 2001 to 2003, full-time employees increased up to 9,352 to help the future full-time employees that plan to retire in figure 1 (Bascetta, 2005, page 4). Bascetta (2005) mentioned that one key problem with VBA in fiscal 2004 and 2005, the 57 Regional Offices were losing its Rating Veteran Service Representatives (RVSR),

supervisors, and Veterans Service Representatives that developed the start of backlog of disability claims.

The researcher will look at the organizational and professional identity theories, based on the ethical challenges that affect the leadership within the ranks from senior officials to case managers and Veteran Service Officers from supported Regional VA counties and veterans helped an organization. Fogila et al. (2009) made a qualitative approach to ethical challenges for veterans and administration healthcare facilities. Fogila et al.'s. (2009) the study can be a guide for the Department of Veterans Affairs on organizational theory when you look at the multi-model design in table 1. Summary of Data Collection and Analysis Method (pg. 29); Fogila et al. used human subjects from two VA medical centers. The results of the study had shown that healthcare facilities had ethical challenges.

All three theories will support the IAD framework because the Department of Veterans Affairs leadership and workforce issues had been shown through Office of Inspector General investigations reviews for the past six years with United States Government Accounting Office reviews that were done with all supported Veterans Affairs Offices. The veteran's identity will be veterans from Pennsylvania and support numbers from data collections on public domains.

Additionally, the study will look at using the social construction framework (SCF) under "Democratic Policy Design" with "policy feedback theory" (Sabatier & Weible, 2014, pp. 131-132; Shafritz, J. et al., 2016). Policy feedback theory will utilize the methods from IAD of "organizational and professional identity" with "veteran identity" to

support theoretical framework for this study (Shafritz, J. et al., 2016, p. 126, IHMC, 2014). Brinkley (2014) concentrated her design theory on the Congress changes on veterans' disability compensation and benefit Acts with the social construction framework to help the military veterans and family.

The social construction will examine the "historical, contemporary, and cross-state or cross-national" to support policy changes (Sabatier & Weible, 2014, p. 132). IAD and SCF will allow the Veterans and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to see there is still a problem with the processing of veteran's disability compensation claims, and policies need to be updated and enforced across all departments. Subcommittee asked the United States General Accountability Office (GAO) on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs in 2004 to provide a report to support VBA's fiscal year 2005 staffing request with claims processing (Bascetta, 2005). GAO report has shown VBA lack of organizational identity based on increasing claims workload with less full-time claim processors.

Conceptual Framework

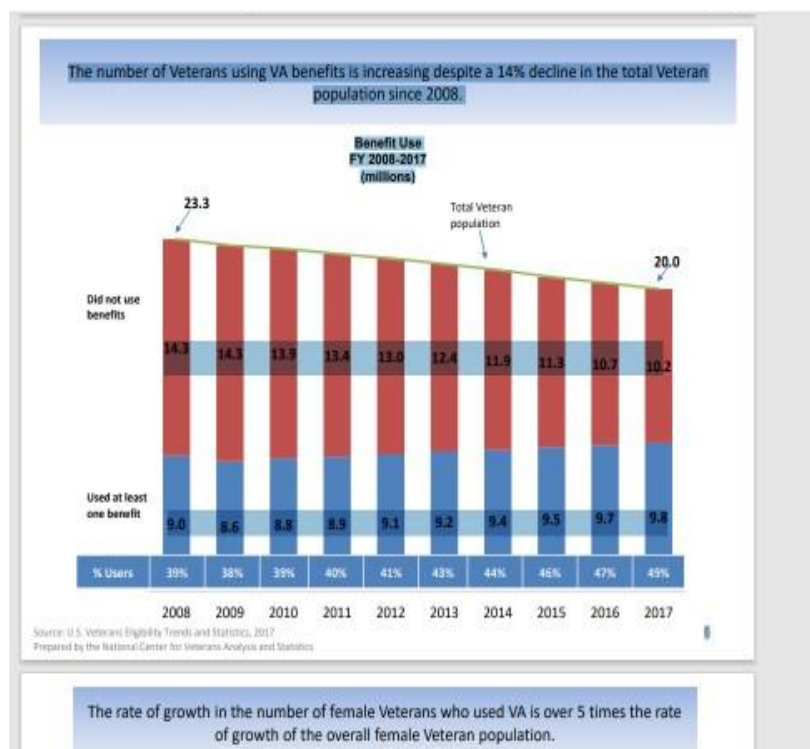
The conceptual framework would be best to use to determine how the processing of compensation disability claims, allocation of the period for appeals, and lack of advertisements for veterans. The research will look at the operational procedures to describe the activities the investigator must specify what to do and what to observe to render a social phenomenon (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015). To keep an eye on the conceptual framework, it would work best to revert to figure 2.1 "Transition from the conceptual to the observational level" when doing the write up on page 28 (Frankfort-

Nachmias et al., 2015). A researcher needs to look at the theory as one of the essential functions in the development and refinement to set goals of science (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015).

The researcher needs to look at four types of theory to use with the conceptual framework of which method would be best: Ad-Hoc classificatory systems, taxonomies, theoretical frameworks, or technical systems. At this time, the theory for this investigation will be both taxonomies and conceptual frameworks, since the study is more on political science on how decision-makers might react to society and environment influences inputs. The researcher felt the Office of Inspector General investigation reports and the United States Government Accounting Office reviews on the Department of Veterans Affairs would provide detailed information and a conceptual support framework with a social construction framework from the theoretical framework. As the researcher plans to utilize the Monday Morning Workload Reports from the public website of the Department of Veterans Affairs and compare them to Pennsylvania VARO's numbers, GAO reviews from the last few years, and OIG reports over the previous six years. The National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (NCVAS) completed an interesting study on Comparison of VA Users and Non-Users FY 2016 that showed 9,734,303 used the VA Benefits, and 10,657,889 did not use VA Benefits (NCVAS, 2016). This survey will help with the quality-of-life issues with veterans that are waiting for their service-connectivity disability claim to be processed with an approved rate percentage. These reports are available from public domains.

Figure 4

*The number of Veterans benefits is increasing despite a 14% decline in the total Veterans population since 2008. Benefit Uses from FY 2008 to FY 2017 (millions)**



Note. The Benefit Use of FY 2008 TO 2017 (millions) came from document of U.S. Veterans Eligibility Trends and Statistics, 2017 that was prepared by National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics

Military Pension Process in 20th Century Review

When the United States got to 20th Century, the Bureau of Pensions and the Department of Interior was still trying to get on top of all the Union veteran's applications. The Bureau of Pensions and Veteran Central Office was overwhelmed with

requests from Indian Wars, Civil War, Spanish-American War, and Mexican Border Period that caused an increase to employees in two years from 16,966 to 22,008 (Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.; Torreon, 2017). In 1917, the United States went to war again overseas in Europe called World War I. In the middle of World War I, about 500,000 Civil War veterans and pensioners started to decline due to death from sickness from 1900 to 1920. During the Great Depression era, the Department of Interior began to decrease the Bureau of Pensions staff by 50 percent. For 98 years, the Bureau of Pensions served the military veterans until 1930 when President Herbert Hoover decided to move the Bureau of Pensions out of the Department of Interior to merge with Veterans Bureau and Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers as one organization called Veterans Administration (Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.). Based on Knowlton Durham's book from 1932, he talked about how the Veterans Administration was having issues with policies that legislature approved from external events for veterans before World War II. One area, for example, was the Confederate soldiers could not receive a military pension after fighting for their southern states during the Civil War until 1958. Most of the Confederate soldier's family members received their survivor benefits if the soldier had passed away before 1958. An interesting point about Knowlton Durham's statements from his book is the Department of Veterans Affairs and our Presidential Administration with legislature still have these issues today. What Knowlton Durham talk about was the issues with Benefit Improvement Acts that Congress representatives and Presidential Administration put in place to help military veterans. The researcher noticed in the literature review that the VA had constant changes from the Benefits Improvement Acts

that Congress and Presidential administration put in place with a lack of training on improvements and senior leadership that cause confusion and disorganized within the Veteran Benefits Administration Department.

Before General Bradley left in 1947, he reported that the VA had established 13 branch offices and 14 regional offices and set up 721 contact offices (Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.). Most of the scholar writing that was studied did not mention the breakdown of General Bradley's branch offices, regional offices, and supported contact offices for the veterans. From the time General Bradley was setting up outside branches to support VA Benefits, there has been a tremendous change within the veteran's organization throughout the years to present.

Fifty-eight years later, President Reagan signed legislation in 1988 to change the senior level position to Cabinet-level status as a Presidential appointment position with Senate confirmation (Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.). The following year in 1989, the President's order change Veterans Administration to the Department of Veterans Affairs with reorganizations within the agency. The Department of Veterans Affairs kept the 13 Regional Offices from Veterans Administration to keep up with all service-connectivity disability claims, and other benefit claims.

The following year, in August 1990, President Bush Sr sent the United States National Guard, Army Reserve Units, and active service members from all military services over to the Persian Gulf to fight a war. The Veteran Service Organizations knew what to expect when the service members returned from war with injuries and death. The Persian Gulf War veterans submit service-connectivity disability claims that cause the

backlog to start, and no one knew about it until the military service members began to return from Iraq and Afghanistan War between 2003 to 2017.

Agent Orange Claims in Vietnam and Operation Desert Storm

It is amazing how many veterans from the Vietnam War era today do not know where to go to get help with benefits. Is it because everyone thinks you must pay someone to get help? When reading some nonprofit blog articles or websites about failed disability claim processes, the answer is a resounding, yes. According to Debbie Gregory, Military Connection Blog (2014), when court ruling changed the Agent Orange symptoms in 2010, Secretary Shinseki requested all the Vietnam era claims related to Agent Orange symptoms be re-adjudicated that put over 150,000 claims back into a large backlog of service-connected disability claims. That does not include the backlog numbers of Vietnam era and Operation Desert Storm era veterans that have appeal cases waiting for the final decision on Agent Orange conditions that include ischemic heart disease, Parkinson's disease, and certain types of leukemia and family claims for claimant after death (Glantz, 2012; Gregory, 2014; Zarembo, 2015).

Senior Leadership at the Department of Veterans Affairs

Most people did not realize that the Veterans Administration is the largest independent agency that was managed by a senior military official. In 1988, President Reagan wanted the top military position to be a Cabinet-level position in 1989 (DVA, n.d.). At that time in 1988, President Reagan changed the named from Veterans Administration to Department of Veterans Affairs that added three additional President appointees for Veterans Health Administration, the Veterans Benefits Administration,

and the National Cemetery System (DVA, n.d.). Of the 11 Secretary of Veterans Affairs, only four of them had business backgrounds, while the other seven had a military history are in bold, see Table 1 of the list of the Presidential appointed Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Table 2

The List of Secretary of Veterans Affairs

<u>Name</u>	<u>Dates</u>
Ed Derwinski	March 15, 1989 – September 26, 1992
Jesse Brown	January 22, 1993 – July 3, 1997
Togo D. West Jr.	January 2, 1998 – July 25, 2000
Anthony Principi	January 23, 2001 – January 26, 2005
Jim Nicholson	January 26, 2005 – October 1, 2007
Retired Lt. Gen. James Peake	December 20, 2007 – January 20, 2009
Retired Gen. Eric Shinseki	January 20, 2009 – May 30, 2014
Robert A. McDonald	July 30, 2014 – January 20, 2017
David Shulkin	February 14, 2017 – March 28, 2018
Robert Wilkie	July 30, 2018 – January 20, 2021
Denis McDonough	February 2021 - Present

Note. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs list came from the History of Veterans Affairs under the Department of Veterans Affairs website VA.Gov

With all that military leadership background, then why were there so many issues with leadership and management with other employees. The ball bounces from the top to the bottom of the food chain. One of the problems the researcher discovered was a lack of respect and communication skills with Under Secretary of Benefits (VBA) knowledge on benefits.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki did the most turnaround during his tenure from January 20, 2009, to May 30, 2014. Secretary Shinseki joined his efforts

with Under Secretary of Benefits Allison Hickey to introduce the e-Benefits portal to go paperless; set up locations for scanning all closed claims that were in VARO's; centralize locations for submitting support documentation and change the policies on backlogs. Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla., chairperson of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, asked for Allison Hickey's resignation due to her performance in March 2013 (Shane, 2015 in press). President Obama appointed Secretary McDonald to take over in July 2015 from his processor Eric Shinseki. Three months later after Secretary McDonald took over as Secretary of Veterans Affairs, he accepted Allison Hickey's resignation in October 2015. Allison Hickey was under pressure with Congress, and the American Legion petition for dismissal based on the VA OIG investigation report that shown negligent oversight of the program based on abuse with VA's employee relocation bonuses (Shane, 2015 in press). Even though it was short term, Secretary Shulkin made some significant changes to the www.VA.gov website by adding a new one for veterans and family members instead of updating the old one. The new site took over in November 2018. The Department of Veterans Affairs leadership is now under Robert Wilkie that has military background leadership with Paul Lawrence as his Under Secretary for Benefits that Senate approved on June 12, 2018 (Stratford, 2018). Both Secretary Wilkie and Under Secretary Lawrence inherited a lot of issues with backlog claims, GI Bill Forever, and healthcare. Even the VA OIG Audit and Evaluations are still coming in with a lack of training on disability claim reviews, management with lack of leadership skills, and other issues at VARO Centers.

Legislation Acts for Disability Claims Under Veterans Benefits

When the researcher went through the VA History Brief, the historical benefit Acts were processed through quickly compared to our Congress in the last two decades, see table below that list all the supported disability benefit acts to 2019.

Table 3

Supported Disability Benefit Acts from 1776 to 2019.

Supported Disability Benefit Acts	Acts Signed by Presidents	Dates	Brief Descriptions
The nation's first pension law	Continental Congress	1/1/1776	The nation's first pension law was granted half pay for life in cases of loss of limb or serious disability. Payments were responsibility of each state to pay veteran.
Service Pension Law of 1818	James Monroe	1/1/1818	Every person who served in the War for Independence and need of assistance would receive a fixed pension for life. The rate was \$20 a month for officers and \$8 a month for enlisted men.
The Homestead Act of 1862	Abraham Lincoln	1/1/1862	Provided disability payments based on rank and degree of disability, and liberalized benefits for widows, children, and dependent relatives. This act covered military service in time of peace as well the Civil War. The act provided burial sites for many Union veterans were assigned special priority for western land at \$1.25 an acre.
The General Pension Act of 1862	Abraham Lincoln	1/1/1862	Provided disability payments based on rank and degree of disability, and liberalized benefits for widows, children, and dependent relatives. This act covered military service in time of peace as well the Civil War. The act provided burial sites for many Union dead of the

National Asylum for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers.	Abraham Lincoln	1/1/1865	Civil War at the National Cemetery System.
The Consolidation Act of 1873	Ulysses S. Grant	2/15/1873	Towards the end of the Civil War, Congress passed the first significant veterans' preference legislation. This act provided that: Paying the veteran based on disability instead of rank.
The Dependent Pension Act of 1890	Benjamin Harrison	6/27/1890	The Dependent Pension Act was to broaden the eligibility, providing pensions to veteran's incapable of manual labor. This act doubled the pension roll to 996,000 from 489,000. The act provided pensions for all veterans who had served at least ninety days in the Union military or naval forces, were honorably discharged from service and were unable to perform manual labor, regardless of their financial situation or when the disability was suffered. The bill was a source of contentious debate and only passed after Grover Cleveland had vetoed a previous version in 1887.
No new pension laws from Spanish-American War in 1898 or the Philippine Insurrection in 1899 to 1901			
The Sherwood Act of 1912	Woodrow Wilson	5/11/1912	Awarded pensions to all veterans included Mexican War and Union veterans of the Civil War receive pensions automatically at age 62. That includes the Revolutionary War veterans that were limited in 19th century.

The War Risk Insurance Act of 1914 and Amendment in 1917	Woodrow Wilson	9/2/1914	The first War Risk Insurance Act was to protect all merchant ships that delivers supplies to allies and service members across the ocean during World War I. In 1917, Congress amended the War Risk Insurance Act to give life insurance coverage to sailors in the United States Merchant Marine o 12 June 1917 and 6 October 1917 with another amendment for death or total permanent disability.
The Soldier Rehabilitation Act of 1918	Woodrow Wilson	Unknown	The Soldier Rehabilitation Act was established for injured veterans that no longer can do their old job due to injuries. The veterans will get to learn new job skills to match their abilities. Later changed to Vocational Rehabilitation Act.
World War Adjustment Compensation Act	Calvin Coolidge	5/19/1924	Congress passed and President signed the World War Adjustment Compensation Act on 19 May 1924 to help veterans between 5 April 1917, and 1 July 1919 with \$1.00 awarded each day that served in the United States and \$1.25 for those veterans that served abroad. No veteran that served after 11 November 1918 were excluded from Adjusted Service Certificate.
Veterans Administration Act	Herbert Hoover	7/3/1930	On 3 July 1930, Herbert Hoover signed Veterans Administration Act by a merged of U.S. Bureau of Pensions, the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, and the U.S. Veterans Bureau to merge functions into one agency named Veterans Administration. Brig. Gen. Frank T. Hines continued his military service as the first administrator for Veterans Administration.

The Board of Veterans' Appeals	Franklin D. Roosevelt	7/1/1933	The Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA) was created by Executive Order 6230 by President Roosevelt on 28 July 1933. The BVA was established to review a veterans' appeal that does not agree with their disability and benefits decision from the Veterans Administration. BVA operates under Chapter 71 of Title 38, United States Code that consists of Chairman that is appointed by Secretary of Veterans Affairs and approved by the President of the United States. The board consists of a Chairman, Vice Chairman, Senior Deputy Vice Chairman, 56 Veterans Law Judges (VLJs), 8 Senior Counsel, and 250 staff counsels.
The Selective Training and Service Act of 1940	Franklin D. Roosevelt	9/16/1940	Required that men between the ages of 21 and 35 register with local draft boards.
The Disabled Veterans' Rehabilitation Act of 1943	Franklin D. Roosevelt	5/1/1943 est.	The Disabled Veterans Rehabilitation Act was amended from 1918 Act to help disabled World War II veterans that served after 6 December 1941. This act will provide over 600,000 veterans with job training to return to civilian life.
The Servicemen's Readjustment Act	Franklin D. Roosevelt	6/22/1944	The Serviceman's Readjustment Act was to help WWII veterans to adjust after the war. The law created GI Bill to stipend payments for tuition and expenses while service members and veterans to attend college or trade school. Additionally, the Act help to finance new hospitals, low-interest mortgages called VA Home Loans, and unemployment compensation.

Veterans' Preference Act of 1944	Franklin D. Roosevelt	6/27/1944	It required the federal government to favor returning war veterans when hiring new employees to recognize their service, sacrifice, and skills.
The Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act of 1952	Harry S. Truman	7/16/1952	Called the Korean GI Bill by provided unemployment insurance, job placement, etc. provided education and training benefits, as well as home, farm, and business loans.
Public Law 85-810,	Harry S. Truman	5/11/1958	Confederate soldiers started to receive their veterans' benefits when Congress pardoned all service member and extended benefits to the single remaining survivor.
The Civil Service Reform Act of 1978	Jimmy Carter	10/13/1978 Est	Persons honorably discharged from the military or naval service by reason of disability resulting from wounds or sickness incurred in the line of duty shall be preferred for appointments to civil offices, provided they are found to possess the business capacity necessary for the proper discharge of the duties of such offices.
Veterans' and Survivors' Pension Improvement Act	Jimmy Carter	11/4/1978	Amend title 38, United States Code, to provide improvements in the pension program for certain veterans of a period of war with non-service-connected disabilities, for certain surviving spouses of veterans of a period of war, and for certain surviving children of veterans of a period of war, to increase the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving parents of certain veterans, to provide for automatic annual cost-of-living adjustments in the rates of pension and in the rates of parents' dependency and indemnity compensation, to

Emergency Veterans' Job Training Act of 1983	Walter Mondale	8/15/1983	prevent reductions in and terminations of pension and terminations of parents' dependency and indemnity compensation solely attributable to cost-of-living increases in social security benefits, and for other purposes. An act to establish an emergency program of job training assistance for unemployed Korean conflict and Vietnam-era veterans, and for other purposes.
Veterans' Compensation and Program Improvements Amendments of 1984	Ronald Reagan	3/2/1984	This Act was the start of improving the Disability Compensation and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation Program with Rate Increases for (1) veterans' disability compensation; (2) additional compensation for dependents; (3) the clothing allowance for certain disabled veterans; (4) dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving spouses according to a specified table; (5) dependency and indemnity compensation for children; and (6) supplemental dependency and indemnity compensation for children that took effect on December 1, 1984. In Part B, there was some decreases in various compensation program. And Title II, child and adopted children for veterans' benefit purposes. Plus, there was some additional changes with guaranteed loans for home improvements, educational assistance, State veterans' cemeteries, and other areas. One key improvement is the increase of members from 50 to 65 to Board of Veterans' Appeals to help the

Department of Veterans Affairs Act	Ronald Reagan	10/25/1988	backlog of World War II, Korea War, and Vietnam War veterans' claims. Changed the former Veterans Administration, an independent government agency established in 1930, primarily at that time to see to needs of World War I, into a Cabinet-level Department of Veterans Affairs.
The Agent Orange Act of 1991	George H.W. Bush	2/6/1991	This Act was designed to help American service members that fought over at Republic of Vietnam were affected by Agent Orange and another other biological chemicals and herbicide exposure.
Persian Gulf Conflict Supplemental Authorization and Personnel Benefit Act	George H. W. Bush	4/6/1991	Per Sec. 335 Both the Secretary of Defense and Secretary of Veterans Affairs were ordered to provide reports on services and treatments on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder to Veterans Affairs Committee Hearing. The Persian Gulf Conflict Supplemental Authorization was important for military operations; the Personnel Benefit Act had importance for Reserves that left their job and build a student loan prior to going to war in Sec 372, see paragraph 3 with waiver requirements. In Sec 337 gave military service members, reserves service members, and veterans that used their Montgomery GI Bill for educational and training received an increase in payments. Under Part F of the Act is where the Farmer and Rancher Program was to help pay back or assist with loans of service members that left during chop season.

The Veterans Health Care Act of 1992	George H. W. Bush	11/4/1992	The details of this Act is to amend Title 38, United States Code, to improve health care services for women veterans, to expand authority for health care sharing agreements between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense to revise certain pay authorities that apply to Department of Veterans Affairs nurses, to improve preventive health services for veterans, to establish discounts on pharmaceuticals purchased by the Department of Veterans Affairs, to provide for a Persian Gulf War Veterans Health Registry, and to make other improvements in the delivery and administration of health care by the Department of Veterans Affairs with a lot of changes to health services for women and veterans.
the Defense Appropriations act of 1997	Bill Clinton	9/30/1996	The last major legislation affecting veterans' preference occurred in the form of the Defense Appropriations act of 1997. Under this legislation, preference was accorded to anyone who served on active duty during the Gulf War period (August 2, 1990, through January 2, 1992). This law also granted preference to certain service members who earned campaign medals for service in Bosnia and Herzegovina in support of Operation Joint Endeavor (November 20, 1995, through December 20, 1996) or Operation Joint Guard (December 20, 1996, through a date designated by the Secretary of Defense).

Veterans Claims Assistance Act of 2000	Bill Clinton	11/9/2000	Public Law 106-475. Chapter 51 of title 38, inserting a section 5101 with the following statement: The term "claimant" means any individual applying for, or submitting a claim for, any benefit under the laws administered by the Secretary. The sections of all 5100 had been amended that the claimants get assistance with all claims including appeal cases.
Veterans' Claims Processing Innovation Act	George W. Bush	<i>Never signed</i>	This bill was announced in Congress and later was closed out without any action. This act could have resolved some of the problem with backlog of claims in early 2000 before going over to fight for a Global War on Terrorism.
Veterans Benefits Act of 2003	George W. Bush	12/16/2003	To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve benefits under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes. This update to Veterans Benefits added the former prisoners of war and the Filipino veterans. Plus, the benefits for children with spina bifida of veterans that service in Korea war. This update also provided changes to various sections of Title Code 38.
Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 2008	George W. Bush	10/10/2008	To improve and enhance compensation and pension, housing, labor and education, and insurance benefits for veterans, and for other purposes.
Veterans' Benefits Act of 2010	Barrack Obama	10/13/2010	To amend title 38, United States Code, and the Service members Civil Relief Act to make certain improvements in the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes

Veterans National Remembrance Act	Barrack Obama	<i>Never signed</i>	The first introduction for Veterans National Remembrance Act on May 21, 2014, as H.R. 4712 (113th) and died that same month. It was re-introduced again on June 9, 2015, as H.R. 2706 that did not go anywhere for two years that died again on January 3, 2017. Two different House Representatives try to amend the U.S.C. Title 38 to provide priority for the establishment of new national cemeteries by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes. Both House and Senate block this one too.
VA Appeals Backlog Relief Act	Barrack Obama	<i>Never signed</i>	H.R. 5349 (113th) and H.R. 1302 (114th) never got through and block by House Committee.
Veterans Fiduciary Reform Act of 2015	Barrack Obama	6/2/2015	States that, when in the opinion of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) a temporary fiduciary is needed to protect the benefits of a VA beneficiary while a determination of incompetency is being made or appealed or a fiduciary is appealing a determination of misuse, the VA may appoint one or more temporary fiduciaries for up to 120 days.
Combat-Injured Veterans Tax Fairness Act of 2016 (Public Law 114-292)	Barrack Obama	12/16/2016	More than 130,000 veterans are receiving letters on how to apply for refunds of taxes they paid on disability severance pay dating back to 1991 — a minimum of \$1,750 per veteran. Applies to veterans who received this pay dating back to Jan. 17, 1991, with taxes withheld. The eligible veterans will have a year after the date of their letter from the Defense Department to file a claim for the refund, or three years after

filing their tax return that reported the disability severance pay, whichever is later. Survivors of those who paid the taxes are also eligible for the refund, which would be paid to the estate of the veteran.

<p>Jeff Miller & Richard Blumenthal Veterans Healthcare & Benefits Improvement Act of 2016</p>	<p>Barrack Obama</p>	<p>12/16/2016</p>	<p>To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the furnishing of health care to veterans by the Department of Veterans Affairs, to improve the processing by the Department of claims for disability compensation, and for other purposes. A bill must be passed by both the House and Senate in identical form and then be signed by the President to become law. This bill was introduced in the 114th Congress, which met from January 6, 2015, to January 3, 2017.</p>
<p>Veterans Appeals Improvement Modernization Act of 2017</p>	<p>Donald Trump</p>	<p>2/17/2017</p>	<p>(The) VA's current appeals process is broken. Between fiscal year 2015 and fiscal year 2017, the number of pending appeals increased from 380,000 to 470,000 – more than a 20 percent increase. Between fiscal years 2013 and 2016, Congress appropriated \$200 million more than the president's request to address the appeals backlog. Despite the infusion of resources, VA estimates that it will take at least five years just to resolve the appeals currently pending.</p>
<p>Veterans Benefits and Transition Act of 2018</p>	<p>Donald Trump</p>	<p>12/31/2018</p>	<p>This act did not help many veterans with their quality-of-life problems. It was supported to Title 38 to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide certain</p>

burial benefits for spouses and children of veterans who are buried in tribal cemeteries, and for other purposes. Additionally, education has some amends on courses pending payment, housing stipend information under post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program, and authority to use educational assistance to pursue independent study programs at certain educational institutions that are not institutions of higher learning. Civil Relief for dependent survivors or spouses of death of service member while serving or veteran for termination leases, tax purposes, voting, and termination of multichannel video programming and internet access service contracts. And adding an old Act by doing a study on community-based transition assistance programs for members of the Armed Forces after separation, retirement, or discharge which was established back in 1991.

VA Mission Act of
2018

Donald
Trump

6/6/2018

The original named is Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act of 2018 (Caring for Our Veterans Act of 2018) is to give medical care outside the network of the VA Medical Centers. The Mission Act benefits the health of veterans. The program establishes a new Veterans Community Care Program (VCCP) to provide health care to veterans by: (1) ensuring timely scheduling of medical appointments, (2) ensuring the continuity of care and services, (3) coordinating among regional

John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019	Donald Trump	8/13/2018	<p>networks, and (4) ensuring that eligible veterans do not experience a lapse in care or an unusual or excessive burden in accessing care due to errors or delays by the VA or its contractors.</p> <p>The VA shall provide an eligible veteran with health care through the VCCP if: (1) the VA does not offer the care or services the veteran requires, (2) the VA does not operate a full-service VA medical facility in the veteran's state, or (3) the veteran was eligible for care under Veterans Choice Program criteria.</p> <p>The John McCain National Defense Authorization Act for FY2019 only had support for Armed Forces Retirement Home under Subtitle C and support for active, retire, reserve, and veterans that has benefits, Authorization of appropriations for Armed Forces. The improvements to veterans that live at Armed Forces Retirement Home (sec. 1421) includes expansion of residence eligibility (sec. 1422); oversight of health care to residents (sec. 1423); modification of authority on acceptance of rights (sec. 1424); financial relief and limitation for veterans that were impacted by increased fees (sec. 1425 and sec. 1426).</p>
Forever GI Bill Housing Payment Fulfillment Act of 2018	Donald Trump	1/3/2019	All this Act was to fix the housing payment that was not ready in the database. The act was to fix it only.

Haven Act	Donald Trump	8/23/2019	Prevents debt collectors from seizing veterans' disability compensation if they declare bankruptcy. The Honoring American Veterans in Extreme Need, or HAVEN, Act extends the same protection for veteran's disability payments that is afforded Social Security disability payments: By law, debtors are now not allowed to count these benefits as disposable income subject to seizure during a bankruptcy.
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Note. Each Act's came from variety locations from Department of Veterans' Affairs website under Public Affairs "VAntage," History of Veterans' Affairs, and Congress.com website when the President signs them.

The Public Law 106-475 Veterans Claim Assistance Act of 2000 was approved by both House (HR 4864) and Senate (S.1810) on October 17, 2000 and signed by President Bush on November 9, 2000 (Public Law 106-475, 2000). On July 16, 2007, the House Representatives introduced the H.R. 3047 Veterans' Claims Processing Innovation Act of 2007 to establish a better work center system for processing veterans' disability compensation claims. H.R. 3047 never got through the 110th Congress and again in 2009 (Brinkley, 2014). Then, the Senate tried with S. 3517 Improve Processing of Claims that also died in Congress to amend the United States Code Title 38 (Brinkley, 2014). President Bush's Veterans' Benefits Act of 2008 passed before he left office, but President Obama signed it for him when he came into office. It was 2 years later; President Obama signed another H.R. 3219 Act called Veterans' Benefits Act of 2010 to improve and modernize the benefits and programs for military veterans and family

members (Guina, 2015). The Veterans' Benefits Act of 2010 will enhance the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (Guina, 2015). What our military veterans did not know was individual Congress members tried to improve the benefits, but their fellow comrades fail them from 2007 to 2016. The one Act that American Legion did not support was the H.R. 2706: Veterans National Remembrance Act that amended title 38, United States Code, Section 2403, part A per National Commander Michael Helm "concerning the presence or absence of a cemetery on a state-by-state basis instead the overall need of the general veteran's population" (American Legion, 2015). The one that was interesting to the researcher was H.R. 1302: VA Appeals Backlog Relief Act that talked about inconsistency with VBA Monday Morning Workload Report (MMWR) of June 7, 2010, and June 8, 2015 (American Legion, 2015). The MMWR indicated there was 192,527 appealed claim pending adjudication on June 7, 2010; while on June 8, 2015, there were 305,020 appealed claims that increased by 58.4 percent in five years (American Legion, 2015). Based on the American Legion article in 2015, the H.R. 2605: Veterans Fiduciary Reform Act of 2015 will require VA to settle fiduciary claims within 120 days to allow veterans to receive retroactive payments (American Legion, 2015). The researcher found an intriguing Act called the combat-injured Veterans Tax Fairness Act that was enacted by President Obama in December 2016 (IRS, 2018). The Combat Injured Veterans Tax Fairness Act is for the veterans that received one big disability severance payment after January 17, 1991 (IRS, 2018). When a veteran receives their first payment of severance, the amount was taxable income instead of nontaxable. The Department of Defense was directed to mail letters to veterans that were affected by this

error to receive credit or refund for overpayment (IRS, 2018). President Obama was fighting with both House and Senate during his second term by getting specific bills through for military veterans. The Democrats and Republicans House and Senate Representatives tried extremely hard to get a VA Appeals Backlog Relief Act (H.R. 5349 (113TH) on 31 July 2014 it failed from the beginning. The VA Appeals Backlog Relief Act had introduced again on 4 March 2015 that lasted to January 3, 2017, which President Obama did not get to sign before he left the office. The House and Senate went back and forth in January 2017 to combine all bills that were introduced during President Obama's 2nd term to allow President Trump to sign his first veterans' bill called The Veterans Appeals Improvement Modernization Act of 2017. This bill would not take effect for two years because VBA needed to put together a process, improve the databases to support it, and get more appeal judges in place by February 13, 2019.

It took a full year for House and Senate to put together the next Veterans Benefits Improvement for President Trump to sign for veterans on 31 December 2018. This bill had to fix the education benefits that cause a lot of damage with the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017, or another named Forever GI Bill that only help military veterans that left the service on 1 February 2013 and the ones that are still in service. The Education Benefit database was not ready to process education checks and cause a lot of damage to Chapter 33 (Terebesi, 2019 in press).

Veteran Service Organizations That Help American Military Veterans

Based on the Office of Secretary VA pamphlet in 2017 had provided a four parts list that recognized chartered and non-chartered Veteran Service Organizations (VSO)

(Office of Secretary, 2017). The VBA would like veterans to use the VSOs that are recognized by the Department of VA Office of General Counsel to process any benefit claims for a veteran or family member of a veteran that is deceased. Until the researcher started the dissertation process, the researcher did not realize there were so many Veteran Service Organization representatives throughout the United States. In the directory of Veterans Service Organizations, they were broken down into four parts. In the first part, there are 35 Veterans Service Organizations that are approved by Congressionally and recognized by Department of Veterans Affairs to be representatives for veterans to process and prosecution of claims under laws of United States Code (U.S.C.) Title 38 section 5902 (formerly 3402) and subsection 14.628 (a) and (c) of 38 C.F.R (Office of Secretary, 2017). Under Part II, there are 11 VSOs recognized by Congress but not the Department of Veterans Affairs. Parts III and IV, VSOs are the only ones the Department of Veterans Affairs recognize to represent a veteran with their service-connectivity claims and other benefits. Part IV has increased with support from veteran organizations every year. And the last Part V, the Congressional and Department of Veterans Affairs, recognize all the Intergovernmental Affairs that are National Association of State Directors of Veteran Affairs and National Association of County Veteran Services Officers. Under Part V, there are 56 State Veterans Affairs that the VA recognized them to represent all veterans and family members. Within the state of Pennsylvania Department of Veterans Affairs, the state has 67 counties that have VSO's working to support Pennsylvania's veterans. With the 67 counties, Pennsylvania has two Regional Benefits Offices in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. In the Philadelphia Regional Office,

they have 12 other supported Veterans Service Organizations, and Pittsburgh has six Veterans Service Organization, including a site office of Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Branch. With this many VSOs in Pennsylvania, then why do we only have half of our veterans with service-connectivity claims submit? The researcher noticed in the research that the Pennsylvania Department of Veterans Affairs, Benefits Division (Regional Office in Philadelphia), was not tracking veteran's claims to the fullness until 2009 with their own VSO counties submission as electronic (PDMV, 2018). The difference with the claimant count is some of the VSO's submission was forwarded separately as hard copies to Pennsylvania's Regional Offices. Therefore, the numbers were off with the Department of Veterans Affairs and Regional Offices when Secretary on VA and VBA representatives with both House and Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs from 2009 to 2014. The Veteran Benefits Administration office went back to 2004 for accounting purposes to cover their tracks with House and Senate Committees.

Veterans Disability Claims

For centuries, the Veteran's Service-Connectivity Disability Compensation Claims were submitted as hard copy paperwork to Regional VA offices where each veteran lived. The disability claim is given to Case Managers to forward to Claim Case Reviewers that might work at the main Regional Office or other site locations that support the Regional Office and Veterans Benefits Administration. For years, the veteran had to trust the mail system with their paper copy from Veteran Service Officers that support veteran organizations, Regional Office, State Department of Veterans Affairs,

VA Medical Centers that do the medical evaluation, and Department of Veterans Affairs. For years, the Military Times (Army, Navy, and Air Force) had written about the backlog of veteran's disability claims. The best article was Tom Philpott, Military.com “VA E-Claim System Melts Backlog, But Costs Alarm Congress” had a picture of disability claim folders sitting on top of file cabinets, see figure 4 below (Philpott, 2016).

Figure 5

Picture of hard copy disability claims on top of filing cabinets at Field Offices (Regional Offices)



Note. The photograph came from Philpott's article with Military.com [VA E-Claim System Melts Backlog, But Costs Alarm Congress | Military.com](https://www.military.com/daily-news/2016/01/28/va-e-claim-system-melts-backlog-but-costs-alarm-congress.html)
<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2016/01/28/va-e-claim-system-melts-backlog-but-costs-alarm-congress.html>

The only people who read the articles were the military service members and veterans that ordered the paper to come through the mail or website. Even though the articles may not be scholarly, they reveal that the Department of Veterans Affairs did not want whistleblowers to open their pandora's box. The principal Military Times writer that everyone depends on to get to the truth is Leo Shane III, that has covered Congress, Veterans Affairs policies and issues, and the White House since 2004. It was not until 2011 that the eBenefits portal was officially used that the VBA allowed both electronically and hard copy submissions for ones that did not have a computer available. It was not until 2016; that Secretary McDonald authorized all Veterans Area Regional Offices to be allowed to pull a veteran disability claim from the portal to start on it immediately (VBA, 2018). Secretary McDonald did not stop there; he decided to use two Evidence Intake Centers for east and west VAROs. These two changes have shown improvements for DVA and VBA for veterans to submit their disability claims. Based on the researcher reviews of VA Office of Inspector Generals for Pennsylvania's both locations in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh Area Regional Offices, the improvements are minimum from the Secretary of Veterans Affairs improvements from 2016 to the present. The researcher will show tables from 2005 to give a visual reference of the submissions, backlog, errors from OIG reviews, and recommendations that leadership and management have not corrected the issues.

The researcher read comments from blogs from veterans that fought in the Vietnam War era filed claims in the 1960's era had not seen one letter. The disability claims from the Vietnam War were overwhelmed because of chemical agents Asians

used during the fighting in various Vietnam locations. Most of those claims were denied due to a lack of symptom evidence, especially if there was no documentation of chemicals used during the war from enemy lines. The VA Disability Compensation Branch was behind before the Operation Desert Shield/Storm, The Gulf War, which started August 2, 1990, to February 28, 1991. Clark (2015 in press) and other articles from websites had pictures of disability claims on top of file cabinets and full auditor drawers with open and closed claims. In the late 1990s, veterans had heard about in-house whistleblowers taking actions on overload and the backlog of disability claims that were not being processed or destroyed by the hands of VA employees (Shane, 2012 in press; Sullivan, 1997).

With all the literature the researcher found, one scholar article from Tanya Brinkley (2011) focused more on the quality-of-life issues the veterans and families have today. Brinkley (2011) wrote a case study on the United States Veterans' Disability Compensation Policy Subsystem. Brinkley used some of the United States Codes that were approved by Congress to help the process for veterans to receive their disability benefits. Brinkley's paper hit some high points on the quality of life of veterans and families with the loss of job and health benefits. Based on her study the researcher agrees if service member did not start on his or her service-connected paperwork before being separate from the service, they might be one of the numbers of unemployment due to disability issues from service (Brinkley, 2011).

The researcher develops a table for reviewers to see that Continental Congress started the first Congressional Acts to help veterans after each war and peacetime. Most

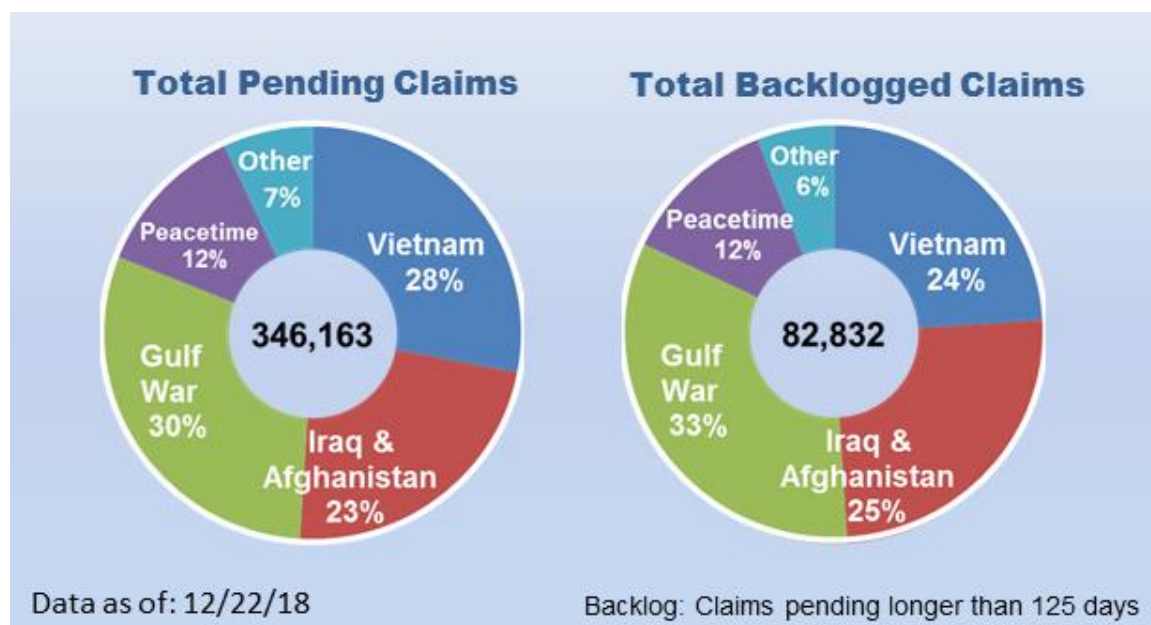
of the earlier Acts in the 1900s was to help military veterans with job status. It was around October 1988 when President Reagan signed into law to have the head of the Department of Veterans Affairs be a presidential appointee. The Department of Veterans Affairs were their own identity, and Congress thought they were on top of both service-connectivity disability claims and health care issues. With the Congressional Act Table 5, the researcher notices more House introduction bills had died within one or more days, especially during President Obama presidential era when service-connectivity disability claims needed help from 2004 to 2017.

Based on the NVACS diagrams from Monday Morning Workload Reports, hardcopy claims of veterans from the Vietnam era (29 percent pending/25 percent backlogged), and the Operation Desert Storm era (30 percent pending/32 percent backlogged)) are still waiting for their claims to be processed. What is astonishing is that the Veterans Benefits Administration still has 3.9 percent of Korean War claims, 2.3 percent of World War II claims, and 12 percent of other peacetime claims pending and backlogged (Figure 3). Based on Veterans Benefits Administration analysis diagrams from National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (NVACS) (see Figure 3), they are processing Iraq and Afghanistan claims (22 percent pending/25 percent backlogged) quicker because they were submitted electronically under the recent programs (Fully Developed Claims and Decision Ready Claims).

Figure 6

Breakdown from NCVAS statistics for claims by military era.

Characteristics of Claims



Claims by Era

Total Pending Claims

- Post-9/11 (Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts) claims make up 23% of the total inventory.
- Gulf War (1990s conflict) claims make up 30% of the total inventory.
- Peacetime (the end of Vietnam to the Gulf War) claims they make up 12% of the total inventory.
- Vietnam War claims make up 28% of the total inventory.
- Korean War claims make up 4.0% of the total inventory.
- World War II claims make up 2.3% of the total inventory.
- Other era claims make up 0.4% of the total inventory.

Total Backlogged Claims

- Post-9/11 (Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts) claims make up 25% of the backlog.
- Gulf War (1990s conflict) claims make up 33% of the backlog.
- Peacetime (the end of Vietnam to the Gulf War) claims they make up 12% of the backlog.
- Vietnam War claims make up 24% of the backlog.
- Korean War claims make up 4.3% of the backlog.
- World War II claims make up 2.1% of the backlog.
- Other era claims make up less than 0.2% of the backlog.

Note. Formula and breakdown are from the Veterans Benefits Administration Reports as of 22 December 2018. *This is updated every Monday after the Monday Morning Workload Report is released to the public.*

https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/characteristics_of_claims.asp

Veterans and Supported VSOs Fighting for Their Rights in the 21st Century

It all started in March 2003 after the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, for the Department of Veterans Affairs. The Department of Veterans Affairs was not ready for another war due to the reduction in personnel levels and staff leaving the organization for one reason or another. The Veteran's Benefits Administration has been in the limelight with backlog service-connectivity claims and appeal claims. President Bush and military officials never thought there was going to be an overwhelming casualty from deaths to massive injuries with their military soldiers since our conflicts with Operation Desert Shield/Storm, Korean War, Vietnam War, and others that we cannot mention due to the classification of the mission. With the unknown of the backlog from Operation Desert Shield/Storm; Veterans Benefits Administration hid the issue fantastically from everyone except the military veterans that applied before the Iraq and Afghanistan war. With the recent conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan, the military service member falls under Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), and Operation New Dawn (OND) veterans. Based on the Government Accountability Office (GAO) report of 2011, the VBA had over two million OEF/OIF/OND service members that were added to the veteran's list with VBA from 2003 to 2011 (MacGregor, 2015). The casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan and the service members that were separated or retired after serving

their country with honorable to general discharges were sending the claims into the VA as paper claims before 2011. The service-connectivity disability claim backlog quadrupled from 2001 with the OEF/OIF service members that receive injuries that forced them out of the service, especially service members that were below 35 years of age (MacGregor, 2015). In the Veterans Benefit Administration reports, the researcher used numbers from July 2012 to January 2018 in figure 2 on page 40 shows completely different numbers in the March 2013 to September 2018 in figure 3 on page 41.

Table 4 is the breakdown from Fiscal Year 2007 to 2019 of the Pennsylvania Governor Executive Budget reports of the numbers from County Veteran Service Officers and the Act 66 Veteran Grant Program that helps with Veteran's benefits. The researcher used the Monday Morning Workload Reports to show the difference of disability and pension claims that both Regional Offices of Pittsburgh and Philadelphia received from County Veterans Service Officers and Act 66 Veteran Service Officers. The Monday Morning Workload reports started on Fiscal Year 2004 to 2018.

Table 4

Historical PA Veterans Disability and Pension Claims by PA County VSOs, Act 66 VSO Data (FY08), and the numbers VBA Monday Morning Workload Reports that states the number of claims submitted to regional offices of Pittsburgh and Philadelphia from Fiscal Year 2004 through 2018.

Fiscal Year	PA Veteran Population (The projected number of veterans in Pennsylvania, based on federal Veterans Administration estimates.)	PA County VSO	PA ACT 66 VSO Grant Program numbers from State Commission Reports	PA Fiscal Report addressed Difference totals against State Commission Numbers	DVA/VBA Pittsburgh Region Office	DVA/VBA Philadelphia Regional Office	Outstanding disability/pension claims with Pittsburg and Philadelphia Together	Overall C&P Pending Claims at VBA	Veterans that Appeal their disability and pension claims. (Phila/ Pitt)
FY04-05	1,117,004				4746	6660	23390	419394	3905
FY05-06	1,088,220		N/A		4884	6438	39199	510364	4547
FY06-07			N/A		6419	7102	41979	588197	4813
FY07-08	1,057,073				9950	31318	41268	636261	4895
FY08-09	1,025,770	3607	9782		5088	7052	42199	637056	5031
FY09-10	995,135	4088	22133		4917	18861	93271	728598	5769
FY10-11	964,132	6465	26675	26134	5425	15151	55879	560495	5905
FY11-12	1,007,607	4088	14312	14132	8467	25038	51725	833606	6502
FY12-13	980,529	6968	12927		10909	23414	55451	909781	6520
FY13-14	953,700	6500	14125		10428	20799	81483	796865	5765
FY14-15	939,069	7582	14891		6367	14071	20452	558256	No Data
FY15-16	916,638	8362	18371		8906	14163	19048	385337	9220
FY16-17	894,681	8780	32756		9007	15250	24257	371153	10800
FY17-18	873,340	9219	34708		6962	16747	33336	368858	10167
FY18-19		7195	18299		7412	21368	26860	338283	10707

Note. The numbers came from the Executive Budget Reports of the Governor of Pennsylvania website (public domain), PA DMVA State Commission Monthly briefs, and the Monday Morning Workload Reports from VA.Gov (public domain).

Based on U.S. Government Accountability Office investigations in 2002, 2007, 2010, and 2011, it has shown the Veterans Benefits Administration office with lack of internal validity on processing disability claims; mishandling claims, extreme delays between medical examinations results and a case manager or workers reviews (MacGregor, 2015). During President Obama's first term, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs Administration was asked to investigate the backlog of service-connectivity

disability claims and improve the process. From 2010 to present, the VA Secretary and Under Secretary for Benefits, Veterans Benefits Administration has testified in front of both House and Senate Veterans Affairs hearings on their performance with disability compensation claims processes (Missal, 2016; Pummell, 2016; Shinseki, 2013; VA, 2012). The testimony reports results showed different total numbers of backlog and how many the VA has received since going to the automated process. The Congressional hearing documentation only displays the names of improvements from the VA Secretary in front of the committee members.

Inspector General Investigations of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh Regional Offices

The Benefits Inspection Program is part of the Office of Inspector General (OIG) to improve the processing time and accuracy of benefits and services for the veterans. The OIG stands by its mission to serve veterans and the public by conducting adequate audits, inspections, reviews, and investigations oversight of the programs and operations of the Veterans Benefits Administrations of VA (OIG, 2018). Based on Sullivan's report of 1997, in 1996, the VA Office of Inspector General completed an audit on Veterans Benefits Administration's data reliability in the claims processing workload reporting system that shown an unsuccessful rate. End of the year report dated December 9, 1997, the VA OIG completed another summary report on VA Claims Processing Issues that showed significant issues and provided recommendations to Director, VBA (Sullivan, 1997). The researcher was unable to find any other audit inspections for eight years until December 13-17, 2004, for a Combined Assessment Program (CAP) review in Pittsburgh VARO for a discussion of fiscal years 2003, 2004, and 2005 (Griffin, 2005). Two of the

twelve areas for consideration were the claims folder security and Benefits Delivery Network Security that supports the disability claims process. The CAP review for Philadelphia VARO was conducted on July 25-29, 2005, that focused on nine areas. Of those nine areas, locked files, and Benefits Delivery Network Security with Automated Information Systems Security were crucial areas that needed improvements at VARO (Wooditch, 2006).

Each IG inspection is done every three to four years from the last review; unless they received a Fraud, Waste, and Abuse tip over the hotline, Congressional request, or someone senior within Department of Veterans' Affairs, they would set up a surprise inspection without notification to the leadership of Regional VA offices. The Benefits Inspection Program provides independent investigations with oversight on disability compensation claims processing and procedural inaccuracies (Halliday, 2014). The VA OIG inspection team started their benefits inspection with all VAROs in 1997 to the present (Sullivan, 1997). All the investigations are seeing issues with policy guidance, oversight, workload management, training, and supervisory review on accuracy and timeliness with disability claims. After each inspection, the Director of each VARO receives Management Advisory on issues and recommendations from Assistant Inspector General for Audits and Evaluations to improve on by the next VARO inspection.

The Philadelphia Veteran Area Regional Office (VARO) had its first inspection with the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) in October 2005; the second inspection in October 2009; another one in August 2012; and surprise inspection on June 19, 2014, due to numerous hotline allegations of mismanagement (Halliday, 2014). Linda Halliday,

Assistant Inspector General for Audits and Evaluations, met with Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs of Committee on Veterans Affairs on October 3, 2014, to discuss the continued failures of the Philadelphia Veterans Area Regional Office (Halliday, 2014). The VA Office of Inspection General did extensive inspections in 2009 and 2010 that was finalized on February 18, 2010; January 24, 2011; March 30, 2011; and May 18, 2011. The OIG did a review to evaluate how VBA hire employees could reduce the heavy workload and backlog on a disability claim and appeal process in Fiscal Year 2008 and 2009 (Finn, 2011). The evaluation review was to ensure VBA followed the guidelines under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The researcher plans to utilize Exhibit 3 "VBA's Rating and Non-Rating Claims Workload and Capacity FY 2009" on page 6 to show how many claims VBA received and completed (Finn, 2011). Studying Appendix C, the researcher discovered: "VBA Progress Filling Allocated ARRA-Funded Positions" as of September 28, 2009, had shown Philadelphia received 104 and filled 100 percent and Pittsburgh hired 16 employees to be 100 percent filled (Finn, 2011, pg. 22). With Philadelphia and Pittsburgh having 100 percent filled, then why did VARO still have a backlog of veteran's disability claims and appeal claims.

Finn (2011) Audit and Evaluations looked at how VARO staff members review 100 percent disability evaluations. The audit proves during the inspection that \$943 million was released to veterans without adequate medical evidence since January 1993 (Finn, 2011). The VARO Philadelphia was inspected on March 4, 2010, with a review of 30 claims with 87 percent errors shown in table 1: "Previous Temporary 100 Percent

OIG Reviews (Finn, 2011 pg. 17). More examples found in table 2: "Universe and Results of Random Sample" and table 3: "Projections and Margins of Error for Sample Results" used statistical sampling methodology (Finn, 2011, pg. 20 and 21). The OIG review of the "Pension Management Centers (PMC)" shown that VA Regional Offices and VBA in FYs 2008 and 2009 did not process because PMC presented inadequate information for death benefits, claims processing, Internal Revenue Service and Social Security Administration Income Verification Matches (IVM) for overpayments (Finn, 2011). What most people do not realize is Philadelphia VARO is responsible for part of the overall of 800,000 veterans and families living in eastern Pennsylvania, Southern New Jersey, and Delaware for the administration of compensation and pension, loan guaranty, national call center services, and vocational rehabilitation and employment benefits programs.

Between 2017 and 2018, the OIG updated its website with a dashboard to show the public how many reports, recommendations, and financial impacts it has done in the last 12 months. The stories are open to the public to teach veterans the OIG is working hard for them. Most of the administrative investigations, independent audits, and reviews of VA programs happen on anniversary or request from senior officials. The OIG likes to concentrate on the hotline calls that report fraud, waste, and abuse. The critical whistleblower case that opens the Pandora box with VA Medical Center's was the daughter of a veteran who went to the Phoenix VA hospital for care and was denied in July 2014 before he passed away (Missal, 2016; Andrews, 2015; VA, Whistleblower Protection Act, 2016). The CBS News received a letter from Dorrie Stafford, a veteran

widow, about her husband's disability claim results (Andrews, 2015). That letter was acquired on July 29, 2014, after he filed in July of 2004 and passed away in 2011 (Missal, 2016; Andrews, 2015). Additionally, to this incident, the employees from VARO in Los Angeles called the OIG Hotline and reported they were ordered to shred disability claims to meet quotas. The hotline call was reviewed and forced the Inspector General Investigation Team to do a surprise inspection of the Regional Office of Los Angeles (Abe, 2016).

The eye-opening VA OIG inspection became known with a hotline call from an unknown source indicated that employees from Los Angeles VA Regional Office (VARO) was inappropriately shredding veterans' disability compensation claims around January 2015 (Abe, 2016). With this inspection, the Los Angeles VARO added a Records Management Officer when the inspection started in February 2015, which VARO did not have RMO for 6 months (Abe, 2016). One of the other complaints was a supervisor told them to shred the claims (Abe, 2016). VA OIG conducted another ten unannounced investigations, and Philadelphia VARO was one of the ten. The Philadelphia VARO had locked shred bins that could have disability claims inserted without the knowledge of the Record Management Officer that has shown on July 29, 2015, in figure 2 of page 11 (Abe, 2016).

Additionally, both Philadelphia and Pittsburgh had surprise inspections after their first inspection in 2009 and 2012. From April 2009 through September 2010, Philadelphia VARO and 15 others had individual inspections on disability compensation claims processing and performance of Veterans Service Center on systemic issues (Finn,

2011). Finn (2011) observed the four areas that have been continuous issues with each audit investigations at Philadelphia and Pittsburgh's VARO, are the "data processing errors; medical exam notifications not processed through Benefits Delivery Network (VBA no longer use); rating decision inaccuracies by omitting diary dates in rating decisions for mandatory future medical examinations; and decisions not finalized."

Appendix D "VARO Inspection Results" on page 32 showed Philadelphia VARO, with six out of eleven compliances met, which gave them 55 percent (Finn, 2011). Halliday (2015) provided a follow-up to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, United States House of Representatives on the Philadelphia, and Oakland: Systemic Failures and Mismanagement on April 22, 2015. The Veterans Benefits Administration receive allegations and non-compliance on policies on OIG's Hotline from multiple sources of serious mistrust between VARO staff and management (Halliday, 2015). The OIG team identified serious mismanagement and distrust of VARO on operations and services to veterans (Halliday, 2015). The allegations were "cooking the books," referring to data manipulation and inappropriately reduced workload backlogs, mail mismanagement, and the potential processing duplicate payments (Halliday, 2015). The VARO mismanagement was the compromised data integrity, lack of financial stewardship, and lack of confidence with the management's ability to exceed workload and protect personally identifiable information of each military veteran that submitted a service-connected disability claim (Halliday, 2015).

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) did a review on Veterans Benefits Administration office on service-connectivity disability End Project since the backlog

numbers were not matching up with the over 125-days old (Reinkemeyer, 2018). The OIG review was conducted from April 2016 to June 2018 by randomly selected five Veterans Area Regional Offices (VARO) of Fargo, North Dakota; Ft. Harrison, Montana; Louisville, Kentucky; Roanoke, Virginia; and Seattle, Washington with two judgmentally VARO's Montgomery, Alabama, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Reinkemeyer, 2018). This OIG report will show the inconsistencies with DVA/VBA numbers from their Monday Morning Workload Reports that are provided to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Based on the stories reviewed, data about the Secretary of Veterans Affairs goal to eliminate the disability claims that were over 125-days old by using the Transformation Plan in 2015 (Reinkemeyer, 2015).

OIG conducted an administrative investigation on VARO Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on October 27-31, 2014. The OIG investigators concentrated on three areas: Disability Claims Processing, Data Integrity, and Management Controls (Halliday, 2015). The claims processing discrepancies are the same as the other inspections in Pittsburgh with a lack of diary entries in VBA's electronic system to alert staff to schedule Compensation and Pension (C&P) medical examination or reexaminations.

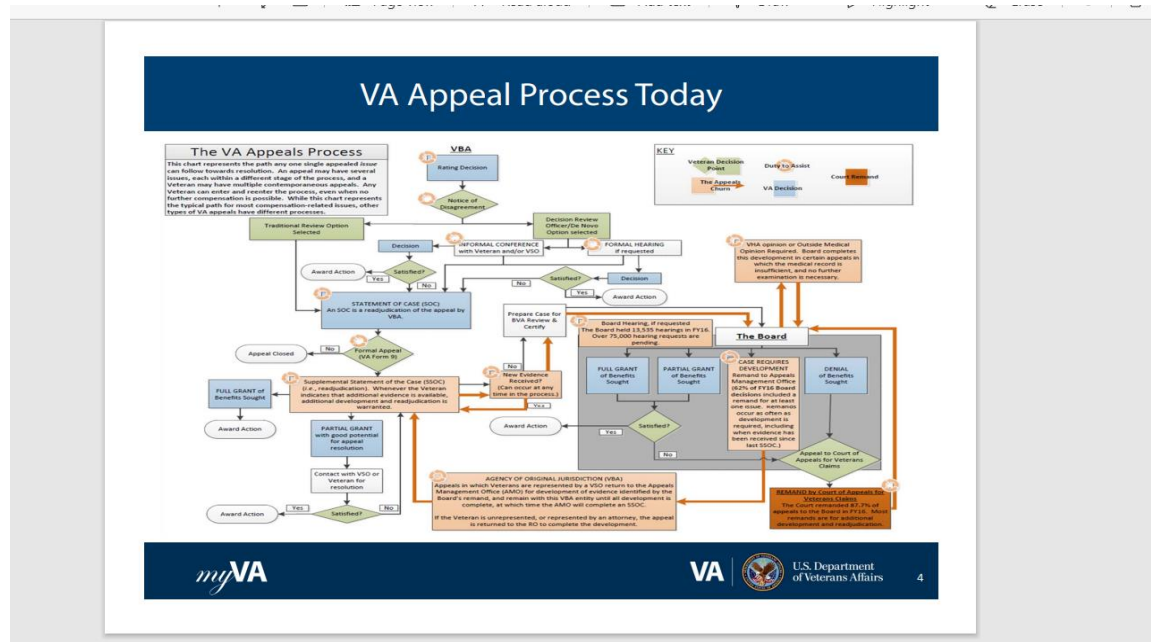
Veterans Appeal for Higher Rate Percentage and Military Pension

The Veterans Administration that merged with the Bureau of Pensions and Veterans Bureau in 1930 established the Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA) in 1933. The appeal board is to help veterans to receive a higher rate percentage from improper or inadequate level given or been denied of the claim (Brown, 2014; as cited in Elia, 2018). What was remarkably interesting is the appointed board members were approved by the

President of the United States (Elia, 2017). For 35 years, the appeal board operated without judicial oversight until 1988 when the Veterans Administration created the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (as cited in Elia, 2018; Mall, 2013). The stage for veterans to submit an appeal on his or her rate percentage is a lengthy process based on the appeal law in 1933 (see Figure 4: Veteran Claims Appeal Process through Veterans Benefits Administration) (VBA, 2018 pg. 4).

Figure 7

VA Appeal Process before New Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modification Act of 2017



Note: This was pull from the Department of Veterans Affairs website under the Board of Appeals section before Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modification Act of 2017 <https://bva.va.gov>.

Even though veterans are or are not told about the prolonged process, the veterans will fight for their rate percentage if it is a low percent or zero percent by appealing their claim. The initial appeal process usually takes three years for resolution on appeal; for the past 20 years, some appeal cases are taking up to seven years for board decisions (VBA, 2018). The appeal process is one of the worst things for veterans' quality of life.

One area of change was the updated website that ex-Secretary McDonald started during his tenure. And ex-Secretary Shulkin continued to update by adding the Board of Appeals (BOA) to the website with The Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA) Decision search results of reports from 1992 to present (VBA, 2018). The researcher will review each report to determine how long each appeal took to get a review by BOA members to decide. Once the decisions are made, the veteran will have to wait for their back pay at least three to four months. The researcher noticed the numbers of backlog claims with BVA are very inconsistent from the VBA; since appeal claims did not have any accountability until VBA started their Monday Morning Reports in April 2014. As of April 2017, 292,035 applications are still in the appeal process for approvals (VBA, 2017). The researcher located a VBA report on Appeals Modernization and RAMP dated February 2018 with a graph called Pending Appeals that showed in FY 2017 over 450,000 still pending (see Figure 5) (VBA, 2018).

Figure 8

Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Administration Benefit Division: Appeals Backlog before RAMP was put in place by President of the United States in February 2020



Note. This graph shows how many outstanding appeals from FY2001 with 100,000 that increases every fiscal year for 16 years. As of FY17, the VBA BOA had reached up to above 450,000 appeal claims that are still waiting for review and decision. Based on (<https://www.dav.org/wp-content/uploads/AppealsModernizationandRAMP.pdf>)

The appeal process has been working for 84 years with issues that it takes too long to get an answer back from BVA or U.S. Court of Appeals with veteran claims. In the last three years, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW), the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans (DAV), and other Veterans Service Organizations had been working with Veterans Benefit Administration, and Board of Veterans Appeal to develop the new Public Law 115-55 Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017 also called Rapid Appeals and Modernization Program (RAMP). President Trump signed into law on August 23, 2017. The VFW and DAV did a joint letter in September 2017 to Deputy Secretary of VA Thomas Bowman about

concerns they have with RAMP. On 30 January 2018, John Towles, Deputy Director of National Legislative Service with VFW, wrote a letter to House of Veterans Affairs Committee about their concerns of lack of communication from BVA/DAV/VBA on RAMP processes (Towles, 2018). After the researcher read Towles's (2018) letter to Veterans Affairs Committee was surprised about the comment that Secretary Shulkin made to Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs hearing that "75 percent RAMP decisions are going in favor of the veteran" (Towles, 2018, p. 3). The RAMP is not supposed to take effect until February 2019 (Colson, 2018; VBA, 2018). The VA is sending out letters to veterans that are pending appeals to get a faster turnaround. Based on Towles's (2018) message, Veterans of Foreign Wars is recommending his claimants not to accept the new RAMP process because they will lose their number in line if they agree to opt-in and delay their claim further in years even though RAMP policy is appeals will process faster. One thing about RAMP it is only for a temporary fix situation with an appeal process to get the backlog numbers lower; then, RAMP will be eliminated once the BVA can manage the veteran's appeal claims.

Study Results from the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics

The researcher was able to retrieve analysis and statistics that became available when VA updated its website mid-2018 by showing the study results from the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (NCVAS). The Department of Veterans Affairs establishes NCVAS in late 2004 to help VBA staff with the backlog of disability claims and other benefits applications. The Department of Veterans Affairs hired nine staff members to do this study during the Fiscal Years 2005 through 2015. This study

oversaw the 22 benefits that are under three separate administrations. The researcher will need to pay attention to the results under the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) that deals with compensation and pension disability benefits and veterans that are users and non-user's numbers. The first report, *Unique Veteran Users Profile FY 2015*, is broken down with males and females using at least one or more benefits from 2006 to 2015 (NCVAS, 2016). The second report *VA Utilization Profile FY 2016* started from 2007 to 2015 that show extraordinarily slight difference of female and male using VA benefits from 2006 to 2007 with one percent increase receiving disability compensation (NCVAS, 2017). Part of the FY 2016 report, a small section called *Comparison of VA Users and Non-Users FY 2016*, the numbers were closed to each other by a little over one million (NCVAS, 2017). These kinds of numbers will allow the researcher to approve the communication theme of the study. And finally, the survey that closed out the project *Profile of Veterans: 2016, Data from the American Community Survey*. The final research compares veterans and non-veterans to provide information from age, race, sex, marriage status, education, computer use, etc. (NCVAS, 2018). The researcher plans to use the outcome of all three study reports that pertain to the questions that need to be answered.

Veteran's Benefits Administration Updates to Improve the Administration Process

Even with all the improvements, the VBA has put out these past ten years, the Office of Inspector General and the United States Government Accountability Office is finding an inconsistency with staffing levels within management and lack of training with staffers overseeing benefit claims. The first improvement change was to develop a

network domain technology to allow service members to use an electronic portal to limit the paper claim and allow the VA to establish an accountability process in 2011. From 2010 to 2016, the application database had issues with duplication cases that messed up the tracking mechanism (Pittman, 2014; VHA, 2015). In 2012, the House and Senate Committees for Veterans Affairs ordered the VA Inspector General Audit Office to start doing audit investigations with each VA Regional Offices on how they are managing the outstanding service-connectivity disability claims and other areas that support veteran benefits. It was around 2014; the veterans started to hear from their Regional Office, State Department of Veterans Affairs representatives about their claim status.

Even with all the new internal improvements that started in 2017 to present with Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), veterans' financial restraint in quality of life will still exist in the veterans' eyes, not VBA. The one program is called Decision Ready Claims (DRC) is for veterans that had previously filed and received a rating decision on a VA claim. The VBA indicated a veteran should receive an approval notification in 30 days once submitted. For the Appeal Process, a new program called Rapid Appeals Modernization Program (RAMP) was signed into law on August 23, 2017, but not active until February 2019. Most people will know it as the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017. What most people do not know is RAMP will be only in place until the legacy (backlog) of appeals have been resolved.

Needed Changes in the Veterans Benefits Administration

Even though some of the veterans, service members and family members will not search on the Department of Veterans' Affairs website, the Secretary of Veterans' Affairs

and supported the office of Veterans Benefits Administrations indicates to the President of the United States, and Congress they are improving and helping the veterans. The researcher used the Department of Veterans Affairs website since they developed their website in 1995 when internet explorer domain initially established for the world to use for personal, news media, and government to interact with other governments. Even though the Department of Veterans Affairs had its internet website, the service-connectivity disability claims were still being submitted as hardcopy to Regional Offices. It was not until 2009, VBA started to develop the eBenefits portal for electronic submission. It took a while for the eBenefits website portal to become successful after all the kinks (issues) were resolved in 2011.

Before the eBenefits portal went online, the researcher wanted to know what systems did VBA use during paper copy days. The VBA was using five different databases to support the workflow management with claims through the adjudication process called "VOR, COVERS, MAP-D, VACOLS, and FBS" (Chapter 2, Workflow Management, page 2-2, 2010). The researcher was able to find more literature on the VBA workflow management to see if they were using any database to track claims. The researcher found a Web Automated Reference Material System, M21-1 Compensation, and Pension Manual that has been rewritten since it was original (DVA, 2018). On September 17, 2012, VBA replaced M21-1 to M27-1 by Benefits Assistance Service Procedure Manual (DVA, 2018). Before the M21-4 was replaced with another procedure manual, the manual changes reach up to 78. The VBA established a Modern Award Processing – Development (MAP-D) to track the location of paper claim applications.

The MAP-D was part of the "VETSNET Operation Reports (VOR) that replaced an old process called BDN Work-in-Process Subsystem (WIPP), PIF, and Inventory Management System (IMS) reports" that was used by the Veterans Service Center (VSC) to help them with their workload management tool" (M21-4, page 2-2, 2010). With the lack of training discrepancies from OIG reports, the VOR had failed the VBA with tracking the claims and appeals that used Veterans Appeals Control and Locator System (VACOLS) (M21-4, page 2-2, 2010).

The Secretary of Veterans' Affairs and VBA needed to show the President of the United States, and House and Senate of Veterans Affairs Committee they had control of all the benefit claims by established Monday Morning Workload (MMWR) Report around 2010. It was not available to the public until April 14, 2014, when VBA open it to public access on their website as an excel spreadsheet (James, 2018). The MMWR is part of the VA's Transparency Program that HR Legislation requested in early 2014 and Metadata created on May 21, 2014, under <http://www.data.gov> with the landing page of <https://www.vba.va.gov/REPORTS/mmwr/index.asp> where anyone can see the Data Catalog on Google, Twitter, and Facebook (James, 2018). Based on in-house whistleblowers from various Offices of VA; they had indicated to the news media the numbers on the Monday Morning Workload were inconsistency with the paper disability claims were not filed for military pensions before 2011 (Carper & Kaper, 2016; DeBruyne & Leland, 2015; Missal, 2016; Pummill, 2016; Shinseki, 2013; VA, 2012).

The support documentation will be coming from the VA Benefits Administration with estimated statistic numbers for how many disability compensation claims were

processed from 2000 to present and support documentation from questionnaires and interviews from fellow Veterans. Additionally, the researcher will be comparing the numbers from Pennsylvania Governor's website that has Pennsylvania Department of Veterans Affairs Benefit Reports from counties VSO reported their numbers from 2009 to present to VBA's Monday Morning Workload Reports.

Even the present day, the scholar literature is minimal on the Veterans Service-Connectivity Disability Compensation Claims process for veterans' quality of life with military pensions. Most of the scholarly research with public policy literature on leadership, management, and medical treatments on veterans and the Department of Veterans Affairs. The researcher is depending on past scholars that were concern about veterans' quality of life with disability claims and all the OIG, GAO; nonprofit veterans support organizations, for example, American Legion, VFW, DAV, and other Veterans Service Officer's websites that support veteran with their benefits and news media websites. Recently, the Department of Veterans' Affairs public domain has been putting out updates that the new Secretary of Veterans Affairs Wilkie's is doing today.

Summary and Conclusions

The Veterans Benefits of Administration and Department of Veterans Affairs summarize the total of the claims process is all American veterans. If you go to any of the Veterans Service Organizations representatives that submit claims, the VSO representatives will tell you there is a lot of veterans who have not filed a service-connectivity claim or other benefits they deserve to receive for one reason or another. Most of the reasons, the VA takes too long for results, especially the service-connectivity

claims are because they compare a veteran case with another veteran case based on the same similar. The Veterans Benefits of Administration were not keeping track of service-connectivity claims that were coming in as hardcopy (paper) for centuries until 2009 when the eBenefits portal was in the testing stage.

Additionally, VBA decided to scan all paper disability claims files that were available from Regional Offices from 2014 to 2018. The eBenefits portal was allowing service members to put in claims before separating from service to let them have their military pension started when they separated on the first day of the month from leaving the facility. If it were not for the war conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan, the VA would not have been under fire from House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee members in Congress from 2013 to the present. One other fundamental problem is the lack of communication on where a veteran can apply for his or her benefits. The themes will surround veterans that submitted their service-connectivity claim and how long did it take for them to receive their first military pension check. With this theme, was the veteran is satisfied with their rate percentage. The researcher is expecting to see half of the sampling size will be happy, and the other half, not delighted. The no's will be the service members from OEF/OIF/OND that fought in Iraq and Afghanistan from 2003 to 2021. One problem we have today, is the last war conflict the active-duty service members have not separate from service to submit their claim for massive injuries.

The second theme will be surrounding the appeal process for the service-connectivity claim that veterans did not like their rate percentage from the injuries they had received during service time. The appeal process theme will be veterans that

submitted for appeal and how long they had been waiting for the outcome by Appeal Board. With this theme, the researcher is planning to see how many of them know about the new executive order that President Trump signed called Rapid Modification Appeal Process (RAMP). The researcher would like to know if the veteran did a partial or full appeal on his or her service-connectivity because their quality of life could receive help with minimum military pension money. The final theme will be on Veterans Service Organizations and the Pennsylvania Department of Veterans Affairs that are supported by County Veterans Service Officers. The researcher is looking at this theme to prove the communication is lacking within the state of Pennsylvania with the veterans. This area of the subject will be based on a questionnaire that will be administered to veterans around the country of Pennsylvania. At the last, presidential election race in 2015 and 2016, the veterans were complaining about how the VA process is slow, and a backlog of claims for all veterans to all candidates OEF, OIF, and OND/indicate they still have not received their rate percentage. Additionally, the researcher will show delays in both the disability compensation claims and appeal process by using new database programs the VBA plans to use today and in the future.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

I used a qualitative case study to demonstrate how Pennsylvania and nationwide military veterans have been dealing with their quality-of-life issues while waiting for the completion of their service-connectivity disability claims for 50 years. The Veterans Benefits Administration department under the Department of Veterans Affairs has jeopardized the quality of life of our military veterans and families for decades. The problem was a lack of accountability under senior leadership and management with the lack of proper employee training on processing the original service-connectivity disability and appeal claims for the past 30 years based on intense investigations and evaluations.

The VA Office of Inspector General supported office of Audits and Evaluation and General Accounting Office (GAO) investigation are usually from the Congressional on issues with processing disability and pension claim. The first GAO report was from 1978 to present had proven there was a problem with processing veterans disability claims and their appeals (Bascetta, 1978, Bascetta, 2000, Bascetta,2005, Finn, 2011, Griffin, 2005. Sullivan, 1997, Sullivan, 1997, and Wooditch, 2006). The first Congressional requesters was on *The Veterans Administration Can Reduce The Time Required To Process Veterans' and Survivors' Initial Claims For Benefits* on December 27, 1978, by GAO (Bascetta, 1978). Cynthia Bascetta, GAO, Director, Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues responded to a Congressional Requester on

veterans' benefits in 2000 and 2005 concerning disability claims processing that showed backlog developed in figure 1 (Bascetta, 2000) report.

For years, the service-connectivity disability claims had been hard copy paper, until President Obama and House and Senate Committees on Veterans Affairs pushed millions of dollars to VA's budget for an upgraded database system called eBenefits (Lipowicz, 2010 and Shinseki, 2010). The new process is to allow the veteran's claims to be submitted as electronic copies (soft copies) for VBA to have better accountability for each benefit application.

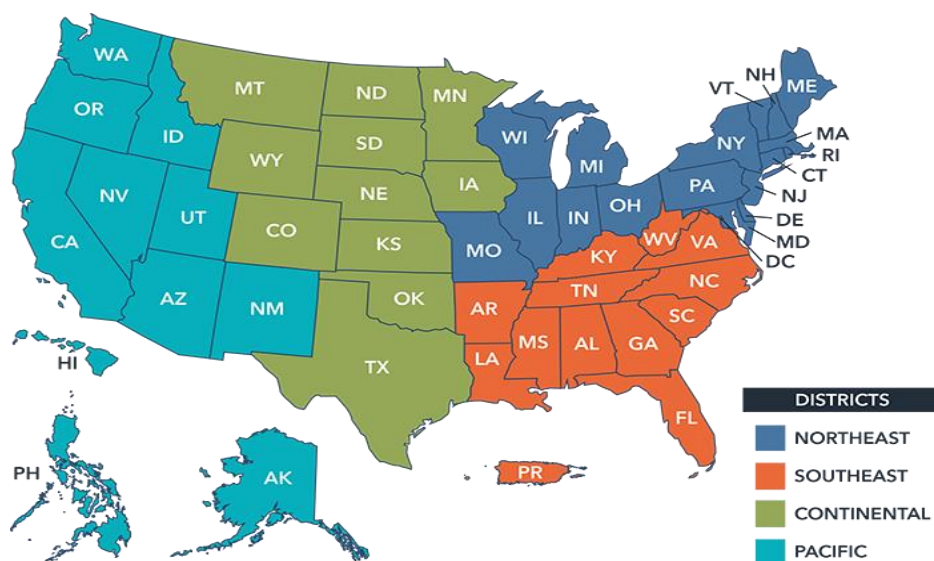
Before eBenefits and after it went active in 2011, the Office of Audits and Evaluations under Office of Inspector General did surprise inspections to all 56 Regional Offices (Abe, 2016, Finn, 2011, Halliday, 2015, and Reinkemeyer, 2017). Based on the outcomes from Office of Inspector Generals, Audits and Evaluation investigations, the VBA employees did not receive proper training on processing hard copy claims and the eBenefits system, which resulted in a lack of accountability (Finn, 2010, Finn, 2011, and Wooditch, 2006). Meanwhile, some veterans were still mailing in hard copies of service-connectivity claims with supporting evidence and documentation, which caused the duplication of VARO and VBA numbers. The eBenefits portal did not start the accountability count until 2011 when it became official.

The previous Secretary of Veterans Administration listed in table 2 have tried to improve all the programs; especially, the health care and benefits which are still in jeopardy due to Congress. Ex-Secretary Shinseki received the claim backlog mess from his predecessors based on figures 2 and 3 (VBA, 2018). From January 2009 to May 20,

2014, ex-Secretary Shinseki did the most changes with VA and VBA by updating the systems technology not the backlog of claims that he mentioned during confirmation. The first thing ex-Secretary Shinseki and Veterans Benefits Administration put together the Transformation Plan to eliminate the claim backlog by 2015 (VBA, 2013). The Transformation Plan was put together to support the Veterans Claims Assistance Act and Duty to Assist Act that was signed by President Obama in 2010 (VBA, 2013, pg. 8). The Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS) was established in 2010 to support the eBenefits portal that took effect in 2011 (VBA, 2013). The VBMS took over 2 years to be fully in place with 52 Regional Offices (RO) by the end of the year 2013 (Bertoni, 2014 and Melvin, 2015).

Figure 9

Breakdown diagram for four districts of Veteran Area Regional Office Websites that support for Field Offices.



Note. The map is located on VBA website to allow a veteran to hit their state to get contact information <https://benefits.va.gov/benefits/offices.asp>

The first 18 Regional Offices achieved success with VBMS in 2013, when they processed 43,337 out of 48,751 cases within 115 days (VBA, 2013, pg. 15). As the final program, ex-Secretary Shinseki and the VBA implemented was the Veterans Claims Intake Program (VCIP) that scanned hard copy paper files to an electronic file system to eliminate paper files on September 10, 2012, (VBA, 2013). The VCIP took over 4 years to complete, and it is still in effect today because the Evidence Intake Center even now receives paper copies for supported documentation. Based on the Strategic Plan to Eliminate the Compensation Claims Backlog of January 25, 2013, the Transformation Plan failed because of the lack of performance and management training for all new computer-based programs and the lack of understanding of the Full Development Claim (FDC) with VBMS (Reinkemeyer, 2018; VBA, 2013). With all the improvements with benefit claims to be process with computer-based programs and issues with capability and cost increases cause the backlog to triple in numbers see figure 2 and 3.

Ex-Secretary McDonald set up two Evidence Intake Centers in Newman, GA, and Janesville, WI, who served as the Centralized Main Processing (CMP) for all evidence (supported documentation) instead of the documents being mailed directly to the case manager. Additionally, in 2016, as part of the Evidence Intake Centers, ex-Secretary McDonald gave authorization to all state Veterans Area Regional Offices to retrieve a veteran disability claim immediately to review from the portal (VBA, 2018). Ex-

Secretary McDonald two changes started to see improvements in the backlog numbers for VBA in 2016 through 2017.

When ex-Secretary Shulkin was the Secretary of Veterans Affairs in February 2017 for a year, two of his changes was the Decision Ready Claim (DRC) and Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act RAMP to help with the appeal backlog of claims (Shulkin, 2018). President Trump's first executive orders was the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act (RAMP) in 2017. The RAMP did not take off until February 2019 because VBA had to set up policy, regulations, and procedures on how to oversee the legacy appeal cases with the new RAMP. Before February 2019, the Board of Appeals gave options to veterans that are sitting in legacy appeal case area to pull out to move their case to February 2019 under the three-option program. After February 2019, each veteran will have the choice to pick one of the three options: Option 1, Higher-level Review; Option 2, Supplemental Claim Lane; and Option 3, Appeal Lane for Appeals to the Board Based that is allowing appeal cases to see other members of the appeal process instead of the long haul for Board of Appeal judges to review the case. When investigator looked at table 10, the newer appeal cases are surpassing the legacy appeal one that are still waiting for review with Board of Appeals. Currently, the Veterans Benefit Administration relies on their VA website and veterans' nonprofit organizations to update the veterans on recent changes to their benefits.

Research Design and Rationale

The case study will concentrate on Pennsylvania military veterans that would like to talk about their quality-of-life experiences with processing for benefits with Veterans Benefits Administration under the Department of Veterans' Affairs. One criterion to support the case study each military veteran lives in Pennsylvania and provide a copy DD-214 or copy of benefit letter for rate percentage. Each veteran will have the opportunity to do a one-on-one interview in person or online due to coronavirus pandemic to discuss experiences on processing and waiting for results of benefits. If the veteran does not have any internet capability for the computer and or Wi-Fi for android phone to do a video interview and or personal interview, the researcher will provide the veteran the same questions as a questionnaire for them to answer and return in the mail with a self-address envelope.

The veterans' responses will design a theme for a theoretical framework to support the Institutional Analysis and Development Framework (IAD) of Hancock and Algozzine (2017) on pages 837 to 839. Compare to other veteran case studies that used quasi-experimental under contrasted group designs and grounded theory; the student will concentrate on effective design (Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015).

The study will show explanatory, phenomenological, and historical case design to meet the methodology studies for all events, programs, or organizations as they get evolved (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). Based on all the historical studies for the past 20 years and graphic designs from VA website, VA Office of Inspector General (OIG)

investigations, and U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) will support the chronological listing of events, cause-and-effect of veterans' quality of life with financial strain and family relationships by not receiving their service compensation in a timely manner. The student might feel some bias leaving out military veterans that fought our most significant wars like World War II and Korea to support the mishandling of the service-connect disability claims.

Some of the key issues that GAO and OIG agree that VBA Field Offices (57 Regional Offices) have senior leadership from top to supervisors, management, and staffing issues with processing disability claims for service members that protects United States from harm's way (Bascetta, 1978, 2000, and 2005; Baine, 1995; and Halliday, 2015). Bascetta (2005) provided a statement to Congress that GAO recommends updating the house structure of Veterans Benefits Administration Field Operations. One of the top contributing factors is changing the policy on the disability claim processing of 365-day policy that develop the extreme backlog from 1993 to 2009; then, quadruple applications from 2009 to 2018 for the 125-day policy; then the VBA placed another program for 90-day policy did not help the situation (Shinseki, 2010 and Shulkin, 2019). The Board of Appeal cases was yet another key factor to the backlog of claims, even though the cases were counted separately from the group (Baine, 1995). Most of the appeal cases pending were from Korea, Vietnam, and Gulf War of Operation Desert Storm until the Iraq and Afghanistan War started in 1997 (BVA, 2016). From 2003 to 2017, the VBA Board of Appeals cases overwhelmed with evidence from a severe injury, chemical, and or biological agent symptoms that cause damage to post-traumatic system

disorders that Veteran Rating Service Officers and Veteran Representatives Officers disapproved (Tucker, 2017). The second contributing factor is the late baby boomer and Generation X service members who are retiring by their 20 to 30-year mark, service members getting out due to medical injuries from war or peacetime, and members who completed their time of service but not all are submitting a service-connected disability claim. And the final contributing factor is a lack of communication from VBA and Veteran Service Officers for each state and supporting veteran organizations that help with disability claims and other benefits.

Veterans' Quality of Life Question

It is crucial to have the study question to meet the problem statement and purpose of the study (Frankfort-Nachmias, 2015). The literature review concentrates on congressional requests for U.S. General (Government) Accounting Office from 1978 to present, the VA Office of Inspector General from Audits and Evaluations investigations, news articles, and the Department of Veterans Affairs website that supports veterans' quality of life while waiting for answers to their service-connectivity claims. In the last 8 years, ex-Secretary McDonald requested the VA's Public Affairs to set up social network to reach out to military veterans about their medical to veterans' benefit questions and answers (McDonald, 2014).

The American veterans would not have known there were issues with VAROs and Department of Veterans Affairs without the knowledge of whistleblower actions on network media stations (Andrews, 2014). After reading the VA Office of Inspector General's hotline investigations to the audits and evaluation on Philadelphia, Pittsburgh,

and other Regional Offices across the United States hurting each veteran's quality of life by claims being shredded, lost, or misplaced folders due to lack of storage, mismanagement, and or lost in the mail from 1993 to 2017 (Halliday, 2015). The only difference today is the Veterans Benefits Administrations have the electronic portal to process the disability compensation claims through a website for accountability.

What the society needs to understand is that not all military veterans file a disability claim for benefits. Most of our military veterans will used their home loan certificate and college education benefits, and then not filed for disability claims because they might not have received any bodily injuries during active-duty service. Imagine having all military veteran service members claim one or more physical symptoms today, and the Veterans Benefits Administration would be in the backlog for eternity.

It is crucial to watch out for biased and prejudiced questions and answers (Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Cooper, 2012; Creswell, 2009; Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002; Frankfort-Nachmias, 2015).

RQ1: What barriers do U.S. veterans perceive with processing their claims on the Department of Veterans Affairs www.va.gov website?

RQ2: How will the inconsistent numbers of pending disability claims affect the veterans' quality of life?

RQ3: Has the process to obtain veterans' benefits getting harder or easier with eBenefits portal?

In Chapter 4, the researcher gathered the answers from each military veteran's interviews; unless a questionnaire needs to fill out due to coronavirus pandemic on how

they feel about their quality of life while waiting for rate percentage and payout of money. The background articles from all OIGs' investigation and audit recommendations and hearings from both Senate and House of Veterans Affairs Committees advise that either Secretary of Veterans Affairs or Veterans Benefits Administration did not follow through on organization and managed the service members disability claims from 1978 to present.

During the study, it is essential to pay attention to biases and prejudices with queries and responses (Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Creswell, 2009; Cooper, 2012; Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002; Frankfort-Nachmias, 2015). Trochin (2006) provided excellent advice when the investigator asked the question, it can be updated to another subject to meet the design.

After reading Creswell and Poth's updated edition (2018), qualitative case study decided to use historical, explanatory, and contrasted groups designs by Campbell & Stanley (1963) and Frankfort-Nachmias et al. (2015). The topic is dealing with how Veterans Benefits Administration staff are managing disability compensation claims due to the lack of advertisements on VA Benefits; a stimulus-response relationship would protect the researcher from biases and political tolerance (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015; McKinney, 2017).

By using supported historical data from VBA Monday Morning Workload Reports, Board of Appeals Reports, and State Veteran Commission of DMVA in Pennsylvania, it will benefit the studies in real-life settings using probability samples. Frankfort-Nachmias et al. (2015) provided internal validity with unethical or

impossible study situations. Frankfort-Nachmias et al. (2015) determined it is essential to follow the research logically or theoretically under causation.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, my personal and professional relationship as a military veteran will not jeopardize this study on veterans' quality of life. The blueprint foundation will establish the problem of solutions (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015). This study will shine a light more on how the Veterans Benefits Administration lacks in its responsibility for military veterans' lives.

The researcher needs to remind themselves that they are here to get responses to interviews if required. Refer the veteran to site VSO for assistance with their claims. The researcher needs to control the groups with a precision matching from biases and to prejudice (Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002; Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015; Trochim, 2006).

Methodology

It is tough to predict the future on military veterans' quality of life issues. The researcher hopes the case study will resolve the problems from each interviewee's experiences in processing their service-connected disability claim unless coronavirus pandemic starts interfering with one-on-one interviews; then interviews will then take place virtual on Zoom and Skype. If pandemic interferes for some reason, then the researcher will utilize SurveyMonkey with the interview questions if virtual interviews is unavailable due to lack of internet capability. Creswell (2009, 2018) explains the use of

interview discussions would provide a veterans' real-life experiences while waiting for approval and or denials from disability compensation claims and appeal cases.

For this methodology, the qualitative study will discover the effects that help both the Pennsylvania DMVA and Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) to assist the veterans' organizations in finding a better way to reach all veterans, instead of concentrating on the website to get the word out to veterans. Currently, the VBA relies on the veteran's organizations and fellow veterans to update veterans who do not have the internet on recent changes to their benefits.

Participant Selection Logic

The researcher will utilize the IHMC CmapTools (2014) by selecting veterans from the mid to late Baby Boomer, Generation X and Y, and Millennial's eras to build the scales and parameters. Trochim (2006) states it better by know your funds and the best cost-effective way. That is why the study will use fellow military veterans from the state of Pennsylvania. Based on the total of 819,185 military veterans as of September 30, 2017, the researcher plans to get at least 20 or so one on one interviews, if possible. The researcher will concentrate on all ages from 18 to 70 that had joined all military services. The reason behind the age of 18 is that they had recently fought in the war of Iraq and Afghanistan. The researcher would love to reach out to the veterans that participate in the VA Pension and Compensation under Facebook, but they are all over the United States. Around July 2018, the researcher had the opportunity to spend some time with Veteran Service Officers at Disabled American Veterans in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania. It was incredible, and the researcher noticed more Vietnam veterans

coming in to get their disability claims processed. It is one reason the researcher plans to go back to the Baby Boomer era veterans who fought in the Vietnam War; the goal is to examine their choices of whether to process disability claims in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, or early 2000s. The researcher feels it would be more sensible to concentrate on service members who joined between 1980 and the present day since the backlog was more noticeable after the Gulf War era. The investigator expects to see more participation from veterans in the late Baby Boomer era, as well as Generation X and Y because they fought in the Gulf War and the recent big wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

At this time, the researcher has no plans to do any telephone interviews because the body language and facial impressions of the individual during the communication phase would not be visible. Participants' body language will show the researcher if the military veteran is telling the truth about their situation or providing a response that the researcher would like to use for the research study. Furthermore, the researcher would be unable to assess if the participant is answering the questions quickly or dishonestly to get off the phone. When a veteran would like to do a phone interview due to circumstances at the site locations, the researcher will provide Zoom and or Skype information so the researcher can see the veteran's body language.

The researcher will concentrate on the interviews with military veterans who filed a service-connected disability claim or did not make any benefit claims. At the beginning of the survey, the researcher will describe the purpose of the case study. Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasize that researchers and team members need to pay attention to ethical issues related to respect for persons: concern for welfare and justice. If one of

these ethical issues has a violation, the researcher's creditability will be tarnished. The researcher will help the veteran to relax during the session. It is vital to select the best questions for audience (participants) that will allow you to succeed (Trochin, 2006).

The researcher will provide a copy of the results to all the Veteran Service Officers (VSOs) who help at each site location to support excellent communication with fellow veterans in their area. The researcher hopes to review the results of the questionnaire with the Director, Department of Military, and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) and Pennsylvania State Veterans Commission. It will allow DMVA to see that their NSOs and VSOs are doing a decent job or a lack of job responsibility with their military veterans.

Instrumentation

The research data for the instrumentation will be historical data from the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) Monday Morning Workload Reports (MMWR); Board of Appeals Reports, and PA State Veterans Commission that is available from the PDMV public domain website. The VBA MMWR was established when Congress requested data collection from each Veterans Regional Area Office from 2004 to present (VBA, 2014). The reporting benefit claim numbers from both the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh Veteran Affairs Area Regional Offices had been inconsistent since 2007 to the present that shows counties with different numbers from the PDMV report. Both PDMV and MMWR will have examples in Chapter 4 and appendixes. The other data collection numbers are from the hearing reports of both the Secretary of Veteran Affairs and the

Director of the Veterans Benefits Administration that were presented to both House and Senate Veteran Affairs.

The Office of Inspector General and Audit of Evaluations investigations from 1993 to the present will show no change from the recommendations. The most recent, in February and March 2017, indicated the staff still has issues with training and entering the data into the database. From all the investigations and evaluations, the VA still has ethical, leadership, and management issues that affect the service-connectivity compensation claims process. The VA and Veteran Health Administration updated their ethical program to IntegratedEthics (IE), dated October 23, 2018, which replaced the VHA IntegratedEthics of June 16, 2009. Even though it is more for VHA employees, the VA has incorporated it with VA core values. One thing the researcher will not manage is unethical practices or allegations that will cause harm to the study.

When looking at disability compensation, society will look at why we care if veterans should be receiving such a benefit. The reason behind this question is our Founder Fathers from Continental Congress felt that our American military soldiers that defend our country should receive service-connected benefits for injuries or illness that incurred or were aggravated during active military service. The four interrelated components that any research project needs to pay attention to is:

- Sample Size
- Effect Size
- Alpha Level (significance level)
- Power (McKinney, 2017; Trochim, 2016)

When a researcher uses all four components, it allows the maximum level of ability to detect the effect (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015; Trochim, 2016). The researcher needs to know if the power does exist given programmatic, logistical, or financial constraints on other components. As such, researchers will concentrate on a veteran as their purposeful sample. Based on Creswell & Poth (2018), the researcher will explore the five approaches “locating a site or purposeful sample, gaining access and making rapport, collecting data, recording information and storing data, and exploring field issues (pg. 5171 online books).” Most veterans have had a poor experience with case managers at Veteran Area Regional Offices of both Philadelphia and Pittsburgh areas that points out the research problem based on OIG reports. The General Accounting Office Audit and Evaluations investigations and VA OIG investigation says from 1993 to present had shown senior officials to office managers that collaborate with Veterans Service Representatives with lack of leadership and management skills at Department of Veterans Affairs, and Veteran Area Regionals Offices of Philadelphia or Pittsburgh will point out the research problem.

Creswell & Poth (2018) and Plummer (1983) made an interesting point that the researcher needs to have an appropriate filing system to store all the data collected, narrative life histories, digital recordings, hard and soft copies of veterans’ responses to the questionnaires, and all literature review articles. The researcher knows how important it is to have everything backed up. Davidson (1996) recommends storing all research studies in a backup database in case of a computer crash or thumb drives accidentally get lost or destroyed. Interviewees must know that their audio recordings are

protected from invasion and sign a consent form with an agreement between the researcher and interviewee. Additionally, the researcher or one of the team members will print out the rough transcript listing with all the interview protocol. Each meeting will concentrate on being anonymous by using data numbers on the data collection matrix list.

Pilot Study

The pilot study is a qualitative paper that will show how veterans' quality of life has been productive by not receiving their benefit disability on time. There have been studies surrounding veterans on health-related issues, education, policy changes, work, and other quality of life cases. This qualitative case study deals are with the Pennsylvania military veterans that decide to submit a service-connectivity compensation disability claim from 1960 to the present or did not submit benefit claims. The military veterans in Pennsylvania have two separate locations in the Philadelphia Veteran Area Regional Office that manage mid-state to East Coast with Delaware, New Jersey, and Pittsburgh Veteran Area Regional Office from the west side of mid-state area. Even though the Department of Veterans Affairs and Veterans Benefits Administration Office changed the policies with their e-Benefits portal, the system today states first come first serve so that any VARO can pull the benefit claim from the gateway to take quicker action. This policy change has made a minor change with the backlog. The researcher will concentrate only on the Pennsylvania military veterans up to 20 or so purposeful samplers to do the study. The readers might think this is a substantial number, but the researcher feels the number is too low for Pennsylvania since it is one of the largest states that have military service members fighting to keep peace and protect the United States.

The data collection for the case study and analysis might assume to two to three months. Additionally, the researcher has a concern about the cost to travel around Pennsylvania collecting the data. The researcher has a few ideas to resolve this problem by reaching out to fellow nonprofit organizations for assistance.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The key to recruitment, participation, and data collection is to have ethical protocol procedures in place for the researcher and team members that volunteer to assist in the qualitative case study. The ethical protocol procedures will help with bias issues; gender, religious, military veterans that have bias issues against VA for mistreatments at medical centers. The application process for the veterans that did not get the respect they deserve, especially the veterans that fought the Iraq and Afghanistan war. Before the researcher sets out for data collections, they need to work with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Walden University. Due to coronavirus pandemic, I change my purposeful sampling to 20 or so one on one interviews by using Zoom, Skype, or in person if area of facilities will allow guest to enter their facilities.

From where will data be collected? The researcher plans to reach out to veterans' support groups National Service Officer (NSO) and Veterans Service Officer (VSO) from DVA, VFW, American Legions, and counties Veteran Service Officers to make special arrangements to utilize their facilities inside or outside. If, for some reason the coronavirus pandemic gets worse by the time I start collecting the data, the researcher will utilize the Zoom and Skype to do one on one interviews; if that does not work SurveyMonkey will be use with same questions of the one-on-one interviews. This will

only be use as back-up to ensure veterans can participate in the research case study.

Before each location visit, the investigator will reach out to media (radio, local news channels, and newspapers) to get the word out (advertisements) of a research study that involves military veterans. The researcher knows this case study is essential for all military veterans to have their opportunity to speak their mind on this situation.

Creswell & Poth (2019) pointed out essential points on ethical issues that can damage the study by failing to gain permissions by Information Review Board and purposeful sampling individual. It is imperative to learn recording agreements by sample signing consent form. The researcher needs to have a back-up protocol when issues arise in the field (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Below are significant steps for the researcher to follow while conducting a qualitative case study:

Who will collect the data? All data will be collected by investigator and volunteers that wanted to help the investigation team and network with fellow veterans. The researcher expects to do some of the data collections by themselves at local establishments from home area residence.

The frequency of data collection events. The researcher plans to do at least one to two months of collecting data to reach 20 or so military veterans across Pennsylvania. The data collection events will be at least one to two days at each site location to meet the number of military veterans that fought for the United States of America. There will be some site locations (towns or counties) that will only need one day.

Duration of data collection events. Each data collection event will be eight hours each day with an hour break for lunch. If there is some inclement weather on the day of

the event, the researcher will decide at each site to see if a room can be utilized at the facility. If not, the researcher will reschedule the event for another day or add a day.

How will data be recorded? The researcher plans to have an interview question be placed on a computer in case the veteran has issues speaking during the interview. If this happens, the researcher will place a password code on veterans' answers to the question. Once the veteran finishes his or her response to the questions, the researcher will print it out to give a copy to veteran. The researcher will download the veterans' answers to external drive front of the veteran and show the veteran that it will be locked up in a traveler safe. The researcher will prepare a protocol for this situation and any other issues that can exist during the interview and or survey. The researcher will review the total of interviews by the end of the first month to see if the researcher needs to reach out to VSOs to see if any of their constituents would like to participant in the research study.

The investigator plans to sit down with each participant before they leave to talk to them about any issues. If the researcher does not have the answers, direct them to go over to the VSO representative that is on-site. If, for some reason, the VSO is unavailable at the site location, they will ask for their personal information (Name, phone number, address, or e-mail) to get the information forwarded to them. Alternatively, the researcher or team member will look up the information on site for a military veteran.

The researcher plans to have a few new laptops on hand to do this kind of work.

Data Analysis Plan

The benefit is to use web-based platforms that Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested for data collection. The data analysis plan will allow the investigation team to manage their financial costs for travel, food, and support costs for data transcription, if needed (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The data analysis plan is to reach at least 20 or so purposeful samples (veterans') to person-to-person interviews across the state of Pennsylvania (Sampson (2004), cited in Creswell & Poth (2018)).

The researcher is hoping to get meetings with the Veteran Service Officers (VSO) and or National Service Officer (NSO) to support the study. Both VSO and NSO understand why veterans are so frustrated with the lack of communication from the Department of Veterans Affairs and support of the Veteran Regional Area Offices. The VSOs and NSOs receive phone calls, appointments, and unexpected visits without appointment.

The researcher plans to use NVivo coding for the interview transcripts. In the first cycle of coding, the researcher is planning to use attribute coding for the survey questionnaire. Both coding's will support the data collection on the phenomenological interpretation themes (as cited in Saldana, 2016; van Manen, 2016; Wertz et al., 2011). Saldana (2016) advises the researcher to develop their own data analytic coding methods. The SurveyMonkey will be used only for the interview questions if veterans cannot do interviews due to voice impairment from injuries and exported into SPSS to break down internal and external validity. The investigator is looking at using the CAQDAS program for managerial and organizational capabilities for attribute coded data (Saldana, 2016).

Additionally, the researcher plans to use Excel spreadsheets as a backup by exporting all data to the SPSS.

The researcher is hoping not to have any discrepant cases during the data collection. If there are any discrepant cases, the researcher will review each one professionally without any bias issues. In case of doubt, the researcher will reach out to the Chair and committee members for advice, and if, for some reason, they are not available, the researcher will reach out to Walden University for assistance.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

The researcher needs to have credibility with fellow veterans. By getting the reliability, the researcher will explain how hard it was to live with service-connected injuries and waiting for the benefit percentage rate to receive the allowance.

Moreover, tell why it is so crucial for them to apply for benefits if they have not done so already. There are a lot of military veterans who had not submitted claims into the system for one reason or another, but the most common goal is they hear a lot of bad stories from other veterans. One area the researcher will receive credibility is when they show the military veteran a secure location that no one else is around while filling in their answers or doing an interview. It will allow the veteran confidence to answer questions truthfully, and it will enable the researcher to feel comfortable if the veteran has medical issues.

At each site location, the researcher plans to have a Veteran Service Officer available for military veterans and family members. The researcher will provide contact

information to fellow veterans if they need assistance or point of contact to get them started with a disability claim. The researcher plans to have each military veteran sign up on log sheet with Name (optional), phone number (optional), address (optional), or email address (optional) if they would like a copy of the interview translation, or if they want to review it for accuracy, outcome of data collection, or even talk if they need additional assistance with VSO locations.

Transferability

The researcher will have protocols set up for data transferability. Responses for each questionnaire must match the field codes. Transferability is critical when code words from the field issues are not matching up with data collections (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The researcher will need to make a copy of figure 7.1 Data Collection Activities, page 5198 (Creswell and Poth, 2018) for accuracies in transferability.

The researcher plans to use the Dragon Naturally Speaking Program to transcribe each interview audio-recorder. The audio recorder will be kept in a brief case or travel safe. The researcher plans to use NVivo Coding to organize and analyze the interviews by providing small or large data analysis. If the interview data collection becomes limited because of coronavirus pandemic; the data collection might go to questionnaire. The questionnaire transferability would be under SurveyMonkey data base to ensure confidential identity.

Dependability

As the researcher of this qualitative phenomenological case study, it is vital to have a proper protocol and strategy in place. The first step is to ensure we have IRB

approval in the area for collecting data on veteran's experience with service-connected disability claims. Second is finding the best site locations for purposeful sampling (Creswell and Poth, 2018). In the third step, the researcher needs to have consent forms ready before veterans participate in interviews. Fourth is to ensure all participant answers will be anonymous by using Veteran 0001, etc. as identification. If there is time, show the veterans their responses will be secure in a computer-based file and assure them back-up drive is safe.

Confirmability

During data collection, the researcher and team members need to have a unique perspective on the outcome of the study. Everyone working on the research needs to double-check his or her work for inconsistency when entering data into the data systems. One misspelled word or entry can change the results, so the researcher will use the Dragon NaturallySpeaking program to transcribe the audio recorded interviews. The Dragon NaturallySpeaking program will ensure the objectively and reliably (Merriam, 2018) to eliminate any bias. Each transcribed conversation from the Dragon program will be forwarded to each interviewee to change his or her answers, as necessary. The interviewee will provide a confirmation or corroboration, who will also acquire confidence in the researcher.

Ethical Procedures

When a researcher decides to do a dissertation paper on any topic, they need to obey their moral beliefs by protecting the ethical decisions of right and wrong. The researcher will reach out to both the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB)

and the Department of Veterans Affairs to get authorization to use articles and data statistics that is on their public domain, if required. At this time, the researcher should not need approval from DVA to do a veteran interview since they are no longer serving in the military. Most of the military veterans in Pennsylvania served up to 19 years or less or completed their whole time of service with 20 to 30 years as a retired veteran. The researcher plans not to use any VA Medical Centers or Hospitals to do veteran interviews; they will all be at nonprofit veteran organizations or appropriate site locations. The researcher may plan to ask for senior-level departments (VBA, Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veteran Affairs) interviews, which might need DVA and IRB approval.

Plus, the researcher will reach out to Walden University Institution Review Board for approval of the number of participants for the case study. The researcher will need to provide a sharp 20 or so purposeful samplers, since most of the qualitative research requires minimum numbers.

The researcher will provide their name and e-mail address to participants that did interviews and questionnaires after completing one or both actions. It would allow the participants to notify the researcher if they decided not to use their responses and answers to the survey. The research study will obligate and understand why a purposeful sample does not want to participate in the study. It is where the researcher's credibility comes into play with the survey.

The IRB from Walden University will ask the researcher to obtain the letters that the researcher plans to write to each military nonprofit organization (DAV, VFW, The

American Legion, and Pennsylvania DMV office). It is to ensure the researcher obeys all Walden regulations and policies with student participation with well-known community organizations.

The researcher plans to use a survey program called SurveyMonkey website. One fundamental importance of using the SurveyMonkey website is the consent form in place before the participant is to take the survey. The consent form will provide participant anonymity and understand their identity will not be in jeopardy because the server is secure. Using the SurveyMonkey website, it will allow the researcher to obey the American Psychological Association guidelines when collecting the data of the website. If, for some reason, the SurveyMonkey website is offline at the site location, the researcher will explain how the participant data information is protected by securing a questionnaire and audio recorder. All the information will be secure in a safe for five years and then destroyed by proper destruction methods. The researcher will use every opportunity to protect ethical guidelines with privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity.

Summary

By utilizing both Hancock & Algozzine (2016) and Creswell & Poth's (2018) books, the researcher feels comfortable with Chapter 3. It is effortless for the researcher to fail with the research method and to collect the data when responses are not meeting the research questions. The researcher must pay attention to bias issues that might come between themselves and the veteran that is doing interviews. If, for some reason, the researcher had any problems at a site location, they need to notify their Chair, Committee Member, and Walden University Institutional Review Board. The researcher needs to

ensure they have responsible team members that have the back of the researcher and no bias issues during the Chapter 4 stage of collecting data and analyze the data for statistics. There will be times the researcher will be the only one performing interviews and getting questionnaires to fill out in small-town locations. The researcher might need to go in a different direction if Chapter 4 data analysis is proven there is no problem with the Department of Veterans Affairs handling service-connectivity compensation disability claims and the appeal backlog.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of the qualitative case study was to see how veterans' quality of life was managed when they were waiting for their rate percentage. The Walden University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved my application on 24 August 2020 (08-24-20-0575435), and it expired on 23 August 2021. The proposal was approved during the major COVID-19 pandemic that shut down the state of Pennsylvania for approximately 9 months. Each veteran participation identity was protected by using "Veteran" plus a numeral (Veteran 01). The data collection started with limited person-to-person interviews because the pandemic caused a fear to contract COVID especially with the older veterans. Getting closer to the holidays of 2020, the Governor of Pennsylvania started to shut down gathering locations with limitations to places outside of their homes.

The mixed demographics was important to have a variety of male and female veterans from early Boomers to Generation Z that serve in the military (Active/Reserves). When looking at themes for the study, military veterans discussed how they manage their quality of life, while waiting for an answer if their disability claim was approved with a rate percentage from zero to 100 % Permanent and Total Disability. When looking at the three research questions, each verbatim responses from 37 military veterans supported two main themes frustrations with the process and lack of reaching out to veterans that the do not know how to request for benefits.

RQ1: What barriers do U.S. veterans perceive with processing their claims on the Department of Veterans Affairs www.va.gov website?

RQ2: How will the inconsistent numbers of pending disability claims affect the veterans' quality of life?

RQ3: Has the process to obtain veterans' benefits getting harder or easier with eBenefits portal?

The military veteran recruitment for the study was hard in the beginning of September 2020, since Center for Disease Control and Prevention put out guidelines that no bulletin flyers will be placed on walls. These guidelines hurt the study since all the bulletin flyers were removed from American Legion and VFW facilities. The investigator thought creatively by using Facebook Friend request, Next-door Neighborhood website for Carroll Valley area, and Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Newsletter that was put out late January to end of February 2021. There were only three bulletin board flyers authorized to be placed at Harley Davidson Battlefield Gettysburg, DAV in Camp Hill, and Family Restaurant in Gettysburg for month of February 2021. The 37 veterans met the criteria of serving in the military as Marine Corps, Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, National Guard, and Public Health that supports the military overseas and stateside. The interview questions supported the research questions and helped to understand each military veterans' experiences on why they did and did not submit a disability claim immediately after they separated out. And to understand why they did not pursue the Appeal Board if they were disapproved on medical conditions and or did not agree with their rate percentage.

Pilot Study

One key impact to the pilot study became when Governor of Pennsylvania put restrictions into play with the COVID-19 pandemic. The restrictions caused issues with the in-person interviews that I wanted to see facial impressions on each question with military veterans' answers. One difference was using the videoconference (Zoom) interviews and in-person was the time available to do the interviews. The Zoom interviews only allow 45 minutes maximum, while in-person gave more time to 1 to 2 hours depending on availability of military veteran. By using the Zoom, it allows the interview to surpass my total of 20 to 37 military veterans. I did not use the Survey Monkey program for questionnaires like I initially indicated, since I was able to get around COVID restrictions put in place by the Governor of Pennsylvania and any CDC regulations using video conference. Because my funds were limited at the time of the data collection for the case study, used Trochim's (2006) advice on the best cost-effective way with COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

Research Setting

Each in-person interview's constant change due to COVID-19 restrictions that the Pennsylvania governor put out each week or monthly based on the positive cases. I was able to get 10 out of 20 interviews in-person at homes or isolated locations from October to December 2020. The pandemic started to change aggressively by the holidays when COVID-19 numbers were increasing to force a stay at home and travel restrictions in place. At the beginning of the study, I reached out to fellow military friends on Facebook and wrote on a social network called "The Neighborhood" Next-door Digest in

September 2020 to see if anyone would like to do a one-on-one interview. For each veteran that responded to me, I forwarded a consent form for review and consent to the discussion. Additionally, in early September, reached out to American Legion and VFWs to placed bulletin board flyers that were not allowed to be placed on their bulletin boards inside the facilities due to COVID-19 CDC regulations. The Governor of Pennsylvania started to shut down facilities that do gatherings with food establishments from mid-September 2020 to March 2021, unless they had driven-thru capability to use. The study was only halfway with my count, so reach out to Public Affairs office of the Department Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) Newsletter. The DMVA Newsletter reach out to all Pennsylvania veterans who signed up for the newsletter and received updated news. DMVA placed my request for study participation in the January 27, 2021, newsletter. I started to received phone calls and emails immediately each time the newsletter went out, with up to 5 to 7 veteran requests each week. Once request received, the consent forms were forwarded with Zoom invite to the end of February 2021. The in-person interviews lasted over 1 to 2 hours before the governor placed pandemic restrictions in place before the holidays in 2020. The interviews went to Zoom in January 2021 that last up to 45 mins to 1 hour. Each interviewee had the opportunity to opt-out anytime if they felt their privacy would not be protected from outsiders. After each interview, provided an DAV Service Officer named, address, and phone number to follow up on their disability claim if it is still pending.

Demographics

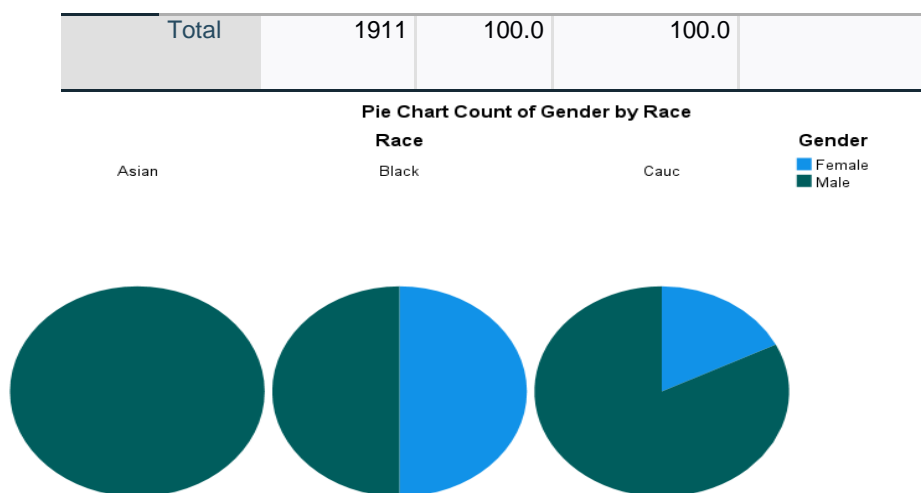
The demographics of the study were veterans from the birth year of 1946 to 1986. See figure 8 for a breakdown of each veteran. Each of these veterans agreed to interview once I forwarded the consent form with sample questions. Each veteran provided me a copy of their disability letter from Veterans Benefit Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs for proof of claim submission before interview. If they did not have a letter, the interview took place as they did not submit a claim and wanted to know why. At the time of the interview, I indicated that they were “Veteran 01 and so on” instead of using their name anywhere in the study. I provided my military experience and that I am also a veteran, so they relaxed and be honest with me on their answers to the questions. Then, asked about their military experiences before asking the questions. Of the 37 veterans, four of them were single. All 37 veterans gave me their true feelings and experiences about their disability claim process and quality of life before and after. It was essential to get a variety of veterans that participated in wars and peace-time service.

Figure 10

Demographic Profile of Military Veterans that participate in the study of The Damages of Outstanding Veterans Disability Compensation Claims

Race

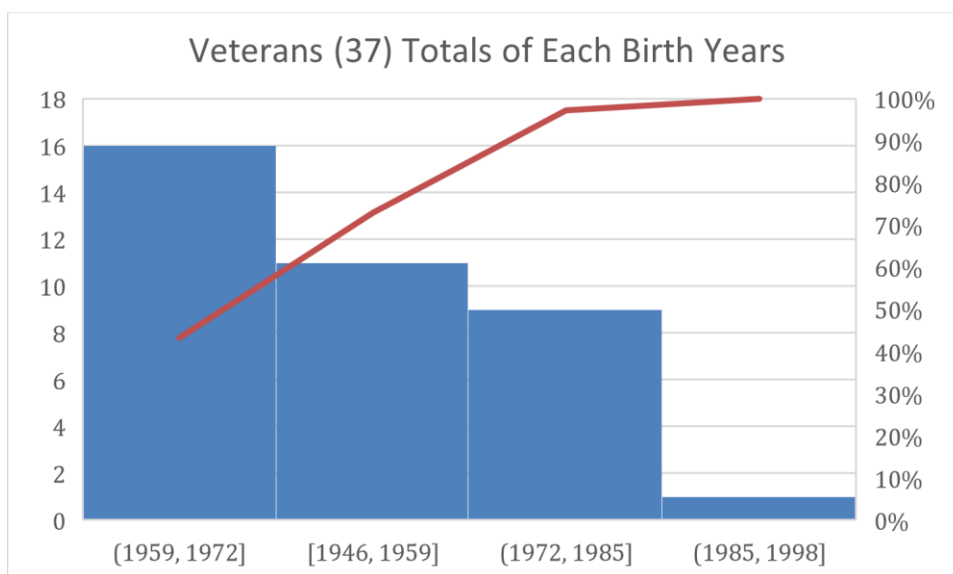
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1874	98.1	98.1	98.1
Asian	1	.1	.1	98.1
Black	2	.1	.1	98.2
Cauc	34	1.8	1.8	100.0



As seen on figure 11 the graph showed the birth years of a mid to late Baby Boomer, Generation X and Y, and Millennial eras based on the IHMC CmapTools (2014) to set the stage for the scales and parameters.

Figure 11

The birth year of each veteran that participate in the study



Data Collection

By the end of data collection on 28 February 2021, the study surpassed 20 to 37 Veteran samples. In the beginning of data collection, I was worried that I would not get anyone to do in-person because of COVID-19 pandemic. My first interview took place in mid-October when the positive numbers were steadfast going up in Pennsylvania. It was hard to get my military friends from Pennsylvania to participate. I ended up going to their house or other outside location that was limited to customers. The interviews were only halfway to my goal of 20 Veteran candidates when the Governor of Pennsylvania changed restrictions to stay home order; the in-person interviews went to one-on-one interviews by Zoom mid-January 2021. Each interview was audio-recorded, notes were written on question sheets, and then transcribed on an Excel spreadsheet. I made a folder for all documentation that consist of consent form, question worksheet, and copy of gift card that was given to each veteran. Some of the participates did not want a gift card, they were happy to help me with my study. All 37 Veteran folders, audio-recorded devices, and thumb drives are locked up in a combo safe box.

The responses to each question will be different based on hard copy or electronic submission through the eBenefits portal. The veteran's responses were recorded and transcript to word document before being cut and paste to an excel spreadsheet, divided up in three sections: Service-Connected Disability Claim, outcome of disability claim, and communication with Veterans Advocacy Support, Pennsylvania of Military and Veterans Affairs, and Veterans Benefit Administration. Once the data was input into an excel spreadsheet with the response, the information was entered in the SPSS program to

help with the demographics statistics and questions that specifically answer yes and no questions.

Data Analysis

After my proposal was approved during the pandemic, I was not sure if any military veterans would like to do an in-person interview for fear of catching the COVID-19 infection. I was lucky in the beginning of doing in-person interviews with over 1 hour up to 2 hours. The Zoom technology limits to 45 minutes, but I had the opportunity to use Facebook video for one that did not know how to use Zoom.

When I looked at my theories throughout the paper, the organizational and professional identity theory can help with the themes for a veterans' quality of life after submission of his or her claim application for benefits rate percentage and or pension. It was hard to determine specific code words when each interviewee provided their own opinion based on their experience with the process to get benefits with their health issues from active-duty service and United States Code 38 for determination of rating for veteran benefits. Throughout each interviewee's verbatim responses, a breakdown of code words from frustration, irritated, confusion, lack of respect from few veteran service officers, lack of understanding, and eligibility with filling out the forms as hard copy or using the electronic process called eBenefits portal. The lack of understanding on how to fill-out the claim questions with each injury and health issues, where to submit supported documentations and later resubmit it again because someone lost it before going to electronic submission in 2011. Eligibility "I did not know I was eligible to submit a claim for benefits" was indicated by many veterans that serve in Vietnam and The Gulf

War in 1993. Each military veteran provides supported information to all the questions that were asked during the interview, see Appendix A1 of the breakdown of questions. Based on figure 11 “*Graph showing the birth year of each veteran that did the data collection,*” the study was able to utilize all age groups from the late baby boomers, Generation X and Y, and Millennial eras to support the research questions.

Most of the veterans did not know there was a tremendously large backlog with service-connectively claims. Veteran 6 indicated *best friend issues discourage him from filing is because his friend was an Iraq veteran that had issues with processing his claim with various Veteran Service Officers that did not care in his eyes, and it took him over six years to reach 100 percent.* Veteran 14 indicated: “*I heard horrible stories from fellow veterans on how long it took for them to receive a response.*”

To support the theme *Frustrations with the process* is important to get each veteran opinion when responding to the first research question “What barriers do U.S. veterans perceive with processing their claims on the Department of Veterans Affairs www.va.gov website?” The responses that supported the theme are from the service-connectivity submission to the communication questions with Veterans Benefits Administration website and Veterans Support Advocacy groups, and Veteran Service Officers that support each county under the Pennsylvania Department Military and Veterans Affairs in Appendix A-AT16. Additionally, the responses are verbatim in Table 4 if the veteran submitted a service-connective claim after they separated out of service and how long did it take them to decide to submit and why. Second theme *Lack of reaching out to veterans that do and do not know how to request for benefits* is cover by

the communication questions. The waiting period to receive final word from Regional Offices that support the Field Operations Department under the Veteran Benefits Administration if their disability and or pension claim was approved with a rate percentage from zero to 100 percent Permanent and Total Disability or denial. One of the last questions to each interviewee was “Did they know that Department of Veterans’ Affairs updated their website in February 2020?” Each one provided a different response, but Veteran 31 provided a perfect response “These systems do not communicate. You start on one site then go to another site, then must go back to find out status then go back to enter info, and worse of all when you call for assistance one is managed by one organization and the other is overseen by another and they do not cross talk. I had this as a major issue, and I know your study does not reflect this but as a woman with a name change. It is awful and adds to the frustration and just makes me want to stop and come back later or get even more frustrated.” Effective sometime in December 2021, the Department of Veterans’ Affairs indicated in their last Vantage and Newsletter, they are going to one password essential to reach all the supported websites.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

What was the critical credibility of the study allowing the Veterans the opportunity to see example questions by forwarding the Consent Form before the interview? Most Veterans requested additional information from the survey by calling or e-mailing back before accepting the interview. During the one-on-one consultation, I listened to their responses and discussed the changes that Veteran Benefits

Administration was doing to turn claims around quicker. Based on Walden's Institutional Review Board guidelines, I followed the integrity and privacy guidelines for each participant interview.

Transferability

In the beginning of data collections, I was extremely limited due to shutdowns with restaurant, entertainment locations, and stay at home restrictions. I was able to get all one-on-one video-conference interviews completed during the COVID-19 Pandemic by using Zoom. As the researcher, I was the only one doing the data collecting due to COVID-19 restrictions in state of Pennsylvania. That limited the protocols to be in place.

The transferability was easier by doing the interviews by researcher only, since the numbers were limited to 20 but exceeded to 37 by end of February 28, 2021. The protocols went from in-person to video conference calls due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions in Pennsylvania. Prior to each interview, reviewed Creswell and Poth (2018) Figure 7.1 Data Collection Activities for proper transferability. In the middle of conducting interviews, my Dragon Naturally Speaking Program crashed with a hard drive failure on a travel laptop, so I had to use audio recorders, with voice recorder from phone as backup, and Zoom from mid-January to February 28, 2021. It was easier to put together an Excel spreadsheet to keep track who, when, where (in-person and or videoconference), and date for gift card. Additionally, I added the interview questions and answers to help with the import into the SPSS program to support the data analysis and graphs for study.

All the transcripts were transcribed on to an Excel spreadsheet that was stored on a thumb drive and external backup that was placed in a small security box case in business office. I did not need to use SurveyMonkey since I was able to do interviews through Zoom. In Chapter 3, I mentioned it was important to use code words from the field issues during data collections (Creswell and Poth, 2018). It was extremely hard to have consistent code words for each question because each veteran responded in their own words.

Dependability

The COVID-19 Pandemic that is still going on today put a damper on the first few months after I got approval from the IRB in late August to continue my data collection. One thing Creswell and Poth (2018) did not have any advice on issues with medical emergencies. One protocol set was wearing masks in each veteran's home per Central Disease Control requirements and regulations. The locations for each purposeful sample were minimal by using 12 Veterans' houses for in-person interviews. The rest were on Zoom since the Governor of Pennsylvania put more restrictions on travel in January and February 2021. All purposeful samples signed their consent form before in-person and or Zoom interviews. After each interview was over, I showed each Veteran that their Consent Form, Question worksheet, and any other materials were given to be placed in a folder with their symbol code "Veteran 01, etc."

Confirmability

Once I received confirmation that my proposal was approved in late October 2020, I started to reach out to veterans' facilities to use for interviews. Due to the

Coronavirus pandemic, I decided to do all my interviews myself instead of having a team help me with the interviews. All my facilities were on hold due to rising numbers of Coronavirus cases in the state of Pennsylvania. Due to the restrictions that the Governor of Pennsylvania put out in mid-December 2020 that all food facilities were closed for in-house services but outdoor were allowed with masks. All the in-person interviews stopped because everyone was scared to leave their home unless the location was very isolated. The interviews were done by voice recorder and phone recorder to ensure the conversations were the same. By mid-January 2021, I had to reexamine on how to get more veterans to do interviews, so I decided to reach out to Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs Newsletter that gets sent out to veterans that requested it by e-mail. I started to received e-mails from veterans to do interviews by Zoom. The Dragon Naturally Speaking program crashed on a laptop during one of the transcriptions from audio recorder. The Zoom interviews were recorded and downloaded to be transcribed by Business Word program on my laptop. Then, I went ahead and downloaded all voice recorder notes again to my new laptop to allow Business Word to transcribe audio recorder interviews. That saved me a lot of time and money from purchasing another Dragon Naturally Speaking program. All the transcript notes were placed on an Excel spreadsheet to allow me to use certain columns for tables and developed figures with SPSS program. Plus, I printed all transcripts and placed in each veteran's folder.

Study Results

After getting the demographic questions out of the way, the first section of questions was related to if the veteran submitted a disability claim after they separated from the service. Once the question was answered “yes” or “no,” the questions asked continued to understand why not; was it because of the backlog or another reason; and then to see if they submitted a paper form or electronic portal. After the first section of questions of service-connected claims, then went on to the second section on the process of results to appeal questions. The last section of the questions was the communication with Veteran Service Officers of Advocacy groups to Veterans Benefit Administration websites. The results of the study were from the 37 military veterans from all generation groups that were specified in Chapter 3. I understand my first research question pertained to the barrier issues that military veterans had with processing their veteran benefits; however, we need to know first if a service member decided to submit immediately after getting out. Based on some of the veterans’ responses from the Vietnam War and first part of the Gulf War called “Operation Desert Storm,” they did not know if they were eligible to submit a claim. These responses were the perfect scenario of lack of communication from the States, Department of Veterans Affairs, and Veterans Advocacy Groups, for example Veterans of Foreign War (VFW), American Legion, American Veterans (AMVETS) and Disabled American Veterans (DAV), and some others that did not know existed at the time when working on dissertation. It was not until I talked to Veteran 30 that indicated me about Act 66 that Pennsylvania started in December 2007; to provide grants to veteran organizations to help veterans with their

service-connectivity disability claim and getting their deserved benefits. The PA Act 66 was established on December 12, 2007, to support Veterans of Foreign War (VFW), American Legion, American Veterans (AMVETS) and Disabled American Veterans (DAV) and four more groups called Vietnam Veterans, Keystone Paralyzed, Jewish War Vietnams, and Military Order of the Purple Heart had Veteran Service Officers attached to them to help veterans with their benefits (66/2021). As of today, only five veteran's advocacy groups were doing benefit claims with 67 counties across the state of Pennsylvania.

The Outcome of Service-Connected Disability Claim

The first section questions were under the "Service-Connected Disability Claim," most of the responses would indicate "No" to question four, "Did you submit your service-connectivity claim immediately after you go out," but 17 responded "yes" within six months or less. Of the 17, some of them had submitted multiple claims for increase in rate percentage of 100 percent and lower. The ten "nos" were from the Vietnam War era, Operation Desert Storm, and veterans that only served one to two tours before Iraq-Afghanistan Terrorism Conflict (2001). I was not surprised with the "no's" because the Department of Defense did not start the Transition Assistance Program to help military service members to understand the process from military to civilian life and how to submit a service-connectivity claim for medical and injuries service during active duty until 1991. The Veteran Advocacy Support Groups were using the word of mouth of veterans that submitted disability claim already. If you were not part of a veteran chapter

like VFW, American Legion, Elks, and AMVETS before 1991, most of the veterans did not know who to turn to for help with their service-connectivity claim.

After question four was answered with a “yes” or “no” response, I followed up with another question, “What year did you submit your first or multiple claims?” It was essential to know who and when each veteran did or did not submit a claim to understand if their quality of life came into factor either financially or economically. We all knew it was tough times for Vietnam Era and Operation Desert Storm veterans returning from wars when their jobs were given to someone else while serving their country. It was more challenging for veterans returning home with limbs missing and issues from biological and chemical warfare agents in their systems that caused more problems that the United States Code 38 had not listed as symptoms for veterans to claim.

Table 5

Did you submit a service-connectivity claim? What year, and how long does it take to decide?

Veteran #	Year Separate	RQ4: Did you submit your service-connectivity claim immediately after you go out? Yes or No	RQ4A: If yes or no, what year did you submit?	RQ4B: How long did it take you to decide that you need to submit your disability claim?
Veteran 1	2005	No	2012	When my health started to have issues

Veteran 2	2011	No	2017	I submitted my first claim a year or two after I got out of Marine Corp in 2009 before my mom passed away in October 2010. I tried to file after I got out of Marine Corps. When things got too bad for me to manage it myself. The physical pain and PTSD.
Veteran 3	1983	No	N/A	N/A
Veteran 4	2003	Yes	2009	N/A
Veteran 5	1970	No	I submitted my claim three years ago - 2017	I did not use any VA benefits until about three years ago. I was paid for my first pair of hearing aid \$6000 or something like that out of my own pocket. And guys kept saying why don't you use the VA? I said Well, I do not want to drive the whole way to Lebanon to see doctors and VA representatives. So, I paid for my first pair of hearing aids. They only lasted a couple of years. I took him back to the where I bought him. The guy said we charged \$500 just to put him in our hand not to fix them. Just to take him. I said I am going to try the VA. So, I made an appointment, wanted you, went to whole story. I went there, went to the VA and Lebanon never filled out any. Yes, I did. Way back near the end of the war, I filled out the form at Camp Hill. That would cover me if any Agent Orange issues came up in the future and nothing did. That is the only time I ever went to the VA until about three years

ago. I went to get a pair of hearing aids and he said, oh, you are a new guy. Well, you wear glasses, why don't you let us check your eyes? I said OK they said have you ever seen one of our psychologists? I said no, I did not think I needed to, but there was a time when I needed to, but that was when I was early. Not long after I was out. You know? Drugs and Anger, that sort of thing. So, there is a bunch of see one of our psychologists, so I did top join casual conversation. He did what questions he was asked, and I did not. But answered everything honestly. That was in Lebanon I believe. And he sent me to another psychologist in Harrisburg. Then a couple of months later they sent me to another one in Baltimore. Then they sent me to one in Harrisburg again. So that was four. And then, uh, this accidentally sent me to a fifth one. He was not aware, he said I already did you. What do you want? I said, well, here is the paper. the VA said be here. I do not know what I just do not answer questions he said well how's life going? You know you talked to my wife now for a while but no issues to address specifically. And that was five appointments. I got a form in the mail or email, or something said you are for mental disability. And I said,

				well, it is quite interesting. I like. The disability part because that means money. And since my brutal poor childhood, I have always liked, money worked hard, retired. But at any rate, so I now get. Disability and hearing. That is the truth about sticking by it.
Veteran 6	2018	No	No issues	Did not submit a claim
Veteran 7	1974	No	2018. Agent Orange symptoms	Well, after I talked to the doctors at the VA clinic. About a month. So well, number one, I do not think I am entitled to him and #2 I do not think I have any injuries or qualify for that. He said you would be surprised. Go ahead and fill it out so we filed for hearing loss. My diabetes and my heart attack. And it all came back denied. Yeah, and I was not allowed consideration under Agent Orange. Because I was not in the security forces at Utapao. And at that time, Thailand was not unless you were in security. Thailand was not considered under the blanket. Agent Orange consideration.
Veteran 8	1973	No. I did not think I was eligible	2015. Physical exam started in 2016.	No, immediately after that, no, no, no. Eventually after I am sorry. Yes, I just wanted to be out, so I did not do anything. The biggest reason at the time was confusion about the program. I did not understand the program. I had the same thing with the college trying to get the

				benefits there. Did not understand the program and it was just overwhelming. So, uhm. I did not, I did not use those benefits in 1973. I went back to College in 1980-81 at Penn State and then I went through all the process and got all of it.
Veteran 9	2010	Yes	2010	Prior getting out. Per new Transition Assistance Program, all service members are requested to submit claim six months prior to leaving
Veteran 10	1984	No	1980	I did not even know it was a veteran until my son got shot. I did not know I had any benefits. It was when my boys started there is in 2009.
Veteran 11	2011	Yes	2011-1st	It was about three months after I separate from service
Veteran 12	2020	Yes	2013-2nd	Prior getting out. Per new Transition Assistance Program, all service members are requested to submit claim six months prior to leaving. Or no, I submitted my stuff as under the benefits before discharge program, so technically it would kicked off the day that. I was out. Unfortunately, I was retiring during COVID timeframes and none of the appointments that were supposed to happen prior to, well. Now I have two appointments that were supposed to happen before I got out happened.
Veteran 13	1986	No	2003	20 years later

Veteran 14	2005	No	Within a year of 2005	N/A
Veteran 15	1985	No	Not Submitted	N/A
Veteran 16	2004	Yes	2004	N/A
Veteran 17	1991	No	2015	For one, I would say I did not really know anything about it. And I got out and got a Job and just continued with my life. I am going to say the city I am from. It is not a very, uh, not a whole lot of veterans here. Not a whole lot of veteran understanding in my family or circle of friends, so I figure I just got out of the military. I am done. Move on with your life.
Veteran 18	1994	No	May-16	I did a physical in 2014 for Operation Desert Storm when I received documentation from VA. It was after that when I received more information from VA about medical issues that other Operation Desert Storm veterans claim; so, I decided to submit my medical conditions in May 2016.
Veteran 19	2007	Yes	2010	I did submit my claim first claim.
Veteran 20	2010	Yes	2010. Submitted before retiring Dec 2009	N/A
Veteran 21	2002	No	2001-Medical Hold 2004	
Veteran 22	2002	Yes	2013	Part of my separation process. Checklist TAP exit physical - encourage Louisiana
Veteran 23	1979	Yes	1979-Medical Discharge	At the time, I was satisfied with 20 percent
Veteran 24	2013	No	2010	It only took 10 months to figure I needed to put a claim

Veteran 25	2014	Yes	1st-1993 2nd-2014 3rd 2017	N/A
Veteran 26	2012	Yes	Within six months before I got out	I submitted my claim with VFW representative that represent the VA. I walk in with a 5-inch binder of medical records and representative went through the record by each page. He submitted a claim with 16 different ailments that I did not even possible that work in my favor.
Veteran 27	1990	No	Nov-20	So, like 30 years later. It was November of or either October or November of 2020. So, I know there are other things you know I have a lot of problems with my shoulders and a couple other things, but I right now I would. The hearing is the biggest thing because you know, I constantly ask my wife to repeat herself and I am in a class and you know, it is hard to hear my kids sometimes so.
Veteran 28	1971	Yes	1972	N/A
Veteran 29	2003	No	2019	It took me 16 years to decide after I served in the Marine Corp from 1996 to 2001 got out and went into the Army from 2001 to 2003. I served over Bosnia. You know I was not aware of my diagnosis until 2008. A way of thinking that you know what happened to me was not so bad and I do not need to apply a lot of other guys. Had it worse and not until I started really losing my ****

Veteran 30	2000	Yes	2000	<p>at work and not even being able to work that I finally apply. I guess is an effective way to explain it.</p> <p>Submit two months after I retired. I did not know anything about it when I came out of service. I went to the VA for help, and they would not help me, so I hated them, and I did not go back for like.</p>
Veteran 31	1991- Navy Rest 2009	Yes	2006	<p>I ended up refiling after getting out of the military on a medical discharge. At that time, the process was separate and thus I had to file after I was discharged unlike it is done today.</p>
Veteran 32	2014	Yes	2014	<p>Veteran decided to submit during the TAP process.</p>
Veteran 33	2006	Yes	2006	<p>It was part of the discharging process or the ETS process at Fort Campbell Kentucky, so I was medically discharged and so it was like part of the check the block system. So, you sat down with the VA Representative, they went over your file and then they compiled whatever they thought was acceptable. Unless you had anything that you disagreed with and then they would submit it through and from that they gave me just 10% for my ankle and 10% for my knee. Uhm, even though my medical record was in two sections. It was like 2/2 folders thick at that time. I did not know anything about filing your</p>

Veteran 34	2020	Yes and No	1996/2014	<p>claims, so. Lack of knowledge was bliss when he got loose and slipped behind. I thought a lot of time that there were worse people out there than me that needed it more.</p> <p>Well, I tried. And actually there when I got back from the Gulf War, I was having some issues and I brought them up with the VA. But because we were in the reserves and because the Gulf War did not last that long, they just said Oh well, nothing you know they are not seeing anything that was before they produced the presumptive issues and of the Gulf War.</p>
Veteran 35	2010	yes	2010	Veteran decided to submit during the TAP process.
Veteran 36	1987	No	2016	Yeah, 2016, probably in that range. Probably when I started, uh the beginning of the process. OK. I have two in the works that was the one that got settled. I think back in 2017 and I have two others in the process of separate phases. Took me 50 years
Veteran 37	1970	No	2020	

Note. This table is combined responses for Question four A through C from each verbatim interviewee. The bold areas are key areas of issues with the quality of life and changes that Veteran Benefits Administration did with Department of Defense on TAP.

When I asked question five, “Provide me your reason why you decided not to submit a claim after you completed your time in service or later in years?” I received

variety of responses that surprised me. The investigator was not surprised when some of the veterans indicated “they did not have any injuries during time in service,” so in their minds, they were not qualified to receive any veterans’ benefits. There was seven Vietnam Veterans indicated they had to immediately start work to support their family. Plus, each one said the same thing “they thought it was only for the veterans that lost a limb or damaged organs from biochemicals: this wants we call lack of communication to our veterans.

Table 6

Provide the reason why they decided not to submit a claim after they completed their service or later in years.

Veteran #	Year Separate	Wars Serve In	RQ5A: Would you please provide me your reason why you decided not to submit a claim after you completed your service or later in years?
Veteran 1	2005	Operation Desert Storm Iraq	I felt I did not have any injuries during my time of service, I did not need to submit a claim since my fellow brothers and sisters lost limbs and they need it more than me.
Veteran 2	2011	Iraq	I never had. I was never given a medical screening when I got out of the Marines there were multiple issues that I was having, and I had tried making reports on them and they were never heard. I went to VA Lebanon to get assistance on how to get my first submission resubmit from VA Representative. They refer me to County VSO, and he gave me tough time with an attitude issue. My Aunt step up to the plate and process it through e-Benefits portal. Then, she had me see DAV representative that push it through the system.
Veteran 3	1983	None	N/A
Veteran 4	2003	Humanitarian	Completed during my retirement process.

Veteran 5	1970	Vietnam	<p>I was not disabled like all my fellow Vietnam veterans had limbs taken off and they deserved it more than me. I was not disabled. And then I had an attitude that the VA everybody has a limited amount of funds. I will let the VA use their money for guys with no arms and no legs and that sort of thing. That has always been my attitude for close to 40 years I guess, and it still is. And then thirdly, the distance I had not dropped to Lebanon over time. I hate driving. I could have had a better job on my career at Mechanicsburg, but it did not like the drive, so I worked 2 miles from here. Which extremely fortunate for me. But yeah, for those three reasons, yeah.</p>
Veteran 6	2018	Iraq	<p>No because I, especially when I was deployed the most, I had happened was like I rolled my ankle, which was fine. By the time I got back. I mean, was one of those ones that I came back with all my fingers on my toes like everything else and I was like. OK, like my knees hurt a little bit, but I earned that. I got some more stories and at hand. That is about all I was expecting and like I was just like I do not really have any issues.</p>
Veteran 7	1974	Vietnam	<p>Initially, I did not think I had a disability claim. OK, and I have always had hearing issues since I got away from the airplanes and all. And I am finding out there was kind of a dumb thing to do, but I was entitled to anything. OK, the word entitlement does not sit well with me. I grew up in a small town on the western slope of Colorado and our ethics in that culture. Dictates that if we get something, we earn it. OK, and so entitlement and earning did not seem to fit right in the same sentence for me and I knew there were a lot of guys that came back with a lot more problems than I had, and they had a lot of trouble back then. Getting the benefits that they needed. And I figured little thing I was healthy I started established a career as a firefighter and a paramedic and I really did not think I needed it. That it was not something I needed play. I felt comfortable knowing that, you know, if I did not take it, somebody else would get it. So pretty much that was not altruism, I guess. That is, it.</p>

Veteran 8	1973	Vietnam, part of the Guatemala Canal issue	I needed to work when I returned from Vietnam. I did not think I was eligible 'cause I had the orthopedic thing. I was off duty. And the ear the hearing in my left ear because of the five-inch gun going off. That was duty related, but I had not documented that, and I wanted to get out. So bad that. I just wanted to get out. Again, there are guys that have problems and I understand that. Why would I want to, you know, get in the way of somebody getting processed Didn't understand the program and it was just overwhelming.
Veteran 9	2010	Did not deploy	N/A
Veteran 10	1984	N/A	I did not know I had any benefits. What I got out. I work independently from myself, and health insurance is expensive, so I thought it would apply to see if I any benefits were available, medical anything to me and I there are none. I am the bottom of the list 5G or whatever. The rating is the bottom of the list. They offered me nothing. I got a letter in the mail. Thank you for submitting. I went and saw the DSO or the Veterans Service Officer there in Cumberland County and I talked to him about it 'cause I was looking for better employment and he said, well, let's do this and he was less than helpful but he was a very rude, nasty man and it kind of turned me off to the whole ordeal. It discouraged me. He made me feel like because I did not serve in overseas or I did not do anything. It he made me feel like, oh you do not deserve that. So, I filed for my Knees at first and I got denied but then talking to him I told him like hey I got denied.
Veteran 11	2011	Stateside	
Veteran 12	2020	Iraq/ Afghanistan/ Korea	N/A
Veteran 13	1986	Grenada Invasion	Rude, nasty man and it kind of turned me off to the whole ordeal.
Veteran 14	2005	Iraq/ Afghanistan	From the best recollection now a lot of drug abuse, drinking, traumatic brain injury, PTSD from the best of my memory is I started the process when I was still in. Which was odd. When I got out in 2005 because they were not really

doing it. Uhm, however, it was a very, very half ass exam and all that good stuff.

Veteran 15	1985		<p>When I separated, I did not have any symptoms? Thought I was not qualifying since I did not have any lost limbs.</p>
Veteran 16	2004	Operation Desert Shield/Storm/ Iraq	<p>I submitted my claim immediately when I separated.</p>
Veteran 17	1991		<p>Well, a couple times after I had gotten married. We have a local VA here it is small, but we do have one, so I went there. I was working in a machine shop, and I went there to see if I had like free benefits or something I was missing out on. And they basically told me straight out well you have a good job. You have private insurance. We cannot help. And at that point I had I had washed my hands of the VA system. And at that same time or shortly after the Erie VA was kind of on a chopping block, getting ready to close. They were scaling down, unloading people, and we thought the VA would be leaving here. And that combination of things plus telling me Well you have your own insurance, you do not want to ask or need us. I was done with them. And that carried on for the next 20 years.</p>
Veteran 18	1994	Operation Desert Shield/Storm	<p>Well, I would say I was young and dumb, uh, most of the things you know, the headaches and joint and muscle pains that I had, I just assumed was from working and doing things like that and probably. In 2000 when at some point the VA started sending stuff out about, you know, Desert Storm veterans and you know the things and I you know it never occurred to me. I just I did it, you know, and then I started talking with friends and things that were having some of the same. Symptoms and issues that I was and that is when I started looking into it, so it was really just ignorance and you know, uhm again, did not realize that it was even available to me until the VA started sending stuff out, you know?</p>

Veteran 19	2007	Iraq (2)	I did have PTSD and that is what made me decide to go ahead and file.
Veteran 20	2010	Operation Desert Storm/Shield	N/A
Veteran 21	2002		My first claim was denied after being on Medical Hold. Submitted a 2nd with DAV that took closed a year. The DAV want me to do most of the work and then they get involved. And now with COVID it is a lot harder because before it was easier with me sitting down with the DAV person when I when they first got involved and doing it. Together, but now they are on. Once we got in, they sit back a little and leave it to you to keep doing it, and they get mail in between, so it is a lot harder.
Veteran 22	2002	Gulf War, Operation Desert Storm Operation Iraq Freedom	N/A
Veteran 23	1979		I requested an increase in 1981, 1998, and 2005.
Veteran 24	2013	Iraq/Afghanistan	Did not deserve to put a claim in.
Veteran 25	2014	Iraq	Just did not listen from what perspective.
Veteran 26	2012	Operation Desert Storm Afghanistan	N/A
Veteran 27	1990		Uh, because there I mean it was. There was nothing explained to us when we got out, it was just there you go, you know, here is the door. You know he has another thing, and my son is currently in the United States Air Force and my best friend who I served with his son last year got out of U.S. Navy. And we were talking about? Different things and you know. He and I both have hearing loss, and he was telling me about his son who they had took them through. You know, basically whenever getting out part of their out-processing was to put them in touch with VA and do all these things and you know they were collecting for I am taking. I got this buzzing. I have had this buzzing in my ears all my life since then, and so it finally just you know. And then I

			was speaking with a former service Present served with back in 85. Works for the VA in Las Vegas. I have not talked to him, probably 30 some years. And he, you know he had asked me, and I just thought, well at this point.
Veteran 28	1971	Vietnam	N/A
Veteran 29	2003	Bosnia	I was not aware of that, even though my dad was a service-connected veteran, he was 100% service connected and he, you know, fought with him for years. I just, you know, I just put it off to the side and I never thought about it much, you know. So, I was kind of clueless about the whole VA system. Diagnose 2008 with PTSD. Got worse in 2018. I did not get through TAP at Fort Dixon. Not at all. We were got home from Bosnia. We did all processing at Fort Dix; New Jersey and I do not remember a single person saying anything to us about. Go talk to somebody about your mental health or anything like that.
Veteran 30	2000	Vietnam Operation Desert Storm/Shield	I knew I had some issues but there were other veterans with missing limbs deserve it more. I only submitted injuries that I had during active duty and knew I probably will only receive some percentage.
Veteran 31	1991- Navy Rest 2009	Persian Gulf , Operation Desert Storm/Shield, Iraq/Afghanistan	I did not out of fear of denial. I knew that my navy time did not count. I also did not due to no records in my possession. I requested from VA on multiple occasions over the years but kept getting the same few pages. I even did so with help of VSO's and others. Finally, in 2018 I was able to get all my records (over 4000 pages). However, I was then able to put in claim for upgrade of the original 60% and am now 100% (remember started in 2006 final in 2020- but only backdated to 2019). There were in between upgrades from 60% to 70%; 70% to 90% then 90% to 100% permanent and total.
Veteran 32	2014	Afghanistan	N/A

Veteran 33	2006	Honduras	<p>I did not have the energy to do anything, let alone. You know life happens, and so I am genuinely. Yeah, over 2 1/2 years. Family was just like sat down and did it and of course it would not submit again. Called them they could see the Work orders still pending from 2 plus years ago. Go find all the form. Make sure that they were the up-to-date forms 'cause now it would not auto populate. Submit package in January 2021. In April of 2019, I also went online again, because they had updated the system and tried it again, uploaded everything. Did the whole kit and caboodle. It would not go up, but that time they would. It would let me print the forms directly from the site, so I did, and I got a response back that my forms were outdated like you were absolutely, and I am like that is funny because I am literally printing from your engine website like it auto populated the form for you. Absolutely, and so at that time, though I was in the hospital 'cause I might lose my leg due to injury, which is related to the service.</p>
Veteran 34	2020	Operation Desert Storm/Shield	<p>They had determined that I had dumb fibromyalgia, my well, not farmers. Then they called it Anglo spondylitis. And then long about 96 when they finally decided to come. Decide what it was.2014 before I file my claim. And only because I was frustrated with the VA system with my prior appointments and whatnot. So, being in the VFW kind of the people in the VFW talked me into doing it finally.</p>
Veteran 35	2010	Vietnam Operation Desert Storm/Shield	n/a
Veteran 36	1987		<p>It was several years. I mean, a lot of the symptoms did not happen right away. Nor did I even give it any thought. You know, I was still probably in my 20s, yet I had not reached my 30s yet. By the time I got out. So, some of this stuff, you know I had been out ten 15 20 years before even. I mean, I heard of the DAV and stuff like that, but I never really gave. Submitting a claim any thought and there really was not anything pressing, and some</p>

Veteran 37	1970	Vietnam	stuff gradually appeared and my hearing and stuff like that out that all. I mean, I just I just went through that process about four or five six years ago. Did not know any time.
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Note. Each response is verbatim from the veteran's interview. The bold indicates the frustration with the process, communication, and red is frustration working with Service Officers or VBA data base systems of processing their claim.

It was not until service members returning from Iraq-Afghanistan with injuries, for example PTSD, burn pit issues, agent orange, etc. that started to see more Vietnam veterans and Operation Desert Storm submit claims from 2008 to present. Even though the Field Offices (Regional Offices across United States) under Veterans Benefit Administration were still processing Vietnam era claims most of them were denied or assigned minimum rate percentage from 1975 to present with lack of medical evidence. Four of the 37 military veterans were from the Vietnam Era war that had issues with their claims due to lack of proof with destination area that had Agent Orange. This was when the Veterans Benefit Administration and Field Offices (Regional Office) got so overwhelmed with first and supplemental claims for increases that they needed to change from hard copy claims to electronic portal for better accountability. Today, they are still fighting their symptoms even though in the last three years, the President of United States pushed the Department of Veteran Affairs to reexamine symptoms for veterans that had Agent Orange issues from cancer to other illnesses that are killing them and the Blue Water Navy that fought in Vietnam coastal waters.

Of the 37 veterans, only seven of them had submitted multiple times for increases to get the opportunity to reach 100 percent with total and permanent disability. Each veteran provided varied reasons why it kept from submitting a claim, see table 5. After hearing the reasons why, a veteran decided not to submit a claim, I was more curious if it was the backlog of claims that discouraged them from submitting. The results were overwhelming with more “no” than “yes.”

Lack of Knowledge that Veteran Benefits Administration had a Backlog

I was amazed on the results of how many did not know about the backlog numbers at Department of Veterans Affairs. More veterans do not care about backlog numbers except the Veterans Affairs Committee in Congress when they started receiving complaints by their constituents and during the United States President Election. The major complaints were asking “Where is my benefit claim?” “Why is it taking too long to process?” This is pretty much what happened in the 2008 President Election with President Obama and Bush. Then, again in 2016 President Election with President Trump. See table 7 below on each veteran that indicated “Yes” and “No” with an explanation in their own words.

Table 7

Did the backlog of claims discourage you from filing?

Veteran #	RQ5B: Did the backlog of claims discourage you from filing? Yes or No If yes, why?
Veteran 1	No. I did not know there was a backlog claims. I did not have that much knowledge. It is kind of like saying. I do not even have the right. I do not have enough information to know what question that is.
Veteran 2	Yes. I knew that there was at least a year.
Veteran 3	N/A

- Veteran 4 No
- Veteran 5 No. I do not know what backlog you are talking about, who applied and who did not? I did not spend time together ever at VA type organizations. Drinking establishments and that sort of thing, so I did not have the contacts. Yeah, I was out. I wanted to forget everything, and I just never checked out to be my father-in-law. Used to say you should go. It is my doctors over there. Yeah, again, I did not want to drive that far when I could afford the insurance for a good local doctor. So, I just never checked it out, though I never pursued it.
- Veteran 6 Yes. **Best friend issues discourage me from filing. That is an exceptionally good friend of mine.** That, well, pretty much like died three times on his way back because he got shot in Falluja. Then to get him or he then remembers the members passing out in Falluja waking up in Germany and then passing out again on his way back to Bethesda. I know all the struggles that he has had just to even like have some type of normalcy. Which thank goodness he has. She kind of has now but I know his Horror Story. And like how much of a pain the acid was for him and his family to even just remotely get him kind of where he needed to be, and I also know how many times they like his memory. At one time they basically had him on anti-depression and anti-psychotics based like the like. The bad mix of everything that makes its side effects like makes the medications do the exact opposite. Yeah, like I know Cam and many other people that were just. It is like how do you F this up? Especially the factor like they are. We literally brighten your lap at Bethesda like so. How do you screw up this? Well, not, I am just that, but they are also getting wrong answers. Like that, that is the part that upset me the most, because even though I knew was like myself defect like I probably like, I do not think at everything, but I was also like the fact is like you are your system so messed up that like you are. Old but killing people. That are already like messed up and the fact that like I am fine. So here you go. Focus on them that really need it. I will be fine over here.
- Veteran 7 No
- Veteran 8 No. I did not. I was not aware of it. Once I got into it, I became aware of it because of how the program works and the things you have to do to you know, but. I did not was aware of before.
- Veteran 9 No
- Veteran 10 No

- Veteran 11 No. I did not necessarily know there was a backlog.
- Veteran 12 No
- Veteran 13 No. I really did not know any about any backlogs and I just did what my friends told me to do.
- Veteran 14 Yes, I heard horrible stories from fellow veterans on how long it took for them to receive a response.
- Veteran 15 No
- Veteran 16 No. Those things did not come to mind right because Uhm, I never really reached out to veteran service officer until I knew they were there, right? So eventually, well, this person is designed to help you. Oh, they are right. So, it was not till I am going to use this term. It was not till helping veterans became profitable. When I say profitable, I am talking about organizations like. Got VFW right or JP right? So, on the back end for them they will provide you with this great service, but you need to pay a membership fee, right? **There is really no one you know talking about, and then the other guys are hidden away, so it was not until I started talking to individuals.** You know again, several years after four years. After or three years after that, you know I should be pursuing those things. So, the backlog that stuff never entered my mind again through from doing 20 plus years in the military. It was the norm for me, right? So, trying to get something done through the military.
- Veteran 17 Yes. I would have to say yes because in trying to see do you know what? Yeah, benefits I had. **There was no way for me to reach out to here and I was getting no response from my local VA idea. There was no manual that said, keep pursuing, you know pursuing further. Yeah, I would say that was extremely discouraging.**
- Veteran 18 No
- Veteran 19 Yes. Uhm, I would not say that discouraged me. It, uhm, set expectations with me that I should not expect it as a quick process.
- Veteran 20 No
- Veteran 21 Yes. I knew about the numbers but was hoping it would not affect my claim.
- Veteran 22 No, did not realize there was
- Veteran 23 No
- Veteran 24 No
- Veteran 25 No
- Veteran 26 No
- Veteran 27 No

Veteran 28	No
Veteran 29	No
Veteran 30	No
Veteran 31	Yes or No
Veteran 32	No
Veteran 33	No
Veteran 34	<p>Yes. Well, they said in God, well, I did not really get involved in the VFW right away. I mean I did join when my husband I got back up and I attempted to talk to a few people and everybody says that, oh, you are going to have issues with this and that. So finally, like I said in 2014, I thought well, I will go ahead and try it. Uhm, fortunately, at that time things were getting a little better because of the presumptive diseases and stuff out there for the Gulf War. So that part. Really did not take that long, although I was dumb. Frustrated with UM and the different things at separate times since I came back from being anglers Spondylitis, it went to psoriatic arthritis. This I would keep getting 'cause I kept going to civilian doctors and stuff trying to figure out what was wrong with me and then trying to get the VA on board. I did have to go through a rheumatologist and when I saw the rheumatologist in Lebanon, VA, he determined that I did not. I have either one of those that I had fibromyalgia and that was a presumptive disease and then I was able to get a claim filed through there. Uhm, I had some other issues that happen. And prior to my deployment that I was trying to get taken care of through the VA. But it started back in 1980 and I tried filing a claim back in 81, but I was denied because I was injured in a car accident on my way home from my drill weekend. I almost lost my right leg and yeah, they would not because I did not have a line of duty they would not. They did not consider it and back then we were not covered door to door so that process would be like 30 years. And fortunately, my lawyer had copies of my medical records, 'cause there was no way tracking down medical records and stuff that far back but. I was tracked down that and put a line of duty in since I had continual service in the Army reserves, I was able to get a line of duty done and finally get that taken care of.</p>
Veteran 35	No
Veteran 36	No
Veteran 37	No

Note. Question 5B was answered verbatim by each veteran interviewee. The bold area was how issues from fellow veterans discourage them from filing a claim.

Frustrated, Difficultly, and Confusion with Hard Copy Forms and Electronic Portal “E-Benefits” for Service-Connectivity Claims

To answer research question three, “Has the process to obtain veterans’ benefits gotten harder or easier with eBenefits portal?” I needed the military veterans to answer questions about their frustrations with the hard copy paper process and eBenefits electronic process. Based on the figure and table below with the verbatim answers to question 5C for hard copy process with paper forms. With the yes and no responses to question 5C, the verbatim responses to the “yes” in 5D were a mixed batch of frustrations on understanding how to answer the questions without good explanations on each injury in red ink. Here are some veterans’ quotes: Veteran 2 “For people who don't know what they're looking at or what they're looking for would be basically put into a continuous loophole where they just go from link to link to link the link without finding the actual answers that they need.” Veteran 8 partial response “that I would have found it too hard to fill out the paper forms because you know. I think I can give you a solid positive 'cause given my experience with the with the stupid college stuff you know and other experience with government forms.” And veteran 10 response “It was tough because there was no definitions or explanation on what to put into the portal for injuries. I ended up going to the veteran representative in Carlisle and he was worthless. He was very ruin to my son that almost died coming home shot from Afghanistan.” Listening to the answers for 5D and 5I with explanations in table 7, it is possible the veterans answer 5C

with 5H as one response. Halfway through the interviews, one veteran thought 5C and 5H questions are similar. I explain they are different because I was talking about eBenefits portal not hard copy paper form. At that time, I re-read the question in unique way for the veteran and others if they got confused. It was 23 “yes”, 11 “no”, and three “Not Applicable” thought it was too hard to fill out the paper forms without any explanation for each injury being reported and not knowing which documentation needs to be submitted with paper forms. After reviewing each response, it was only 12 out of 37 submitted a hard copy claims before Veterans Benefit Administration went to computer-based portal system by 2011.

Figure 12

Based on question 5C: Did you feel it was too hard to fill out the paper forms before it went to electronic submission?

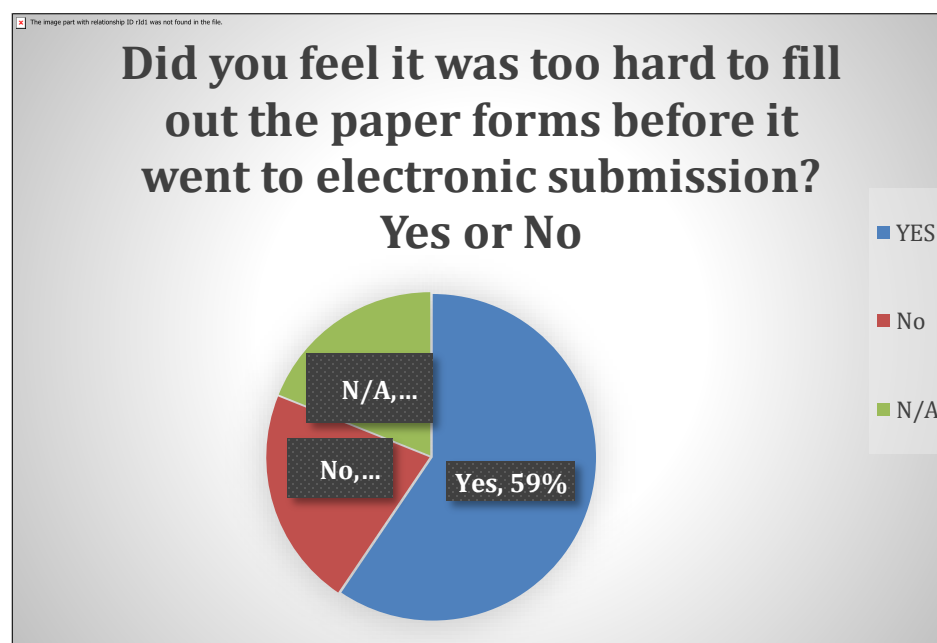


Table 8

Did you feel it was too hard to fill out the paper forms before it went to electronic submission? Yes or No. Following the question, if you answer yes, please explain.

Veteran #	RQ5C: Did you feel it was too hard to fill out the paper forms before it went to electronic submission? Yes or No	RQ5D: If yes, would you please explain to me what issues you had?
Veteran 1	Yes	First time, my representative that fill out a claim toward your employer even thought I was on active reserve. Once I got online I would say I have pictures of the gulf, smoke through the window. I have all this documentation indicated it was not service connected. Some of the VA reps claim everything. What I am getting at the VA did not indicate you do not have it.
Veteran 2	Yes	Oh 'cause the VA website and everything. It is just a never-ending loophole it is set up for people who do not know what they are looking at or what they are looking for would be basically put into a continuous loophole where they just go from link to link without finding the actual answers that they need.
Veteran 3	N/A	N/A
Veteran 4	Yes	Incredibly detailed. And it goes back to where even what they are experiencing. Now you must have documentation, and I was warned about this, so I was gathering documentation two years before I was retiring. You know?
Veteran 5	Yes	Yeah, they did everything. I cannot say enough great things about the VA. OK, I never had to deal with any of these issues on period that officer. Backlogs concept.

- | | | |
|------------|-----|---|
| Veteran 6 | Yes | Well, with the 15 years' experience, I had in the military and with computer programs. Where it might have been probably easier to do auto portal like as in the actual task of doing it. I know how well the military and just Uncle Sam in general are not at putting things in clear cut verbiage. So, I know I probably would have like if I like what I've like. When submitted this and done it through a portal, I probably would have called my unit administrator. Be like hey once a day I can come in and sit down with you to be to be like I can then go OK this thing it says is what are we talking about? So, I have had someone I could have trained to put it in plain English, because like I said, like I know how Uncle Sam like start, word stuff and sometimes you've like OK, yeah, that makes sense. And then other times you will look at it and be like. |
| Veteran 7 | No | Well, I really do not have anything to base it on pre portal. OK I did the portal made it easy to technically apply. But I do not think looking at it from. Say an educated person point of view. You know the there are buzzwords in the federal government? With anything that you do, and unless you know what the buzzwords are, you are not going to get your paperwork. OK, that is my opinion, and before I left I coined a phrase that a lot of people are using right now. It is not logical, it is federal. OK. Looking at them. They do not make it easy based on what they are looking for in content. In my opinion. |
| Veteran 8 | Yes | I would say that I would have found it too hard to fill out the paper forms because you know. I think I can give you a solid positive 'cause given my experience with the with the stupid college stuff you know and other experience with government forms. Investigator: cause you would have had to fill the paper form to do their college anyways. Yeah, but I ended up. A little more motivated at that point and a little older and a little bit wiser. I had some help. Yeah, I had some help too. Does somebody help me with it, you know? Yeah, it is a better organized. |
| Veteran 9 | No | I would guess, gotten easier with the electronic but most military people are electronic now, so. |
| Veteran 10 | Yes | It was tough because there was no definitions or explanation on what to put into the portal for injuries. I ended up going to the veteran representative in Carlisle and he was worthless. He was very ruin to my son that almost died coming home shot from Afghanistan. |

Veteran 11	Yes	Confusion. I did not use eBenefits. I did not understand it. I did everything through the paper with the VSO office. They told me that it is going to take a long time.
Veteran 12	No	N/A
Veteran 13	Yes	And they are the ones who set me on the direction to getting my claim filed. It was difficult because in stages first they give you 10% disability. Because I was in the war. And then after that you must prove. Your further disabilities. And then come.
Veteran 14	Yes	I did it myself with difficulties of understanding legal aspect since the paper forms does not explain what is needed.
Veteran 15	N/A	N/A
Veteran 16	Yes	Paperwork sucks in general. I mean, I do not want to say yes or no I just put but it sucks it really does it. There is nothing there. Really other than name, Social Security number, right? That is really. Legible for an individual. Without that VSO experience right that merchant service officer experience, so there is nothing veteran friendly about filling these forms out.
Veteran 17	Yes	A lot of gray areas. A lot of areas needed. Paragraphs rather than. No, nowadays there is a lot of circles you fill into, whereas its computer generated and maybe gets filtered better than when you have one person reading paragraphs and trying to know what file the brilliant.
Veteran 18	No	N/A
Veteran 19	Yes	I did hardcopy because I submitted a supporting paperwork as well, so I did an actual mail end package.
Veteran 20	Yes	HARD COPY. The well I had a uh, a lady from the VA helped me submit them. It was not quick. I mean, she told me that I needed to take things that were. Additions that were similar and grouped them together. Uhm, on each of the rows. In the hard copy. And I wish I had not taken her advice because the way she had me do it at the VA to this day. I am still appealing some fee. Uhm, issues. Yeah, the VA regional office. They screw things up.

Veteran 21	Yes	It was confusing like the different date. You got to make sure the dates are right, were the biggest thing for me. And then they want you to also give dates of when you may have had the different ailments illness or whatever. Aches, pains, and stuff. They directed me to that too. I found if you did not put the right dates or something and they were messed up, it would not do anything, and you would not find, and I did not find out about it. So later. So, it is very frustrating.
Veteran 22	Yes	I do not recall whether or not I submit it through the eBenefits portal, or wherein I actually back and tried to find that I know it ended up in the eBenefits portal.
Veteran 23	Yes	Difficult. The redundancy part 'cause they have to repeat everything that was wrong over again, not just on one point but on every other form. I had to keep repeating myself the same thing over again. And then getting the medical records even though they had access to him. They wanted me to get the medical records. I said they are at the they are at the Lebanon, VA you just go on a computer and get him. But they wanted me to take my time to go to 11 and sign a medical release and get I got there this high. Of all my records.
Veteran 24	Yes	They were confusing, I mean. Wanted the DAV Rep. But I did find it confusing.
Veteran 25	No	N/A
Veteran 26	No	My claim was done by VFW Rep. I decided to speak with someone that did it for a living and pay by the VA and gave him power of attorney to do my claim.
Veteran 27	N/A	N/A
Veteran 28	No	N/A
Veteran 29	Yes	Not to ramble on too much, but I tried submitting electronically. This would have been July 2019 and it would not go through. So, I filled out a ticket and I called the one 800 number, and they told me, but it would be about a year to fix the ticket. And OK so I could like mail or fax it and I said you know what I want to submit this online and so I read the CFR and it would not let me submit. It was something VA something forms 26, but it said that if you are doing a file for disability, you could use form 27, which is normally. For pensions and that said that in the CFE. So, I filled out the form whatever 27 attached the PTSD paperwork and they screwed it up and found it like it like I was applying for a pension and so I wasted two months waiting on this.

Veteran 30	No	I had someone from the VA benefit counselor at the Vet Center Harrisburg fill it out.
Veteran 31	Yes	At first yes, especially with moving after the first experience. The backlog also discouraged me because it was a long dragged-out process with little to no info while going through it. Frustrating and wearing just in itself.
Veteran 32	No	N/A
Veteran 33	Yes	<p>There is an obscene amount of forms that you fill out and then. Uhm, so then there is a lot of forms you must fill out. The forms do not give you adequate faith to put any kind of information. You are constantly having to do attachments. Some of the forms have supplemental pieces to them. That you need because that is where the is as opposed to. On the form itself. So, there is like a version. That truly has a signature block. The original form was not so, there is just. It is easy to with the way the forms are written and then also because like your Social Security number gets. Uses your VA claim number. Or you offer my service number, which I do not. The years that I served, but there's spots where it is extremely easy. To miss stuff and then. Of course, all of my records. One last I am a different last name. Now when I worked for the VA, I was the same last name, but now it is on my dependent. Hey but. Just could not get all the forms. Filled out and then a lot of times the same thing that you just previous. You know, like for an orthopedic injury, you know you are having to repeat yourself constantly, because when, let us say you feel well. Angle your knee, your hip, your back. But each one is. But then if there's nerves involved and that is its own individual thing. So, there it is. Not a broad stroke brush that you are using. It is more extremely specific things that are related to your injuries that do not even like register because it is not part of a typical drop down, so it is not, uh, easily selectable. Option, so then you kind of do your best to get. Something close to it. But then when you go to your TMP, hopefully you can justify why you put. You know this nerve damage when in fact it is not. It is this nerve damage is not an option.</p>
Veteran 34	No	I liked the eBenefits so, but now I did not follow any claims through there, but I like the fact that I can talk to my provider and see my lab reports and things like that out there.

Veteran 35	Yes	It was a bit confusing because it was so lengthy. Uh, and you were not sure what blocks you know needed to be filled in and you were afraid that if you missed the block. What would occur so it was kind of a daunting thing, but. You know you need to muddle through.
Veteran 36	Yes	They are not intuitive. They do not give you any. There is you know there is some of them are just a wide-open field of narrative text. You do not know what you are writing. What the best word verbiage, is how to describe things. And then if you cannot do it electronically. You are trying your best to make sure it is clear and concise. But yeah, it conveys what you wanted to say and be an impactful description of your claim or any background information.
Veteran 37	No	My claim was done by VFW Rep

Note. The red highlighted area is the frustration with paper forms and the eBenefits portal.

I think some of the 21 veterans answered yes to both hard copy and electronic process because they felt the process was overwhelming when I asked the question 5H “Was the process harder or easier with eBenefits portal?” After reading these two questions aloud during the interviews, I pretty much got the same answer but in different wording.

The second question was on eBenefits with 37 interviews, 21 of the interviewed veterans felt it was harder to use eBenefits portal, and of the 22 veterans, some of them did it with hard copy process, as well. Of the 22 veterans, 13 of them submitted their claims as paper submission.

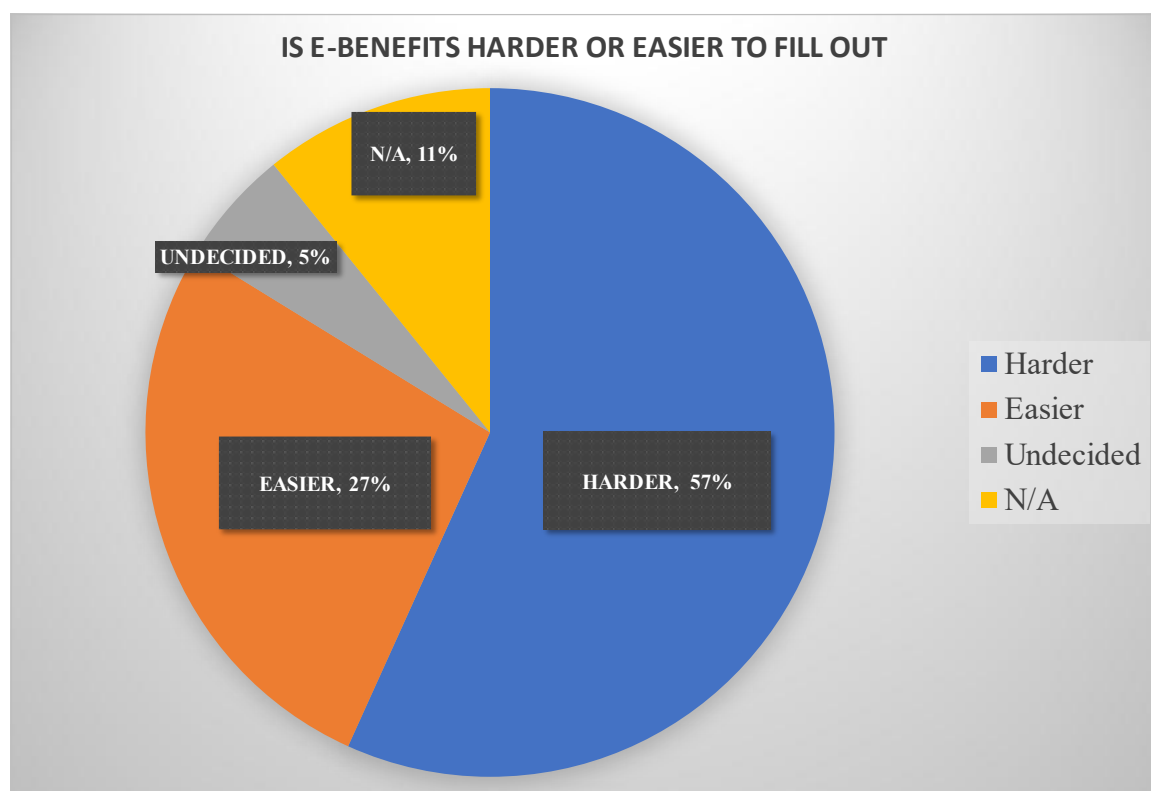
A follow up question was asked for the 17 veterans to explain “what issues you had” and are placed in table 7 “Did you feel it was too hard to fill out the paper forms before it went to the electronic submission?” The table provides the “yes” or “no”

responses with a follow up question for interviewees that answered “yes” to explain why. The responses were mixed with frustrations with the forms, difficulty, and confusion by doing it themselves, when Service Officers gave them mixed answers.

The other 19 veterans had submitted their claims through the eBenefits portal. Of the 37 veterans, 18 felt it was more complicated because it was overwhelming and lacked knowledge of what to put down as answers.

Figure 13

Was the process harder or easier to process with the eBenefits portal?



After questions 5D and 5H, I wanted to know if they reached out to any veteran advocacy groups for help. Seventeen veterans reached out to their County VSO, DAV, American Legion, VFW, VA Attorney, VA Hospital representative, and Certified VSO

from a nonprofit organization, while the others did it themselves. A few of the veterans that saw a County VSO had issues with them due to a lack of respect, lack of knowledge, and or did not care to help for one reason or another reason. Because of one or more reasons, they turned away from processing their service-connectivity claim when they received an attitude from a Veteran Service Officer. Some veterans decided to try it again by submitting it on their own by getting some rate percentage.

The below table provides verbatim responses from each military veteran interviewed for my research study. The explanation for why it was challenge with the Vietnam Era and late and early Baby Boomer veterans it was confusing with both processes if you did not know the rules of thumb with United States Code Title 38 for applying for service-connected benefits. Plus, it was confusing “how to open up the webpage” if they were not computer savvy or literate.

Table 9

Has the process of obtaining veterans’ benefits gotten harder or more comfortable with the eBenefits portal?

Veteran #	RQ5H: Has the process of obtaining veterans' benefits got harder or more comfortable with the eBenefits portal? Harder or Easier	RQ5I: Would you explain why harder?
Veteran 1	Harder	<p>It was challenging. It is about a 4 out of 10. Even before changed what is eBenefits? Yeah, it was challenging like it is I had a hell with time getting back home is like OK how do I get here? Well, I will just go back home. Start over again and I found it with me. I am not a computer expert, but I am literate. English or IPO letter if as far as the computer, I am good and I would</p>

		say if you said 1 to 10 and 10 is just soak and one is exceedingly difficult, I would say it is about at my skill level. It is about four it is challenging. But if you are at home and you have time, you go back through OK. This is what I am looking at.
Veteran 2	Harder	Oh 'cause the VA website and everything. It is just a never-ending loophole it is. In the way it the way it is set up for people who do not know what they are looking at or what they are looking for would be basically put into a continuous loophole where they just go from link to link without finding the actual answers that they need.
Veteran 3	N/A	N/A
Veteran 4	Easier	That younger soldiers were experiencing, and I am fine with my nephew now who is in the Air Force is lack of leadership at people to explain things, supervisors. The knowledge of supervisors. All these you know younger forwards me fives are getting out with disabilities, their squad leaders, or for two insurgents. No one giving them appropriate guidance, and that is what's hurting, whether their leadership does not have that guidance again, it goes back to leadership.
Veteran 5	N/A	N/A
Veteran 6	N/A	N/A
Veteran 7	Harder	Education it is not logical
Veteran 8	Easier	If I did not know how to use computer, things would have been different.
Veteran 9	Easier	N/A
Veteran 10	Harder	I was overwhelmed with the questions because I did not know what to enter the system.
Veteran 11	Harder	It was confusing. There is just so many different papers while you need this form, you need this form, and they call it by numbers and with someone who's kind of battled dyslexia their whole life. You hear numbers and like what form is that? What form is this? Well, you need to print off this form. Now you must get this form OK. Well, what I do at this? Well, now you must fax it. Who faxes anymore? It is the, you

Veteran 12 Harder

know. It is the 21st century. Why do we have to fax something? So, then you are going to staples and you are faxing your Dang forms? Prime and medical information, which you do not know where it is going. If someone receives it so.

Honestly, I would like to as I was going through it and if I were doing it in person, I could get with somebody and. Immediate feedback on hey is this how this is? If I have any questions one of the things on there was OK, well, do you qualify for radiation whatever? Which I marked yes on the on the forms. Well, turns out the radiation that they are asking with that they are referencing and the D or DD form that they gave me. After the fact was basically strictly about nuclear radiation. If I were in a total atomic. Not any radiation in terms of I used to wander around with a transmission device strapped to my body, and I have had a lot of radiation exposure from that, so those sorts of things made it quite a bit more difficult. Then it otherwise could be if I had somebody there now on I was transitioning from Carlisle Barracks and prior to COVID they did have a VA Rep who. Come out. To the location and do stuff. But during that period, none of that wound up happening. So, I wound up doing everything fully on my own.

Veteran 13 Harder

I had issues filling out the forms because I could not remember my name due to my depression and stress disorder. The eBenefits Portable is difficult to navigate. They ask for several passwords. They cannot be connected to anything. Your name, your birthday, your dog's name, or anything. And uhm. The last time we were in Manila, my wife tried in VA, they helped her get on but. You know, we still cannot get on the eBenefits, so I just call and do the paper forms because. Uhm, now these they are almost just as quick, but the VA has no email. If I want to change my address. Like I changed my address from my checks going to Carlisle to my checks going to the Navy Federal Credit Union, which is worldwide and a lot easier. They have 24 hours assistance. I had to fill out the

Veteran 14	Harder	paperwork, send it to my son, and then he faxed it. I emailed it to my son, and he faxed it to the VA because they have fax number, but they do not. My email, how prehistoric is that? So, I had VSO Representative from Warrior Project to assist to get my last 20 percent.
Veteran 15	N/A	N/A
Veteran 16	Easier	I mean, it is a way to fill in the blank where you can get status updates, right? So that makes it easier versus having a call or having to wait or having to figure something out right? So those things from automation standpoint are great.
Veteran 17	Easier	It got more comfortable now that it is more electronic.
Veteran 18	Easier	I did not have any issues
Veteran 19	Harder	Not completely understanding what I needed to do to submit, uh, it was exceedingly difficult. I felt like there was a lot of steps required on my end to submit the evidence and submit the claim and there was I at the time I did not have anybody to hold my hand, so it was very much. This is on you to do on you to execute and I had no idea what I was doing.
Veteran 20	Easier	It is better with eBenefits portal, but it is still not great. Uhm, when I submit something by hard copy, I have no idea whether it gets there. The only way I can. Figure out whether it gets there by hard copy is to call my veteran service organization and they can look and see. But there is no way for me to tell.
Veteran 21	Harder	Yes, it is for me. It was confusing like the different date. You got to make sure the dates the biggest thing for me. And then they want you to also give dates of when you may have had the different ailments illness or whatever. Aches, pains, and stuff. There the benefits part I found because they come. They directed me to that too. I found if you did not put the right dates or something and they were messed up, it would not do anything, and you would not find, and I did not find out about it. So, it is very frustrating.
Veteran 22	Harder	Double edge sword

Veteran 23	Harder	<p>Like many benefits, it is harder. I would rather do the paper form. In a timely fashion, it cuts you off. Then you got to re-enter in. Where paper if you need to get some information, you can go right back so you do not have to re-enter. Just do it so, I do not like eBenefits. I use my HealtheVet a lot, but eBenefits I do not. I am not, I am not a good typist, even though was a radioman in the Navy. When I apply for increases that was difficult. When I apply for benefits, that was easy. And let me explain benefits anything I need from my house.</p>
Veteran 24	Easier	No issues
Veteran 25	Easier	N/A
Veteran 26	Harder	<p>Oh no, this guy did not do that for me. No, he helped me fill it out from soup to nuts. Yeah, I mean that is I would not know only because I did not use the E portal I did; we did paper forms. Oh, I would imagine that they probably were then than what the E portal would have been. That is just my take. I do not know for sure.</p>
Veteran 27	Easier	<p>Roadblocks, Confused. I would think it should be easier, but there's. I know I ran into some roadblocks. Uh, my friend Joe. He also ran into some roadblocks like you get, you know it. It seems like it should be easy and suddenly boom, something cut you off and you must get on the phone. When I started looking at the forms you know they were. I was glad that I had someone the VSO to help me because I was confused. You know, uhm? And I do not consider myself an illiterate person. But the form that you know, the forms were certainly less than friendly.</p>
Veteran 28	Harder	<p>I went to my VSO about claiming Agent Orange and she said, oh Jim, she said there is nothing there. She said if you put in a claim you will just plug up the works for other people. And was this vicious? County BCOM Beaver also went said that to you. And she made that comment saying that. It would be waste of time to and then you would be. Your claim will be back and other individuals' killings up because you are applying for your debt.</p>

Veteran 29 Harder

Not to ramble on too much, but I tried submitting electronically. This would have been July 2019 and it would not go through. So, I filled out a ticket and I called the one 800 number, and they told me, but it would be about a year to fix the ticket. And OK so I could like mail or fax it and I said you know what I want to submit this online and so I read the CFR and it would not let me submit. It was something VA something forms 26, but it said that if you are doing a file for disability, you could use form 27, which is normally. For pensions and that said that in the CFE. So, I filled out the form whatever 27 attached the PTSD paperwork and they screwed it up and found it like it like I was applying for a pension and so I wasted two months waiting on this.

Veteran 30 Harder

Well, you know I am not a huge fan of the benefits. Only because of my service officer background. But I would say the. You know? If I can inject this, you know? I saw a benefit counselor in the year 2000. The counselors were fill out this form. Do you know what? I am saying. They did not care about evidence. And that is what I do not like about the benefits, and you can apply. You are just filling out a form. You know that just gets you started. You know you cannot do this without seeing a service office, so. Correct, do you know what I am saying? If my clients do not throw out anything, you know the only thing they do is, I say, sign here, you know. Yeah, you know after my stuff. And I do all the paperwork. Yeah, I gather all the evidence, et cetera so. Then that is what I do not like about these benefits. Just filling out a form. OK. And that is the mentality. The VA benefits counseling, you know, yes. They are not there. Their job is to help you fill out that form it is not to when you are going. You know, I mean, I understand what? It takes to legally file a claim, whatever it must be there, et cetera. And of course, I provide that for my clients.

Veteran 31	Harder	Easier in that the form takes you through and tells you what is not complete before you submit. Harder in that the fill in limits you to using only certain words and can get confusing, however having had to use the paper forms it is easier. Harder in that it times out on me multiple times. Harder to navigate to where to go but easier once access obtained.
Veteran 32	Easier	N/A
Veteran 33	Harder	Uhm, well, it is my understanding to the eBenefits portal is not really working through it. For password anymore like it is now on the different portal for claims. Yeah, so there is like somewhere on the benefits. When you go to log in, it says like. For claims you are VA.GOV. Just because nothing went through so even with their Updated system va.gov benefits the problems. Still carried over. But then two I. Mean back to paper filling it out. I mean, that is Daunting in itself. I mean, you literally roll cross eyed trying to fill out. Everything and then trying to switch it into. And I used the PDF's online, but I had this skill set to. Could fill them out and then print them and do it. Look, I have access to a scanner, and I was able to scan it. Word the technology that I have.
Veteran 34	Undecided	Unable to answer since VSO process claim. And even today, knowing what I know I do not. I still do not think that I would use the online process.
Veteran 35	Harder.	Confuse forms. Well, sometimes some of the people are confused as far as what forms, whether or not the claim was, or the evidence was uploaded properly.
Veteran 36	Harder	Conflicted info. It is harder because I do not know even fully. You know, I still to this day I get conflicting information. Oh, you are come, your claim cannot be processed that way. And then all the verbiage and all the. It is almost like advertising I get from the VA with these emails. Oh, it is you know it is so simple, it is everything streamlined. It is like yeah, streamlined for

Veteran 37 Undecided

My VFW VSO enter everything into the system.
I just went to my appointments.

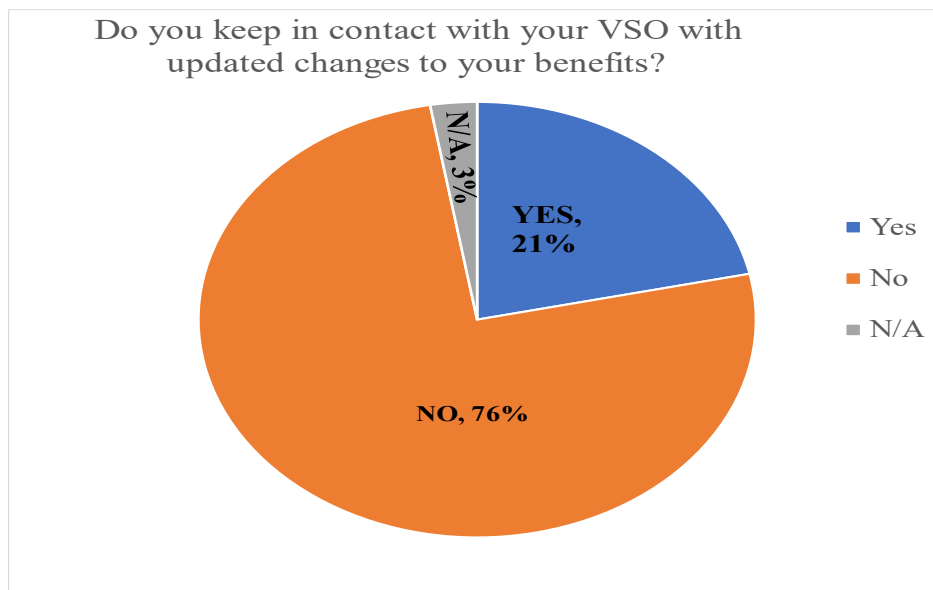
Note. The red highlighted tells how each veteran felt about the eBenefits portal.

**Past and Present Interactions with Communication to Our Military Veterans
Improve on Communication and or Interaction with Veteran Benefits**

Most of the 37 veterans that were interviewed agreed with my observation that we need to improve on communication and interaction with veterans. Table 9 demonstrated how veterans felt about research question 17A. Some of the key code words were advertisement, too many advocacy groups, and communication. What was very interesting was some of them kept in contact as members of charters of American Legion, VFW, and DAV, but they did not keep in contact with their National Service Officer, State Service Officer, and or Veteran Service Officer with their benefits (see Figure 14 “Do you keep in contact with your VSO with updated changes to your benefits). When I asked if they ever searched on the Internet for additional benefits with Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, I was totally surprised that most of the answers were “no” instead of “yes.” The ones that responded yes were the military veterans that had separated out from 2012 to present because they received documentation from TAP to communicate with their state representatives. I had two veterans who did not know about the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) for help with special programs and financial support, if needed.

Figure 14

Do you keep in contact with your VSO with updated changes to your benefits?



What did help me make my quota for data collection was the veterans that read my request through the Pennsylvania DMVA Newsletter. Getting near the end of my questions, I wanted to know if they reviewed the Department of Veterans Affairs website, which 12 out of 37 veterans did not check it out. The 25 veterans that reviewed the website mainly did it once a month or two to three times a month. So, I asked if they knew about the updated changes to their website that added all the other VA support sites, for example MyHealthVet. The answer was a mixed answer of “yes” or “no” answers and explained how they felt about it.

Table 10

Do you feel we need better communication or interaction with a veteran on benefits and other outside needs for jobs, etc.?

Veteran #	RQ17: Do you feel we need better communication or interaction with a veteran on benefits and other outside needs for jobs, etc? Yes or No	RQ17A: If yes, would you please explain?
Veteran 1	Yes	<p>I cannot get fair evaluation on this. They do an initiative-taking. From the going online to the website and getting emails, they are being initiative-taking. How well, I do not know. And sometimes it could be that what we used to call formal language, how you doing? I do not really care; I am just asking it looks good. I do not know if they are really doing that or not. In some cases, you are just trying to blow smoke. Make it look good to the world, particularly in the Trump administration. You are trying to help us. Well, obviously it is like. If you are having trouble getting online, contact us through this portal. Well, if I could get online, I would not either contact, but you know, and in fairness to a friend of mine just died. He had. I do not know his. He was a Korean vet. His mentality was not a few other people. They do not even have cell phones. Yes, and I said, you know. Let us go back a few one hundred years. I could just see when I invented the toilet, you are going to say I am walking a smitten eating the same building. You know he cannot make the move. Yes, when I got to Ben Franklin to invent the indoor toilet thing. Flush commode, but so that there are people out there and that's not the VA's fault that you have that mentality. But there is an assumption. There is an assumption that everybody has a smartphone. Today. I have an iPhone or, well, that is considered somewhere, and they do not.</p>

Veteran 2	Yes	<p>The state guys are idiots. After what I went through with, you know the guy belittling me and berating me. Investigator: Are we talking about the Cumberland VSO? Interviewee: Yes, making me out to be, you know. You know, disrespectful freaking. Slop that did not deserve the title of a veteran after my frigid you know. After my service overseas basically accounted squat to him because I could not make it to a meeting. You know, a few f... king appointments 'cause I was dealing with a death in the family.</p>
Veteran 3	Yes	<p>Will when I ETS. Nothing was ever really explained what you are entitled to. And at the time to pursue it, there is nothing locally to go pursue. If you had to travel. An hour or two hours just to see anybody about the VA. It was not convenient at all.</p>
Veteran 4	Yes	<p>Do they care/leadership. It goes back to communications, see where I was at, but it was a big army installation. There was sufficient information given to us, but uhm. If you do not have that, I know there is a lot of installations that may not have that. The proper resources we had a big transition building, so everything was there. Ah, but I know being in the military, not all installations are the same and again I got lucky I had everything available to me. But I know that what is at Fort Lewis is not at Fort Carson or Fort Sill, or Fort Irwin. Even though it should be or some of those larger installations that Even when they started doing joint basis. Ah, or if those people in those offices care. And then again that goes back to leadership. If you have leadership that care, or people that know the system, your ship may not know the system 'cause they could be twenty somethings too. But you should have a Sergeant major in that system or something like that but then again, I have seen so many senior leaderships that can care less. That is, it, a lot of the older generation do not have, you know, I do not have one. I never have because I cannot justify having this and that and a tablet in because again, on a fixed income.</p>

Veteran 5	Yes	Well, I do not know what you are talking about, so perhaps we do need. The case is it is speaking Greek to ease. And that is if you find them. They do not find you, there's millions of things on the Internet. You know, I did a search this morning and got 2.4 million hits in .34 seconds.
Veteran 6	Yes	They need to put everything in the military process when checking out.
Veteran 7	Yes	It comes from a lot of different points of view number one. They do not do a good enough job of advertisements. OK. VA benefits is one of the federal government's best kept secrets. As far as I am concerned. I did not know what benefits I had available to me. Until I met that doc out in Martinsburg, and he was talking. One thing led to another. I started looking at other organizations. I joined Vietnam Veterans of America. OK, uh, a lifetime member there. I joined the VFW and that was ridiculous. All they want to do is sit around, smoke and drink. I talked to Mr. Clark. I talked to Miss Bergstresser. And both times I came away negative. There was nothing positive about. You know, learning from them what? Is available really? So, I went online, and Ms. Bergstresser got me into that portal thing. And you know, I got to squirrel learn around in that. And if I only figured out this is a lot of government gobbledygook and. I am not going anywhere with it. So, by that time, I had that second denial and just decided to blow it off. So, there is a very definite lack of communication, for one thing. In my opinion.

Veteran 8 Yes

Yes, I do. I think that. My experience is better coming back and trying to readjust into civilian life. It is a different world, you know. And while there is a whole lot of advantage in what you get from being in the military. The skills that you need to adapt. Are not there. You know? The forms and confusions and the laws and all the rules and all that other kind of stuff. Plus, you are also might say, hey look, I have been through this. You know they told me where to go and I thought it was a stupid place to go. I went anyway, 'cause that is where I was, you know. So, there is some mentality. That holds over in veterans. It may not hold over it. I would piece the population. It is like OK, well, that is the rule. Well, crap, fine, move on. Uh, because you know those of us that have bucked the system and have lost. While we were in in the service. Realized that there is a system, and the system is going to keep grinding forward, and so there is that that that is a barrier. I think where good news and sad news you a lot of stuff have trying to be provided. Do they really understand it? Is it really presented in such a way? Uh, I work in government policy for several years. I realize how badly things can be written and how poorly communication is done, especially after the subject matter experts turn it over to lawyers and they screw it up. And that is really an important thing here. My experience with VA and the mortgage end of it because I knew that mortgage and you know all that stuff. That program works very well. Because it has gone on for years and it really has been worked through. But that does not. There are still some problems with it, but easy to understand this stuff. Ah, and then the Congress writes new laws. And then they put new regs in there. And then they put the and then they have a big Oh my God, we are screwed on our veterans. So, then they overreact and everybody. Tries to fix it. And then a new administration comes in and they do the same thing over again. And there's layers and layers and layers, and that is the thing that I would find is that the individual veteran. Even today, I think trying to find their way through the layers. You know, and

maybe that is where these advocacy groups. I should have called somebody and gotten some help. I had some, you know, I had guys at the friends of mine that were saying trying to give me some advice and so forth like that, but I thought, you know. They should be able to. It should be simple, but. In in, in hindsight, yes, I should have talked to somebody, you know. Researcher: The veteran's advocacy groups do not come and reach out to the fellow veterans of their states. They depend on the veteran. They depend on you going to them. They wait for you to call them instead if they should be felt more initiative-taking in going after them. Interviewee: You know, that is a good point. That is akin to Red Cross and Salvation Army. The day I went into boot camp, were there giving us stuff and following up the whole time I was in. And I always knew if I had a problem, they were there. Because they made themselves visible. I think that would help if. These guys, could you know, and I am sure that the groups just do not realize that there is a gap that you know. Everything is fine because no one calling us or Gee whiz. We would like to help more, but no one calls us. But, you know, put yourself in front of these guys and. You know?

Veteran 9 Yes It is excellent. You get so much information and the transition assistance program that they got going on and all that kind of stuff. But the other ones that have been out for a while or did not know about that, or some of the other branches, do not have the benefit the Air Force does, but. Yes, there is more outreach that could be done for veterans.

Veteran 10 Yes I feel the communication between myself, and Cumberland County VSO was disrespectful. No one from any veteran advocacy groups or Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs never contact me when I return to the states after I serve. My boys were incredibly lucky to have their friends to help them with the process of getting their benefits after serving their country.

- Veteran 11 Yes 100%, uh, I mean, I had to go out of pocket and pay somebody to help me to navigate the system because the VSO, I mean again, the guy in Franklin County was it was helpful, but I did not even know what eBenefits was. What do you mean I have eBenefits, I do not know what that is, and the websites are very confusing. That is what there's eBenefits and others myhealth@va.gov, whatever it is. So, I mean again, yes it is confusing. It is frustrating. I had to pay somebody out of pocket to help me along with it, and I am a tech guy. I could not imagine being an older generation, say a World War 2 veteran Vietnam personally or Gulf War or something, and trying to navigate that it blew my mind and I worked for Dell.
- Veteran 12 Yes Interaction, I would say there is close to none in most cases as far as information, I would say there is a lot. 1 Like how yeah? OK. like Pennsylvania military and Veterans Affairs, I get a lot of emails that are extraordinarily rich and dense in information. I enjoy them, and I read them from top to bottom, but that is just hey, here's information that I am vomiting. In your direction, what sticks and what does not.
- Veteran 13 Yes Well, at the time when I was in America, if I did not go to that one office in Harrisburg. I had tried all the other offices and they were not willing to help. You know the VFW. They said, oh, we are not. It is not our job to fill out your paperwork and you know? It is up to you. The same with you. Yeah, the same with the other people you know. I do not have time to fill out your paperwork. I have other people to take care of and the person who oversaw the VA clinic filling out files for the veterans she could only manage like 5 or 10 veterans a day when or else she would be overloaded. She needed more support. You know there needed to be two or three people doing the job of one person.

- Veteran 14 Yes Uh, it helps if the VSO is that like say, the Legion or the VFW work 95. I mean those. I was continually active in those organizations for a while, but no, I am not. But uhm, those organizations are fantastic, but you must get the younger people in to keep it alive. Well, I do not want to, well, a lot of people do not know they go to Vietnam. Uhm legion and the AMVETS. Yeah, half the people do not know you can talk to these smaller organizations that are actually huge when the greatest advocate for veteran rights is the VFW. But the problem is they are all 900 years old and World War 2 veterans. And as younger vets, a lot of us do not want to sit around, share war stories and drink, binge drink. 'cause we did that; we don't want to do that. We do not want to end up like that.
- Veteran 15 Yes No matter what field you are in, communication is everything. You have veterans coming from different cities. Traveling hours to get to see one person. He is saying that veteran is telling that person his problems, and that person has tried and figure out individually how to fix. That problem person problems. It is exceedingly difficult to be on that side of the desk. Hearing everybody problem because that is what he does all day long is hearing everybody problems.
- Veteran 16 Yes From what we started talking about at the top that 24 months after a person separates. Yeah, it is great to send me newsletters, right? But? Support groups or groups to understand, say, hey Lisa, when did you separate? I separated on one October, right? Lisa right now he would lose you to go back to Lebanon. Go to Martinsburg. Go someplace. And well, before you go, sit down, and think about all the things that are going on in you. Now, since you calm down from leaving the military, you want to go to the aid clinic and get those things annotated and documented so that you can file a claim for disability. For those things, I do not think any of those organizations are doing that right now, and that is when we talk about the backlog. Kind of the backlog I fully believe is the paperwork, right, missing documents not filled out. Having to review having to go to appeal, resubmit, resubmit,

- resubmit. I just did it for the last 10 plus years. If there was a group that not just for some who says hey, I need help but for everybody for those that do not know they need to. No, right for everybody, of course. You cannot make a person attend a meeting, but if you can provide them with. Lisa, it is best if you do this, but if you do not, here is what you are going to. Here is what is going to happen. You 10-5 years from now when your back goes out from lifting ammunition. OK, we get it documented now. Chances are giving me apart that backlog five years from now. So, I think those groups should be doing it was more actively. When those versus me I get the DAV newsletter from PA. I read it OK why I read it now? Because I that 24 month that I missed. I realized the importance of keeping up with that know.
- Veteran 17 Yes Lack of Knowledge. Well, with my case, there is a lack of knowledge about what is available to people. Uhm again, I go back to that. There is no pamphlet they hand you and you will come back to Pennsylvania as a veteran. You know there is no pamphlet out there that I know of that they hand you and say this is what you need to do from here on out to follow. And if you do not pursue things greatly in depth on your own. There is no one to hold your hand and tell you where to prove? Communicate, but again, it is almost information overload and trying to decide what applies and what. What you need to do, and again the advocates again, I would recommend everybody go through. Uh, you know and use of, uh, an advocate, but I again I do not know that that everybody, even though when you log in it says that that's available I. It is almost like you are speaking a different language to somebody that you know. Why do I need them? If I can submit it online but you do not? Realize the bureaucracy that you must go through to get these claims submitted. So, I think using the advocates is the way to go. Uh, but from my perspective it is. There is just too much out there, I think. They ought to force people to use an advocate, in my opinion, not let them submit it on their own. You know, and they should have a
- Veteran 18 Yes

- process where if they are going to force you to use an advocate, that they that they issue, you know, they say legion. VFW, because there are all kinds of shows out there to help, so. Uh, my I really think again, especially for older veterans. Again, I am very technologically savvy, so I can navigate, but the bureaucracy and all that is extremely hard to get through to know what you need to do.
- Veteran 19 Yes In my experience Groups were completely segregated there was some visibility that was afforded too in my experience Pennsylvania and Texas veterans commission where they could see status they could check on me I believe they also had POA power of attorney him if I recall correctly but I they could not essentially give me any kind of status information either so that the information flow was very fragmented while I did assist in quite a few ways now I this far as part of the question him sorry now that I can you answer the part of the communication in Internet interaction already. So, you already answered the question do you stay connected with your via so with updating change to your benefits so I do not even know the person is so that is answers now are you members of any veteran's advocacy groups like the FW American Legion and DAV.
- Veteran 20 Yes It is always good to have. You know, open lines of communication. Right now. Especially the VA, VA just is they seem to be. I really wish that I could do something like. Go in to log in online and see all my decision. Letters I cannot see that I would like to be able to log in see all the correspondence that I said it sent in, so I have no idea whether. They received it or not. And so, for instance, let me let me tell you what. Then, when I when I went from 70 to 80% disability. Uh, my service did not audit. To send to the VA so that I can get my retrofit. And they faxed it to they sent it electronically to the VA. It faxes it to the 8 three times I faxed it to the VA twice. I sent it electronically to the VA. I see and then I hand carried it down to The VA. Was not giving me my retro pay after over a year. Wow, I got my state senator involved and my state senator was able to spring it free. But I had no idea whether

- the VA. Logged any of those forms in. That I sent. They hand stamped it for me and say that they, you know, got it, but you know when I tried to tell them hey you have this. You know the record of this, sorry. How do you say you have no record of it? I have it hand stamped right here. Well, I do not send that to us I have sent. It to you many times it is like. How do you get tired of beating your head? Against the wall and eventually. Decide well, it is not worth it. You know?
- Veteran 21 Yes I think all the above. We need the better, I think. I know some of them feel frustrated and overwhelmed, so with all the different ones they may be helping just from my experience and what I heard. So, they say you got to give us time. So somehow, even if it is in a letter or a phone. Call now and I see the VA has started using texting, so some way to let us know we are not forgotten. Because the communication you do not know what is going on. And for me, I did not worry too much at all until I heard. And then that is when I wondered what is going on. But for others who do keep track of all that. It is a lot harder for them not hearing and then getting the runaround on who to reach out to.
- Veteran 22 No They do a decent job of communication through, especially the VA and the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, to an excellent job of communication. It is up to the service member to pay attention and then follow that guidance, I think. In every VA hospital that I have ever been to, it is extremely easy. Uh, me too. To make time with an advocate, those government agencies are working hard to use again, email social media. All those things I can see why some people would not believe that, especially if they are not technologically inclined. But uhm, for at least for me. I get all the information that I want. Outside of that, I mean that does not happen, so I would be probably in an information vacuum. I would say though, that with the number of veterans there are against the number of representatives there are that is just not a feasible exercise. Unless there is a major increase in staffing. There's not enough time

Veteran 23	Yes	<p>in the day for them to call everyone, hey, how is it going?</p> <p>Because there is so many benefits out there for veterans that unless you do research you. Do not know about. I get to Dauphin County, 150 bucks a month for paralyzed veterans. I knew nothing about that And if it would have been for Colleen. Who would she know over there DAV, Dauphin County, VA at Dauphin County Veterans Affairs. I want to say something to her I would have that benefit. Same way with the property tax. I knew nothing about the property tax exemption. I had to find that out on my own. Just to give you an idea of this, guy said this recently became 100% PTC over six years in separating those six. A family of four currently have health insurance from my Wife's employer. I am trying to navigate the blurry lines of health and dental insurance going forward. I wrote Tricare and all that stuff, but they are asking questions about the different benefits.</p>
Veteran 24	No	<p>DMVA UM and the other organizations I regularly get updates on jobs and opportunities.</p>
Veteran 25	No	<p>Right now, there is too many groups out there. And candidly if they were. All working together, or if you had a single face to your support structure rather than different faces, right now you go to all sorts of various sources trying to figure out what you get and what type of support you get. You do not go to one single place that says let us help you go through everything. And I do not candidly, I do not see why the state of Pennsylvania even needs to have this. Besides, they want to say we really support it, and I am in Florida now and their group is big and helping vets in Florida and. Why do I need? Besides the fact that you can say I can give you localized support. But for someone like me who is always virtual, I do not care where you are located, huh? Yeah. And you know, so why would I need each individual state to set up such a type of capability and even the. Organizations out there that support the vets. Why do you need so many different organizations out there? Besides, everyone wants to do it their own way.</p>

Veteran 26	Yes	<p>I feel for the job's situation. York County is proactive with military veterans. Benefits and claims that are doing a respectable job. From my own story. In York County, I can tell we help other veterans in need and are very proactive in helping veterans of needs; by submitting claims, homeless, sheltering, feeding, a veteran needs assistance we do and enough veterans organization to help set up a house. We reach out. I understand what you are saying and agree with you veteran someone to reach out to them and its responsibility of PDMVA. They should empower it down to other organizations behalf of veteran's administration of Pennsylvania we are empower you to reach out for us.</p>
Veteran 27	Yes	<p>Yeah, like I said the. Six months before you get out, it was in 1990. Do you know they came to me, and you know 'cause? Basically, I you know I had a year in school, did a year on David Garcia, went to my squadron so I was basically much quieter for you. I extended two months because we transitioned airplanes and all that and then. You know it was whatever time and I said, hey, you know it was time to start taking out orders and whatnot. You know what your plan and I is said, well, I plan to get out, you know, at the time I was 23 and you know I could. I could look at my sea, shore rotation, and say I do not want to be. I will be 37 when I get out. I said I do not want to be a 37-year-old. Married man at sea with my 12-year-old kids and I kind of planned out of it and be at sea so I said I am going to get out and they said OK, you know? That was it. That was the process, and so you just started counting down you. You know, I, you know you went.</p>
Veteran 28	Yes	<p>No, no one. No one.</p>

- Veteran 29 Yes
- Well, you know my VSO. I appreciate him. You know reached out to help me because that was when COVID started a lot of VSOs when responding. However, on top of these screw ups he had where he forgot to submit evidence or the right evidence. He also was not up to date on VA regulations, and even though he has been doing this job for 30 years. He told me that I had no chance whatsoever getting back to 70%. He said that he felt that I fit the 30% criteria and I explained to him that suicidal ideation. If you are hospitalized like I was and it is frequent, they must put you at 70. And he told me that was untrue. He said he has been doing the job for 30 years. That is not true, and I sent him the court case where they said if a veteran has chronic suicidal ideations, you have to put him at 70% and I was right, and they put me back at 70%. So, here is a VSO and he is like the only guy I must reach out to. He has been in jail for 30 years and he does not. He is not even up today.
- Veteran 30 Yes
- Yeah, certainly. Remember I said when I got out of the service. I did not know where I was going to work. I did not. You know, and you know, one of the problems that we have in Pennsylvania if I this is. One of the problems in Pennsylvania is that? Uh if you look at VA benefits education and employment fall under labor in India. OK, where benefits. Uh falls under the Department of military. And Veterans Affairs so. There is like a big disconnect there. Do you know what I am saying? You know, in the perfect world we would have all those resources working together. It is difficult when you are working with two different departments. Yeah, you know. And it is not like that in every state. It is just kind of a Pennsylvania unique thing. Because of the labor and industry part and the education part. Yeah, so it becomes kind of confusing but uhm. Uh, you know. I strongly believe that that all veterans should work through a service officer, and I do not know. Are you familiar with the term Max 66? Well, you know I worked for the Department of Military and Veteran Affairs for eight years and. I was part of the people who put that program together. And once, once we got

Veteran 31	Yes	<p>that program together, then then then I left the part with the military and veteran affairs. Actually, took a \$20,000 pay cut to go work for the American Legion, but because I thought I could help. More veterans in that position, and that has been a statement ever since. They participating organizations in Act 66 are kind of have various levels of expertise. And what I mean by that is, you know, I like to say that our program leads the state as far as having confident. The service officers which you told me not to answer this as a service officer. Do you know when I worked at DMV. I said our major problem in Pennsylvania is we do not have enough accredited service officers for veteran population that we have.</p> <p>There seems to be no cross talk, if there is the Veteran is not involved in the conversation. These organizations work with these benefits daily and should become familiar and make recommendations to Veterans. I have been proactive and have learned through age that there are many benefits out there that I did not know about and did not take advantage of. I look to my left and right and see Veterans daily that are not even aware of the basic benefits. This is ever evolving, and I feel these programs can be better advertised and better outreach can be done to ensure Veterans are receiving what they deserve. In addition, this is not only electronically, as many Veterans do not have the technological skills or resources to navigate and find this info.</p>
Veteran 32	Yes	<p>When I first started, yes. Now that I am in the military or Purple Heart. I based on the VFW and Legion are too expensive for my war generation. I do not get information from them, but my members in the purple started a meeting like MOPH. They are part of them and then like also I am part of the our department level now of RMOPH and so I get email traffic coming from our commander and the other organizations that the PA, puts out and the VA stuff puts out and plus being part of the weekly or monthly email from the military affairs and purple of the Pennsylvania.</p>
Veteran 33	No	N/A

Veteran 34	Yes	Have not really used that part of it, but I think that there's always room for improvement because especially when it comes to female veterans. Uhm, I did manage to talk to. I did have a few sexual traumas and stuff like that, and I did talk to the one woman over at the Lebanon, VA but. Yeah, yeah, considering how you know. I mean, I have been in and out of their process for like I said, basically since 1981 and yeah, I have seen an enormous difference in the in the system in the process. It is probably another reason it is probably another reason I waited until, you know, because I kept hearing better things about the VA so.
Veteran 35	Yes	And Department of Military and Veterans Affairs is trying to do that, right? Right now, they have that program with the R pox. Those regional you know coordinators.
Veteran 36	Yes	Yeah, I think they could do a. I think they could do a better job. I do notice some a lot of communication. For as far as employment goes and vets, uh, my, but I struggled for years. I mean, I went through a bunch of periods of time where I was unemployed. I mean, there was no, I did not have any good connection, so I do think that they are. I do think that I do see some information from time to time. It is a little bit better than it used to be. And they you do hear about private companies that at least talk the talk. I do not know if they are going to walk the walk, but they talk to talk about hiring vets, but I am thinking. You know everybody says that, but I, you know, prove it to me. I am from Pennsylvania, but I am almost done. What is that one? What is that? What is the show me state, whatever that is? But yeah. I to answer a question they are doing a better job. I just think that there could be a lot better communication either. I do not know where if it would get pushed down from the VB from the VBA down to the state level or just contacting, I mean. They know who these folks are. Do you know what I mean? Like they have to have your records somewhere. Reach out to them and say, hey, do you know what? mean just get the word out, I do not know.

Veteran 37 Yes

I think when the veterans come home. They should take him by group and came home sitting in a room and tell him the story. Tell him where you know if they want to do is they want to do that. They want to file a claim we got. Booted so that it just cut him loose. On the street and that is it. You know it took me. It took me 50 years to get. I would not have gone. I would have been homeless a couple of times. I would have been doing drugs. I would have been doing this if somebody would help me, not just cut me lose my ETS, you know, just that is it. You know, do not tell you nothing. You know? They got to take them out. You know, as they come as they get the as they get added to service take them back, you know roots and you sit him down. Have like an orientation and tell them story. You know not. Let them find out, not let them die. You know and not get anything you know.

Barriers that Veterans Encountered with Processing Claims

After I asked all critical questions to support my research on the quality of life of a Veteran while processing and waiting for their claims, I needed to know if my interviewees knew about the barriers of other veteran's issues and their own barriers based on the research question: RQ1: What barriers do U.S. veterans perceive with processing their claims on the Department of Veterans Affairs www.va.gov website? Some key code words that were explained as too difficult or complicated, lack of self-explanatory, number of forms needed, and one veteran indicated the status has improved. You can review each veterans' words in table 10. It was hard to get a response by veterans that Veteran Service Officer had submitted their claims for them.

Based on the data collections, the Veterans were hoping to see future improvements but were expectational on the quickest and getting the right rate percentage

the first time instead of appealing and or requesting an increase. Since the collaboration of Department of Veterans' Affairs website, they are making it easier by logging in one time only instead of reentry username and passwords to multiple accounts sometime in December 2021.

All 37 military veterans provided different explanations of their barriers with using the eBenefits portal and hard copy paper processing before 2008. Some of my interviewed veterans explained to me that Department of Defense and Veterans Affairs improved the disability claim process time from one year of separation and two years for military members planning to retire in 2009 with the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). In the last few years, some of the Veterans that submitted claims during TAP had received results the day of separation and or retirement. The frustrations were from Vietnam Era to Gulf War era veterans on who to see for help, taking so long, technical issues with data processing, and Veteran Service Officers giving incorrect information with processing the claim and attitude from Service Officers and Call Center Help Desk Representatives which was put in place in 2017. See below for each veteran's response.

Table 11

What barriers do U.S. Veterans perceive with processing their claims on the Department of Veterans Affairs www.va.gov website?

Veteran #	Birth Year	RQ23: What barriers do U.S. veterans perceive with processing their claims on the Department of Veterans Affairs www.va.gov website?
Veteran 1	1958	Not having to know with all on how to do it. Could have done it probably could have. I know I could have. Did you follow for a travel pay? Yeah, what if I know how to do it? If I mean I could learn. How to do it if? I knew I was supposed to. Right? So, I just assumed that when I know I should not assume, but when

		you are talking to someone, explain to them that their job. Is to help you out and they are doing it. And if even if you did not think of it, they know about it and they already did it. And finding out that's not necessarily case.
Veteran 2	1984	It is way too broad with no specifics on its set up like running around a loop pole to each link pictures to another link that does not give you a direct answer to the question appear officially trying to answer. And you know marine dumb dumb. That is the way the veterans perceive it is they think of us like we are idiots, and they treat us like idiots. And then they over complicate the process then they over complicate the process with paper forms first until VA developed electronic system with less explanation on each section of injuries. Then, less explanation on what documentation is needed to be add for each injury claim. You know we would not be able to understand it even if it was explained Barning style to us.
Veteran 3	1961	When I got out in eighty-three there was no nobody to talk to direct about claim process.
Veteran 4	1963	I do not know what kind of barriers cause I have never used it and I have never heard of any. I did not even know there was a website to submit your claims. Again, cause I do not have that much exposure to active duty. OK, we are at Fort Lewis. I did constantly, but when I was there seven years ago, and I lived there for almost 15 years before I moved out here. Never heard of it so it may not be available seven years ago it may have, but I did not hear about it.
Veteran 5	1948	See, I have no clue because my claims went so easily, I did not know I was claiming. Yes, so well.
Veteran 6	1985	Like I explained to you about my best friend turmoil getting his disability benefits. They need to listen instead of putting their opinions on veteran's injuries and medical diagnosis, for example hearing and brain injuries.
Veteran 7	1952	Mostly, it is the federal gobbledygook, the bureaucratic. Content is a user friendly. For one thing though, unless you know what verbiage to put into the text. It seems to me that opens the door to create more frustration. And then certainly when you get your denial letter back. And the VA seems like OK, either somebody in a suit sitting in an office somewhere who has no clue about me, and my condition decided, or a computer made a decision. But there was no personal, no personality in any of the conversation, and there is no personal feeling of assistance, you know, personal assistance on the website. It is all very matter of fact.

It is all out of bureaucratic gobbledygook. You know they ask for stuff that most I did not have all this stuff. I just found out I could get a copy of my medical records. So, you know how I am a knuckle dragging hose hauler from Colorado, right? I am fortunate to get the job I had here at the Fire Academy. But how does somebody with that level of intellectual capacity I do not want to say smarts or anything like that education level, you know, unless you know how to squirrel around in the bureaucratic gobbledygook. **You are going to be lost. You know all you do at that point is just fill in the blanks the best you can.** And in the blanks, themselves are very regimented. You do not get much opportunity to explain your side of the story. If there is a story, it is just all data. So that is another challenging thing. It is mechanical, it is not personal. Does that work?

Veteran 8

1951

The weight of bureaucracy, it is the complexity of the issue. Not having enough knowledge as to what things are and do and what things might be available. It is, I say, overwhelming. It is. I would say scary, but it is like. A big brick wall it you know, just do not want to be bothered with that. It is better than it was. Truly we have made some improvements. Uh, in benefit processing and so forth. I know that's cause how I worked on, but. It could be better if they would not pay too much money to these idiots that put crap out there for you, but. I do not know I think that. Let us say monolithic. It is that big mountain that is there and unless you are really motivated to climb the mountain. **Or do you have a real need, or you got a problem? Then you know. You are not going to bother. It is too complicated and having someone talk you through it is important.** The other thing is looking at software and. Those kinds of things and so forth. A lot of that stuff is written wrong. The sights and the things and so forth should be written. To bring the person along. With them unfortunately, a lot of a lot of them are kind of counterproductive. You know this is the thing in software development is that you have the people that write the code. And then you have your subject matter experts must be sharp enough to understand how people think and do things to be able to tell the developer. Hey, here is what we want to do. The developer then needs to write the code for that to happen, and then they need to work it together until it flows properly. And that is the goal of all this stuff. But I have seen a lot of failures and a lot of serious stuff. And **it gets too techie. It turns people off.** It gets too stupid, and you know.
Investigator: It makes you feel like you are a idiot,

- Interviewee:** yeah. I mean like what the hell is this going to do for me, yeah? So there needs to be that level of. Obviously, there must appeal to millions of people so that you know you can communicate with them. But, **I think having someone walk you through it is the number one on anything on any level of all the stuff that is going on. If you have someone show you something or tell you something, or you know help you with something. You are going to be a lot more successful in whatever the tool is.** Really, this stuff is it. Its software should be intuitive, it is not websites like this typically are designed to meet these requirements that somebody has written up in a vacuum. And if you have somebody that knows the program. **They can shepherd you through the process, yeah, but if you do not know where you are going and you do not know what it does and you do not know how it will do it, you are more likely to get shunted off and frustrated and done.**
- Veteran 9 1959 **Maybe they do not understand it, or they do not know what to submit or they do not know if they can get help.** That would be my choices of why.
- Veteran 10 1962 By note, that is something I can say is that, but **when someone is interviewing you and talking to you can get a little more just up their wants, their needs, their desires, things that they need. This is just black and white to fill it out on the computer, and that is probably why I got denied just simple questions.** This that put this date in female your age and that was it. Now, did you ask if I was homeless? Did you ask if I was naked? Did you ask if I was mentally ill hanging in my bathroom? You asked none of those questions. It was very plain Jane. The questionnaire that I answered.
- Veteran 11 1986 **It is kind of like what I was saying earlier with it is you must go to 30 or 40 different pages to find the correct information. You must have this log on. I have what three different log ONS?** Uhm, just to get in there to see anything. The technological technology aspects of it or you can sign to see where they are going. It is like they took five different websites and try to cram them into three different websites, and it is still just not there. It is not there that this was the important thing, just kind of navigating it. And again, it says, oh well, you need this form. OK, well what is that form? I might already have it, I just I do not know you know SP101 or SP102. And **just once you finally have everything and again, the VA claims guys they walked me through it. Once you learn everything it was a simpler process to submit a completed claim. But getting**

to that point and navigating the different lengths on the website getting to that point, it is quite infuriating that there were many times you can ask my wife and I said, you know, excuse my language, I put my hands up and I said, **** this, I'm done. I do not care; I do not want it and she pushed me and the eight claims' guys. They pushed me. No, you need to do this. I understand it is frustrating. But you can get it done.

Veteran 12 1979

It is very impersonal. Here is an example. If I can go with that dog drawn from my wife. So, if you did get to talk to so regarding our being. Great for the last 14 years which is in there. Well. We wound up going through process after finally talking to whoever from VBA who was doing the national teleconference. We wound up getting in as to ask a question. Ours do not come up during that. Session, I had a separate prior that. Would put for that. They wound up having somebody, somebody reach out and we wound up getting information on how we updated in the system because she is updated it. First times and we wound up calling in because. After we did our most recent update, they said in about 2 weeks or so. You should hopefully see that the status has changed, at least for now going forward. Separate from the going backwards and covering the last 14 years of nonpayment or gone. But before that well. Everything that the person we were speaking to came back to. Well, initially I initiated the phone call with my wife sitting next to me asked. They asked all the all the information, gave it to them and then they had to disarm me over the phone. If you would be and it is like, no, I cannot talk to you, and it is like my wife is sitting right here. She just does not necessarily and. She had let them know, hey I. Here, yes, here is my stuff. Yes, I am fine with your talking to my husband who I am sitting next to as we are trying to work on this problem together and so after that. Then it wound up reaching the point were. They just said a decision letter has been sent to you and I cannot tell you anything about it. A decision letter has been sent to you and I cannot tell you so. Where do you have the option of having that human interface? They are intentionally. Dehumanize it. So, which it is one of those, I realize they have several individuals who. As they found in information, we talked to them with unhappy voices and unhappy words, but at the same time. To have them say. Where they said we are not even going to talk to you. And get the get the letter and then. Then you can appeal an appeal or one way, but we did not even know what the decision. Was yes so.

Veteran 13 1961

Too difficult to get into too many passwords.

- Veteran 14 1984 **Even with the online portal, they still do not know how to figure out these papers. I mean 'cause most of it is all legal jargon.** You know, fyi crap. **No one there is not very many people to sit down and explain it to these guys who do not mentally comprehend it.** Uhm, that was my biggest hurdle is **I got flustered, confused, and gave up. Because it was so confusing. And convoluted, and I did not understand and do not have the time to stand there and not necessarily walk me through it but help me with any of the questions I had. I did not know VA updated their website**
- Veteran 15 1961
 Veteran 16 1961 I asked it upfront, but all the above after I need to file a claim. I mean there is this area of getting the complete accurate information that you need to file. **There is a barrier on where to go. So, I am phone now. And I am speaking in past tense for me I was not aware of all these tools that were available now.** Most are readily available primitives that are transition now, so on a scale of 1 to 10 from when I transitioned out to where things are now, things are at 11 OK compared to 2004 when I transitioned up.
- Veteran 17 1970 **Not understand the process. Not having internet capability. Up a lot of your better observed no say their injured or elderly or not understand surfing Internet or websites. I would say another one would be the lame response.** Do not know if you really got the right person to email you do not know where it is going to filter do there is no without a final answer. There is no one saying I got you play on the right person the habit of working on it know your time your kind a lost in the zone can so do you use Godhead Notify was inquired about something I would rather have an email from someone.
- Veteran 18 1969 **Too complicated. It is electronically it is extremely easy, but I do not think that you can understand.** That you can fill everything out, but I think again until I got a veteran's advocate, I did not feel you know I felt lost like again, I submitted the application, but then it is like. Like OK, what am I waiting for, and you know? And again, the only reason I initially reached out to the Advocate and even on my first claim was because I had not seen any movement. And I think when I reached out to the VFW, I do not know. She did do something and then it seemed like there was movement. So, I think when I submitted it all, might 'cause I submitted it in May? And I kept checking. I mean I did not check it. Today, but then at some point I was like, you know, this is ridiculous. It is not moving and on who the hell do you call? So, then I reached out to the VFW, and they put me in contact with a VSO and then like I

Veteran 19

1984

said within you know, a month or two things started to be moved. Was it because she did something? I do not know, but I would say again, it is. You are not going to submit your claim properly and understand it on your own. You know even with the information out there, you just you do not know so.

I have definitely struggled. I was working two full jobs at one point and going to school full time. To manage that did not last long, 'cause I could not keep up. It was a struggle I would say before I filed my claim in the process of waiting while the initial claim was filed. Uhm, I would not say that changed because it was just made things a little bit tougher because of having the gathered information and figure that out. On top of everything else. Uhm, **the initial decision was very discouraging because there were a few problems with my initial decision. They did not review my medical history at all that I sent in my package. They said they never received it, which is hard to believe. They only reviewed my medical history while I was in active duty. Nothing that I had done with the VA was reviewed. I had acquaintances that had indirect acquaintances that were getting extremely high ratings for things that were not near the level of what I experienced.** Uhm, and not to discount anyone else's experience, **but it was insulting to get 30% and then having the tinnitus claim denied, initially it was insulting and frustrating for me. Uhm, so I did file my appeal. And at that point the 30% payments. That was like \$400 a month or something like. On the appeal, uh, that process was just arduous as anything. I mean, seven years waiting on that and a lot of it was spent just fiddling my thumbs. There was not anything I could do to expedite, would not. I could call occasionally, and check on status, but even then, that was difficult sometimes. So, I felt like my hand was forced to try and get something versus fighting for something that might outright be denied if I was perceived as being greedy or anything like that, so I settled. And so that is where I am now is the 60% rating. And it does help. It is extremely helpful, but I feel grateful for I am at in life,** but that makes sense the position I have the job that I have, but I also feel very inadequate. If something were to happen to me at this point in life, it would be exceedingly difficult for me. I feel to find another occupation that would support me I guess is the best way.

- Veteran 20 1954 Up with processing their claims. I would say. **If I had known now when I first filed, I would have done it a whole lot differently because what you really need to do is go into the United States Code and look to see what medical conditions are? And then you need to tailor your submission to those medical conditions.** Build medical conditions. So, something says that you know you. Get you know 10% rating for say you know ringing in your ear's tinnitus, you now have the words in your submission. That match that United States Code section to make it simple for the regional office to. Look at it because otherwise if you say if you use non-medical terminology then somebody must map it to the medical terminology. They have to say ringing in the ears is this condition and sometimes if you do not use the right words, it does not get interpreted the right way.
- Veteran 21 1971 **It is not self-explanatory as they make it seem for us and them. They want you even though you should remember this day and time; which it is a lot harder for people to remember.** So, if you your dates, I forget how they got high. I received a letter where my dates were overlapping or something; they said did not like that overlapping. In yet, they need to give an example of what they mean some examples for that stuff.
- Veteran 22 1969 **I will say they have been improvements though in the last 2 years with moving everything to be VA.Gov.** Used to be ping pong around to different websites knows nuts there is still some of that and in some ways least at the front end of va.gov website reduces that the nalos the Thursday perceived notion on the backlog of cases that some people are concerned about.
- Veteran 23 1953 **Form the redundancy.** The weight always getting the same answer. Waiting for decision. There should be a way that you can enter cable somehow and find the exact status of your case where it is an approximate date of completion. That would be nice, but the fact they got a call once a month to find out what is going on. I got the point where I quit calling. I got the three months, or I would see someone to be on. I will give him a call and see what is going on. And you get the same. You get the same answer waiting for this evening. Well, **how long they must wait to get a decision? So that was a barrier. It is the long wait periods and the lack of communication on their part. Is almost deters you from filing a claim.** In my opinion. Because why bother? But the thing with me is all I got is time. So, I am sitting here when I go to write up an appeal.

Veteran 24 1983

Peers-been denied. I would say uhm the fact that some of my peers have applied and been denied. However, they get they need to be the squeaky wheel. And after it seems like time after time they are given the benefit. When we were going through the process trying to get my rating initially, uhm. At one point my wife took over and in being the contact point for the regional office in Philadelphia. And my wife so vividly remembers speaking to this woman she is so nice, and she really was extremely helpful. Uhm, but you know we were going through all these. My initial call was about his rating and where was it at in the paperwork? You know, in the process and she was asking about different things you know, did you go to this appointment? Did he do this? So, he did? You know all these things and after about 20 minutes she said to me come and remind me again what is his rating? No, my initial. Phone call was because he did not have a Rating yet and I said to her. Is it ma'am? Oh, there is nothing wrong with my brain and this. It is mine. This makes my head hurt. Like how a veteran is who is who is suffering from a TBI or PTSD or anything supposed to navigate through this If they do not have someone. Helping them, yes, you know, and she was incredible, but she like. This was. **You could see that the paperwork on her end was so cumbersome that you know she lost track of what we were talking about,** and I was like, oh my God, **I cannot like a wonder people give up because you cannot get through the red tape. That is absolutely and it I can wholeheartedly understand why A veteran would just throw their hands up in the air and say, forget this is not, you know this. Is not worth it, even though it. Is in the end, but you know. She's frustrating** and Roman he had a lot of help.

Veteran 25 1961

Status has improved. Let us see. **One barrier that they have improved on just recently is you had difficulties seeing statuses between steps.** OK, and which forced me to make **phone calls because you would sit there and say, well, nothing happened. According to the website for the last two years.** So, you call up and they say Oh no. **Some people inside the VA can see changes that I do not have visibility to. And I am not clear why the case as well as access to notes that I think. Unless you are trying to hide something from the know person, why would you keep the notes hidden from them?**

- Veteran 26 1965 Well one is they made **one barrier** that I can think of is that they are not. **They do not know how to use the computer properly or they do not know how to navigate the website properly. No one's there to help them with that. Uhm, that is probably an exceptionally large barrier because a lot of the veterans are probably older. The younger veterans understand computers, they understand websites and so forth. The older veterans, for example the Vietnam vets, Korean vets and so forth makes it difficult for them. I would say that is probably the biggest barrier that they have, uh, with the different programs that are on a computer.**
- Veteran 27 1965 **It would be called lack of transparency.** There yeah, I guess there's lack of transparency 'cause when I get on their websites it says uh? Now, me speaking to you today will be the cure. I am going to pull it up, uh? I am going to put my little code in. And I guess another thing would be. I mean, I teach computers, so I am not a technology. Rube, I am afraid that anybody who is not Technology savvy would struggle.
- Veteran 28 1946 The barrier that I would see is I do not do it that way because I think that my VSO should be able to it better. Maybe no, no. The right words, but I found out that they just used the fewest words possible. But I like to think they use the right words. The knowledge of verbiage.
- Veteran 29 1978 **Barriers, you know if there is any kind of technical difficulties.** Good luck, I mean it. They still do not get back to me about what I complained about in December 2019 with filling out that ticket.
- Veteran 30 1949 **The eBenefits website, the let us see all those programs and filling out all the applications is not aware of what evidence you need to submit with your application. Your diagnosis and the third thing are if you have been out of the service more than a year, you are required to provide a medical access letter from a medical doctor stating that he is not fit that your current condition. Was caused by your military service. If you have those three things, you win. Yeah, if you leave one of those three out. You lose and but for the years you know. I have met people who have been fighting with the VA for 12 years. Uhm, uh, I can read the rating decision because what I do? I read the rate decision and I underline the three things. If there are not those three things in the right decision. They are never going to be successful. That is why it is important to use the service officer to serve you, stand proof. 'cause you know the thing about VA benefits.** I do not care if they are federal benefits, state benefits, county benefits. They are all entitlements of law,

yeah, so. It so if you do not understand how to apply the law then?

- Veteran 31 1971 Lots of info, but the catch is it is limited and generic info. **There are few links to regulation or to clarity on expectations or unique situations, when you call 1-800-827-1000 they do not have answers and tell you to apply when you only have questions on the program or resources, then you must wait months to even get your questions answered. Helpful yet confusing.** However, this has improved over time.
- Veteran 32 1983 Initially, I was trying to find the right area and like the important thing I had is trying. **I always was told like go through a service officer. I have friends that have told me to go through three different organizations that are civilian based. They do the claims for you and then you get give them a portion of your what you receive.** Because and then also then being part of a military organization who has service officers and other things, it is like no, you do not do those. Those are the wrong way. **Then we are not the right thing, so, finding the information and trying, or at least finding a good service officer in different areas outside Pennsylvania. I mean talking about Pennsylvania outside Philly and Pittsburgh is what I have been told.** Or at least it is hard to do. Like said boldly, the idea which I am learning that they have them, and they are a lot more qualified than the other organizations out there. It is a learning curve 'cause I have been asking looking for a service officer for a while and no one could tell me anything and all my friends keep telling me use these organizations. They do the job right? And then you get it quick, but you pay them. I am like part of a military organization that says not to if we had to. We had to let him go because of they were not doing their job and the money with the COVID and redistribution of money. We had to let our two organization service officers go. So, it is interesting trying to figure out what's. Out there.
- Veteran 33 1979 **So, word of mouth always tells you that it is a huge challenge to complete a claim like all you ever hear are horror stories about how it took forever. No one listened to you the people. At the VA that we are doing, the customer service was rude, and they did not hear you when you brought documentation, they would not even look at it.** And they were more concerned about getting me in and out like you. Hear that kind of stuff all the time. And especially when you go to veteran's support groups 'cause it seems like everyone enjoys

telling their story. So, and then, once I had to start when I was at working for the VA, I got recognized right away as being an employee at the VA. And so, people started asking me. All the time. Like they are like, hey, would you volunteer and be one of the folks that help people with claims, and I am like, I know I cannot do that.

Veteran 34 1960

Well, the barrier is that not I had done it because like I said, I have always used as a veteran service officer. Is having someone to assist? I do not know that they have the online kind of help thing, but it is better to talk to someone who has gone through the process with another veteran. **I do not know if they use the person that is on that site is another veteran or not, but it is always better to use another veteran.**

Veteran 35 1950

What challenges they have? Yeah huh? It is understanding the process of uploading. All right, uhm, it is that and. What forms do I need? That is the massive thing, you know, because you know as well as I do, the VA changed. What used to be certain forms and how you could do it and when they change some of those forms. **Next thing you know, it is like, why did you add this section all right? Like the dependency claim form that changed dramatically, and it is like, huh? You know? That is where the veterans get confused.** OK, yes. That is on the website. No good. Well, the rest of it is the process. **The actual process that where the veterans get confused, right? When you talk about if a veteran gets a decision. They immediately sit there and say, well, I want to appeal the decision. It is like, well, what are you appealing? What is it that you do not like about the decision? You know well one you know; they gave me a zero. It is like, well, you got service connection. No, I did not. They denied me. It is like no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Meet the criteria for compensation, but you were granted service connection.** You just did not. So, it is understanding. That is the important thing. Those that sit there and say, well, I served so, therefore. I am entitled to it as like. Well, no, it is evidence based. It is like what do you mean? The government knows what I did in the service. It is like no name. Just because you did certain things the. There are plenty of what we affectionately call the bar room service officers. Right? That will sit there and say, Lisa. You served in someone, so you should file for so and so or you and I served together. I got this. You should be getting that too. It is like no, no, no, no, no. You do not understand circumstances. Oh, my worthless brother-in-law, my God. He is 100%, he did not do watch it and when he was in the service it

is like. Do you know what he filed for you know? Or the one guy he sat there and said well, the VA knows what I was exposed to. It is like what do you mean? They know what you were exposed to. Well, they know where we served. It is like if you are talking Agent Orange that is given. If you are talking something, no, these are the chemicals that we use. Like what and what were you doing? Were you sniffing it, or you put your nose in it or what you know if you if you used it to clean your weapon, OK, you did it in an undeveloped area you were not confined area, you were not breathing it for hours? On end. It is the misconceptions that people have.

Veteran 36 1961

One of the hurdles and one of the things that is I think can be overwhelming is the number of forms and the number of forms and the purpose of each type of form. Uh, if somebody does not know, it does not have a good clue and I have barely scratched the surface of some of this stuff, but. The amount and number of forms to use for this, that and the other is insane. I mean, if somebody had to start from nothing and you had to tell him, hey, you got to do this and do that I God bless the people who must give that advice cause I would be like my head would be spinning it is pretty insane.

Veteran 37 1949

All evaginate. I have never been to the website. So, I do not know, alright?

Note. The birth year was important to know age group. Each response is verbatim. The black bold and red highlight areas are concerns with processing disability claims.

The Transition Assistance Program (TAP) improved the process of the program from 2008 to present for active service members to military veterans. One area that benefited our active-duty service members in 2008 to 2013, the Veterans Benefit Administration changed the requirement for active-duty service members to submit their disability claim within 90 days of separating when they were going through Transition Assistance Program (TAP) from the service in 2008 to present. The opportunity to interview three veterans that had the opportunity to submit claims through VA

representative that taught the class. Even the three veterans had issues with their claim because it was placed in the backlog problem. Sometime in 2017, VBA changed the requirement again to make it mandatory for an active-duty service member to submit a disability claim within six months out of end of service date. This allowed the active-duty service member to start receiving rate percentage pension the next day and or first month after date of separation. The opportunity to interview one veteran that went through the new TAP program. Even today, the TAP program was utilizing a virtual setting for all active-duty members and families to participate.

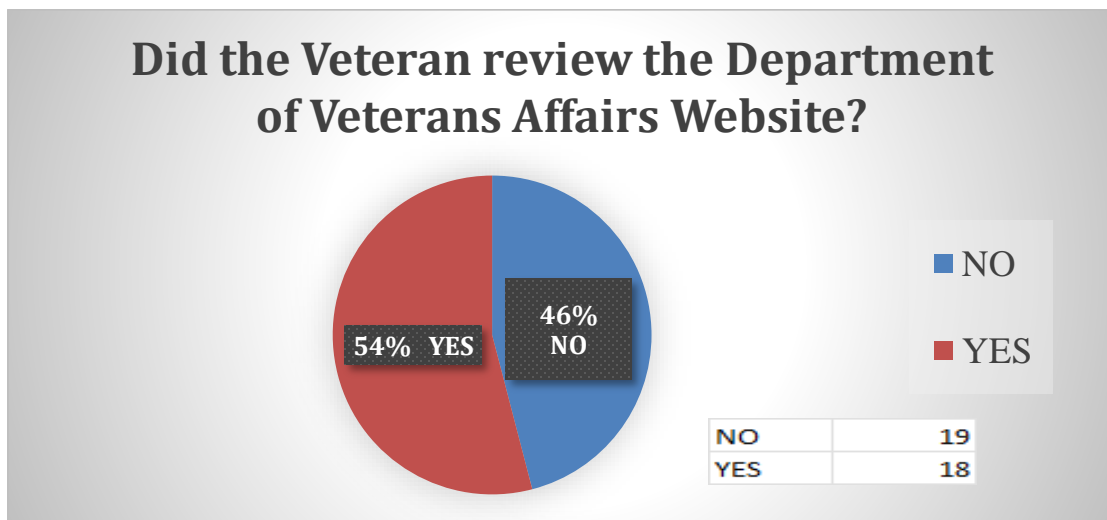
The Old vs New VA.Gov Website is Still Confusing

Based on the data collections, one question was asked was “Do you review the Department of Veterans Affairs website with a yes or no response?” Then, followed up with “How many times do you review the Department of Veterans Affairs website?” Out of the 37 interviewed veterans, 20 said “Yes” and 17 indicated “No”. See figure 15 first diagram shows the percentage of 54 % yes and 46% no responses; see NCVAS (2018) survey on page 17 talks about *VA Benefits Utilization by Program – Veterans only: FY 2016*. The second graph below display how many times a veteran reviews their VA.Gov for updated changes with benefits and any other information that a veteran, spouse, and family needs to know in case of death of veteran. Figure 16 shows estimate of above 95 percent of both male and female using smartphone more internet access and computer in fiscal year 2016 that was on page 21 of the *Profile of Veterans: 2016* (NCVAS, 2018). When you look at figure 17 it shows approximately 9.7 million veterans used at least one or may two VA benefits from health care, compensation or pension, loan guaranty, life

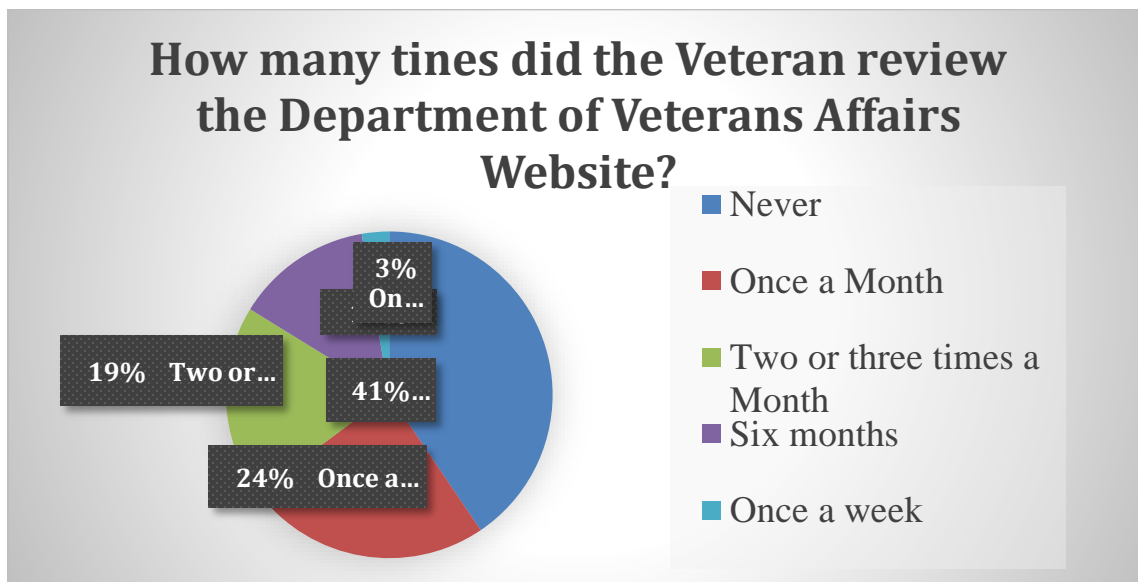
insurance, education, memorial benefits, and vocational rehabilitation (NCVAS, 2018). Since the document is from a fiscal year 2016, the numbers should be higher 4.6 million to 5 to 6 million for fiscal year 2021 for compensation or pension and close to 7 million for health care.

Figure 15

Do you review the Department of Veterans’ Affairs website? Yes or No. With a follow-up of how many times do you review



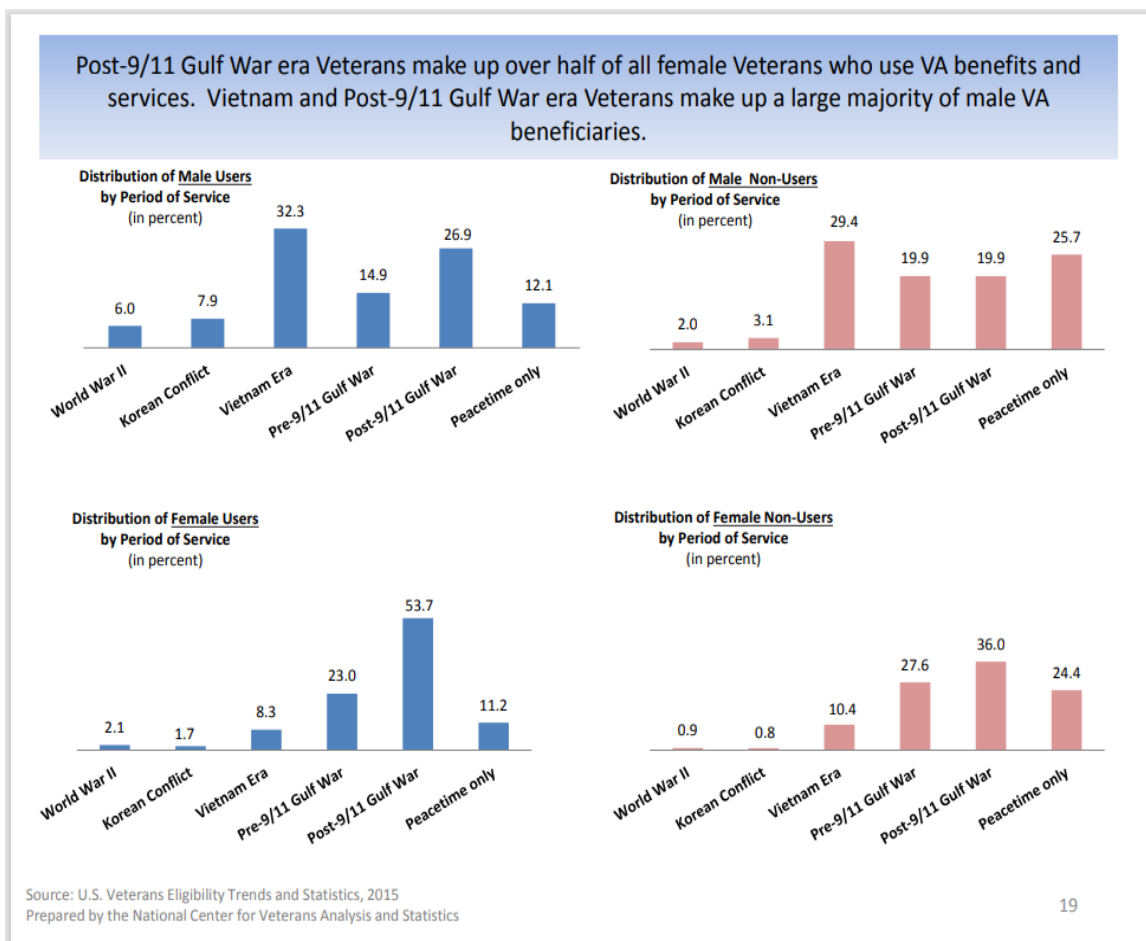
Second pie graph is the following question to support the yes or no on the Department of Veterans’ Affairs website.



Note. The percent is based on 37 military veterans that participated in the study and each yes or no response was verbatim by each veteran. It was 15 for never, 9 for once a month, 7 for two or three times a month, 5 was for six months, and 1 for once a week.

Figure 16

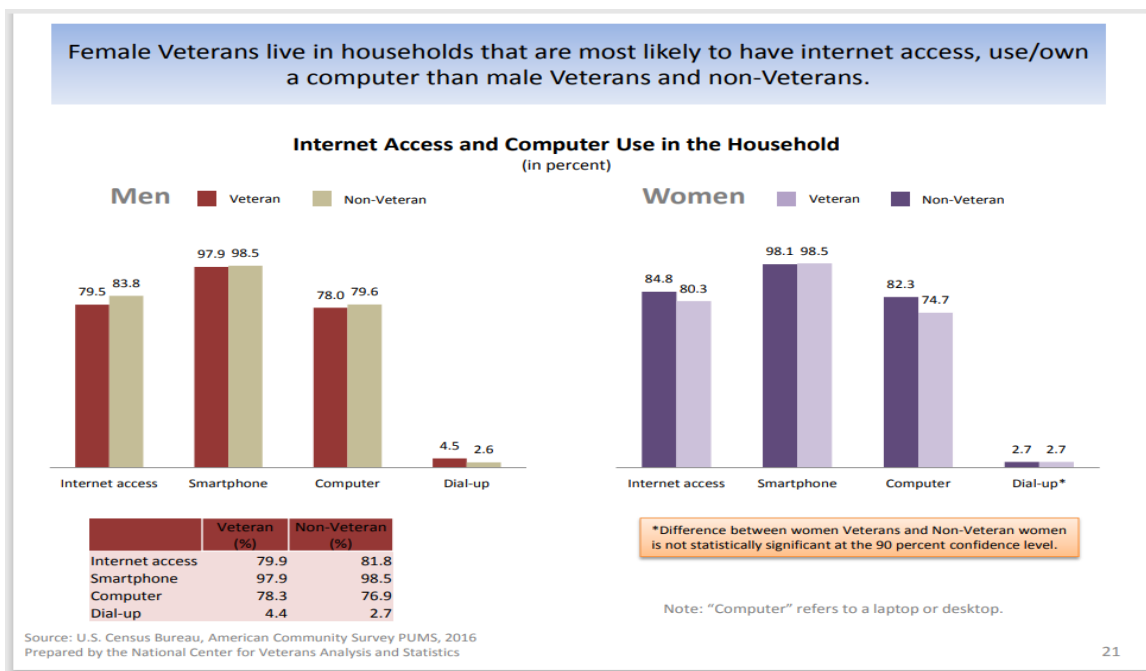
Comparison between military veterans (male/female) users and the non-users from Vietnam to Post-9/11 Gulf War with VA benefit, services, and beneficiaries



Note. The slide 19 came from the Comparison of VA Users and Non-Users FY 2016. The source is the U.S. Veterans Eligibility Trends and Statistics, 2016 and VetPop2016. That was prepared by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics under https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/Profile_of_Veterans_2016.pdf

Figure 17

Internet Access and Computer Use in the Household



Note. The graph belongs to Profile of Veterans: 2016 of the Data from the American Community Survey that was prepared by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics February 2018 under https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/Profile_of_Veterans_2016.pdf

The key problem with the new VA.Gov website is they still utilize some of the old VA.Gov website that supports the eBenefits portal. When you go into the VA.Gov to apply for a new claim, then you are transferred back to the eBenefits side of the old website. Even today, when you want to pull research documents to support any part of your research through the new VA.Gov, it directs you go to other Department of Veterans Affairs websites. So, investigator decided to reach out to my military veteran interviewees on how they felt about the new VA.Gov webpage on Table 12 below.

Table 12

Did the updated VA.Gov website in February 2020, confuse you more since they still utilize the old webpages of eBenefits portal? Yes or No. If yes, please explain why.

Veteran #	RQ25: Sometime in February 2020, the VA/Gov (Department of Veterans Affairs) added another website; did it confuse you more since they still utilize the old webpage for eBenefits portal? Yes or No	RQ25A: If yes, would you please explain?
Veteran 1	Yes	<p>I think they could have done a better job switching it over and he said by February God by now this is just this month by now they should not. They should not even have any benefits. They should say it is va.gov, we are done. Here it is. But they do not have it. They do not have all the information there. I must go to two different stores to get everything you know it used to be at a Grocery store then you had a. Back in the old days, like a Kmart and then they had the Super store. It is all in one stop shopping. Well, it is not one stop shopping right now.</p>
Veteran 2	Yes	<p>That is like the people at the VA. When they try and explain **** they bring it up. They mention the one website. The guys at the DAV bring up a different website. The guys at the Legion who can look at a different website said nobody there is no consistency, which is there's. There is no consistency. With where the information is, who has the information where it is coming from? Who disseminates the information? Nobody knows who is in charge over there. ***** **** of epic proportions. Never knew it exist</p>
Veteran 3	No	
Veteran 4	No	<p>Regular information I get is that army of one newsletter, the hardcopy. You know that list all the things going on and half the stuff does not pertain, but I like to look at the different links and what is going on with the IRS owes, because I do like to go to the RSL conventions. That is the only official thing, and I know</p>

		that the Internet is full of official. But I do not have a need to go research it. I registered for it, and I had trouble getting onto it and then I just said screw it. So, I just call the VA when I need help and I get.
Veteran 5	No	Well, that is not hard to answer. I do not use it. My wife does it. She keeps track of my time to keep me alive.
Veteran 6	No	I did not realize that VA merged their websites
Veteran 7	No	Never knew about
Veteran 8	No	Happy to try to log in and see.
Veteran 9	No	I do not use any of it.
Veteran 10	No	N/A
Veteran 11	Yes	It is like exactly what we have been talking about. You must have three different passwords. What is it you must have your default password? Uhm, and then you must have your VA health password. And then there is a whole another. I have a whole list of them written down at home on a notebook, and of course they expire occasionally. So then, oh well, **** Now I got to go redo this one. Well, what was it now going to this one and you click one link, and it says go here. Well now I must log into this website. Because I am already logged into this website. And but then you walk, log into that second website and it looks just like the website. You were already on, huh?
Veteran 12	Yes	As I have been. Learning how to deal with it, it has not been such a change for me, but it has been interesting when I do a complete log into one thing and then if I want to look at hey, what payments have I received or what is my actual status? The disability status I must log into another VA tool with the same exact stuff. And then and then there is a separate portal. So, I must go to if I have any travel related things after I check out in Lebanon while living in Mechanicsburg. That is obviously a little bit more of a haul than I otherwise would have, so I tried doing the process while my appointment finished right after. Or right as the office that they have their closed, but they wind up, gave me a pack of paper that was like sorry 8 inches long. And here is how you do this. We have changed the system. Here is how you do it. Set it up for yourself, which I did. And then after I did that, I put in

		2/2 separate claims. One was for something that I did during my CMP. Of while but my CMP was done under contractor, so while it is.
Veteran 13	No	OK, I do not look at the eBenefits portal and I never looked at the new website.
Veteran 14	Yes	They have a new website.
Veteran 15	No	N/A
Veteran 16	No	I could say they should be doing a better job because they are so. Like you said earlier with the one gentleman he was in his own for a year or two, year or three years, right? Where nobody cared, nobody understood. Nobody mattered nobody. Life did not matter right. If I can get high loans, I can deal with whatever this demon. That I am dealing with, so a caseworker. Something you know I am talking about somebody you know. Again, going to see his doctor at the VA. I mean, I, I went back, and I looked at my chart right from my health and like 90%. Are the sessions that we had nothing about what we were talking about was in there.
Veteran 17	No	You going to any other the other new website of the va.gov that they put in place in February of 2020 that is not compatible to their whole website. Because you still had to have each password for each portal that has the day put into the website. I mean you still had to have your email add your password for my health, and tab your password for the VA.gov. My password for anything dealing with the travel now that are using for travel pay I mean completely different but it's all under that whole little thing, but you must like still to take all these passwords, it's not just one it must have multiple passwords to get into everything.
Veteran 18	Yes	Yes that is one thing I will say going between like the do I sign on to the DoD site you know and then that directs you know where a VA site is and then there is a site for the claims. It is very confusing and I usually anytime I am going to look other than my health. Do you know the VA stuff? It takes me about 5 or 10 minutes to get to where I need to be. Oh no, this is now on va.gov. No, you know it is you get bounced around a lot so.
Veteran 19	Yes	It also seen very fragmented

- Veteran 20 Yes Let us see, there is two of them. Is it? **eBenefits? And then there is another one to look at appeals. And when you log into the one to look for appeals, you not only have to log in with username and password,** but they send you link in my phone. May I secure? And after a while again there. So, there is basically three different. Logins to the VA and UM.
- Veteran 21 Yes I know what you are talking about. Yes, it is **because when you asked to look on one thing you must have another username or password highlighted. At first, username or and password, you got to have a different one, even though they are booting you to a different site.**
- Veteran 22 Yes That is a **matter of perspective because I think someone coming out fresh now would find that confusing, I think someone like me that had experience with it no more than 5 years ago.** Now sees the improvement is like allow this better so, it is a matter of perception on when the law experience with the website began does now I would if I were out now what is done.
- Veteran 23 Yes **I was not aware that they did anything to it. Nobody could explain to me what the categories meant and what you needed to qualify for it. Whether you call the 801 thousand number or called. You went to the website; nobody broke down what the different things were to qualify for it. And now if you do a Google search, it explains each category, what you need to do to qualify for that level.** And now when you go to va.gov, it is on there now too. **It is more informative, but you still must do some searching to get to it.** Yes, you must start with pop up and if you know them with the pop exact insert. It is like if you do not know how to spell something. Hey, look it up.
- Veteran 24 Yes They want to legalize, I couldn't do one password for the whole firm and a how to do another password for the travel section so I still to me it's still not compatible for me to use because I still have to do that all well Bixby me now log in is what I used to get to everything I think you actually multiple I saw 4 different authentication systems in addition to cat cards you that still are in there they yet useful authentication. It is much better than it was in my opinion and it is going to be there all go to single sign on eventually

- Veteran 25 No **It did not really confuse me. They are going to migrate to one single system.** The failure is part of chain management they did for it to help the manage people all different users that understands how to easy navigate it . Environment on this portal is the dependence upon older process. **The issue I see with the VA, they are set standards I wanted to email them my documents instead I had to fax them the paperwork. Why would you post the letters that are mailing to the website. I cannot see those letters, so instead I had to call them (support line) ask them to read it to me. Asked them to read it to me. Why did not they build a system that automatic sent to the printer, to portal and into your record. I should be received a notification automatically. They do not adjust address the people are digital. They did not specify in the Contract for the requirements in the design to build it. Failure in the design of the system.**
- Veteran 26 Yes I thought. **I mean for me I am using confusing passwords that I thought were correct. We are not correct, so I you know. I spent a lot of time. Uhm, forgetting my password, you know, hitting that, forget me forgot my password link and resetting my password a lot. That was confusing.**
- Veteran 27 No I did not realize there was, you know, I mean.
- Veteran 28 No **The second website, yep. You know, is that something that that? My HealtheVet bumps me off into sometimes. And then you need a different. Sign in yes. That was a panic button. So now when I go into it, I can use my HealtheVet sign. In or another, so there's. Two things on here. Now for the same place. So do you want to yes on that.**
- Veteran 29 Yes **Yes, absolutely. There is such a I do not know why they are using two websites you know va.gov and eBenefits, and they do not always match up, and that is incredibly frustrating. And it seems like the two are always kicking you to the other site, so when you are on eBenefits, and you want to see historical claims that kick you over to va.gov**
- Veteran 30 No As a veteran and VSO, the changes do not affect me working on VA.Gov website.

- Veteran 31 Yes **These systems do not communicate. You start on one site then go to another site, then must go back to find out status then go back to enter info, and worse of all when you call for assistance one is handle by one organization and the other is handled by another and they do not cross talk. I had this as a major issue, and I know your study does not reflect this but as a woman with a name change. It is awful and adds to the frustration and just makes me want to stop and come back later or get even more frustrated.**
- Veteran 32 No No, I mean I work in software, so for me it is a kind of a norm seeing some old and new technologies together.
- Veteran 33 Yes **Yes, 'cause again making him everything is getting redirected over. It is a slow process. To relearn something, you already know. So going in the eBenefits website, and almost like you are like. Oh, I do not do a claim here. Anymore, I must go over this other website. OK, sure, that is the blue and stuff. And then you get over there and things but now you are looking at a ton of different things on one page, so it takes you a minute to find it.** In respect I only must remember one website and I can. So that is convenient. It is just a matter of knowing which dropdown which section to go to get the best information because typical search engines within the site where it says search. My little brother it brings up so many odd things that I mean. Like I do not care about an article. Related to me am learning where do I go to file a claim? I want to know where I go to get the right information you get. Golden shot, I do not want articles about how this hospital is starting off?
- Veteran 34 Yes **I only really went out there once and when I saw it, it was kind an okay, where is this taking me to? This is what I am looking for.** Am I going to be able to find things? Yeah, so. It was kind of like once I saw the differences I'm not sure I want to get involved in this right now, it just and it also happened to me at a period when I was working on my retirement stuff, so I was kind of busy. So, I didn't go into in depth in it and figure it out. I am usually fairly good about figuring out websites, but I just did not have the time at. You know for this one.

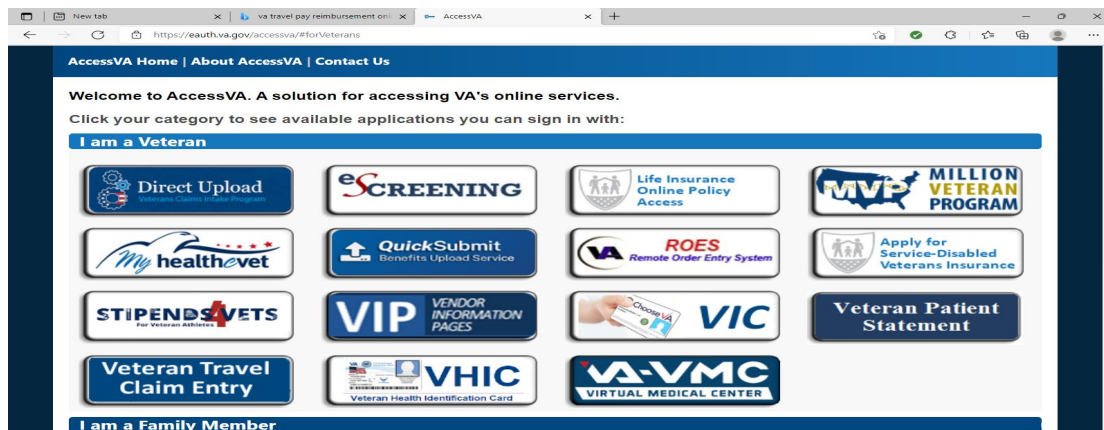
Veteran 35	Yes	It would be nice to see one password for all VA.Gov websites that had been redeveloped numerous times.
Veteran 36	Yes	Yes, 'cause I do not know which is going to be the go-to site and I try not to. Just logging on used to be a big hassle, but now one of the options is to log on using your HealtheVet log on and that is the only thing that gets me in without this huge, cumbersome process. It helps a little bit to have if you are if you have a mind HealtheVet, log on. It will pull over somehow and let you get in that way. I spoke around here and there, but like I said I go into my HealtheVet because it is the best way for me to communicate about my appointments. I can talk to my primary care provider. I can upload information, pictures. Test results, all that stuff I know they are going to try to do something here. In the not-too-distant future, but I hope they do not break what's working is what I say.
Veteran 37	No	Not sure what you are talking about VA.gov website. I do not go online that much.

Note. Each veteran provided their own verbatim response. The bold and red highlighted areas are the frustration, lack of knowledge, and lack of communication on how to use the new VA.Gov (www.va.gov).

One of the biggest areas that communication and barriers that has veterans up in a stool wind is the constant changes to all the VA websites that support from disability claims, pension claim, education, cemetery, and health. Below figure 14 is a notable example of some websites that Department of Veterans Affairs are using that will be eventually will be one log in through VA.Gov website to get to these in Figure 14 .

Figure 18

AccessVA Home/About AccessVA/Contact Us



Note. The screen shows multiple programs that is being place under one login location for the VA.gov website (www.va.gov).

The responses were right on what I expected to see, since only the ones would know about the changes are the veterans that signed up for newsletters.

Did the outcome process take too long for Veterans' Quality of Life under the Old Appeal Process?

If you go back into the Legacy Board of Appeals BOA website under VA.gov and or other veterans support site, for example Senior Veterans Service Alliance (SVSA) provided estimate numbers from 2017 to 2024 the answer to question would be "yes". I agree with the estimated numbers that SVSA numbers provided below because if you want to do a deep dive into the Board of Veterans' Appeals Decision search results you will see cases by to 1992. SVSA provided a perfect scenario that 400,000 to 600,000 legacy appeals are stuck somewhere in a black hole of appeals (SVSA, 2021). In figure 7

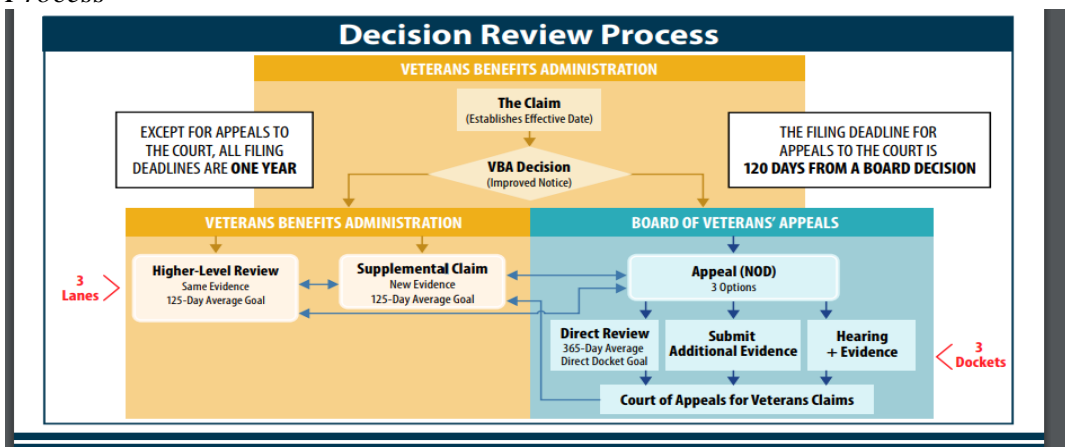
below, the Board of Appeals provided an updated numbers of pending appeal claims and future FY22 process of appeals.

If you open cases from 1992 to present, you will see a lot of closed due to deaths. Then, the question comes into play is how many veterans' cases were closed to be re-open for survivor benefits? That can be resolve by another research study for someone to make that determination.

When you look at dates when each veteran submitted a claim or not, 25 veterans' claims did not get process within 125 days. Of the 37 veterans, 16 were satisfied with their results and or partial satisfied. Fourteen of 16 appeal their results by doing only the denied or low percentage rate on each injury. The 14 veterans that submitted an appeal did not realize there was a backlog with appeals and only six knew about the "The Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017" that the President of United States signed August 23, 2017, known as Appeals Modernization Act, see figure 15. It officially did not take into effect until February 19, 2019, during the two-year period after the Act was signed the Veterans Benefit Administration had to work out the details. See Table, on how long a veteran had to wait for an answer from their appeal. Four of the veterans are still waiting for an answer back from Appeal Judge. My final question on appeals, some veterans are still not satisfied with their results but most of them had an increase in rate percentage. Only five of them received a final of 100 percent. There were two veterans that used the new appeal process and received answer back within 90 days per agreement of the law. The veteran was not happy with the results, so the veteran submitted appeal through the new Modernization Appeal Process

that took effect on February 2019 and received a positive response. Based on Figure six “VA Appeal Process Today,” had the opportunity to make it work during the pandemic when the President signed Executive Order for “Tele-hearing Modernization Act,” on April 10, 2020, to allow virtual hearings for the appeal backlog.

Figure 19 A better understanding of the VA RAMP Appeal Process – Decision Review Process



Which Review Lane is Right For You?

Supplemental Claim Lane
(decisions within 125 days on average)

- Select this option if you have additional evidence that is new and relevant to support your benefit claim.
- VA will assist you in gathering new and relevant evidence to support your claim.
- VA's review will include any new and relevant evidence submitted since we last decided your claim.

Higher-Level Review Lane
(decisions within 125 days on average)

- A higher-level review consists of an entirely new review of your claim by a more experienced claims adjudicator.
- Select this option if you have no additional evidence to submit in support of your claim, but you believe that there was an error in the initial decision.
- VA cannot assist you in gathering new evidence, but if the higher-level reviewer discovers an error in VA's duty to assist in the prior decision your claim will return to decision makers to correct the error.
- You or your representative can request an optional, one-time, informal telephone conference with the higher-level reviewer to identify specific errors in the case, although this may cause a delay in the processing of your higher-level review.

Appeal to the Board Lane

If you choose the Board, select one of the three following options:

- Direct Review**
You do not want to submit additional evidence or have a hearing.
- Evidence Submission**
You choose to submit additional evidence without a hearing. You will have 90 days from your Notice of Disagreement (NOD) to submit any additional evidence.
- Hearing**
You choose to submit additional evidence and have a hearing with a Veterans Law Judge. You will be scheduled for a Board hearing and may submit evidence at the hearing or within the 90 day window following the scheduled hearing.

What If You Still Disagree with a Decision?

If you disagree with a decision from the Supplemental Claim Lane, you may choose to resubmit the claim as another supplemental claim with new evidence, as a higher-level review or as an appeal to the Board of Veterans' Appeals.

If you disagree with a decision from the Higher-Level Review Lane, you may choose to resubmit the claim as a supplemental claim or as an appeal to the Board of Veterans' Appeals.

If you disagree with a Board decision you may either resubmit as a supplemental claim or through an appeal to the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims.

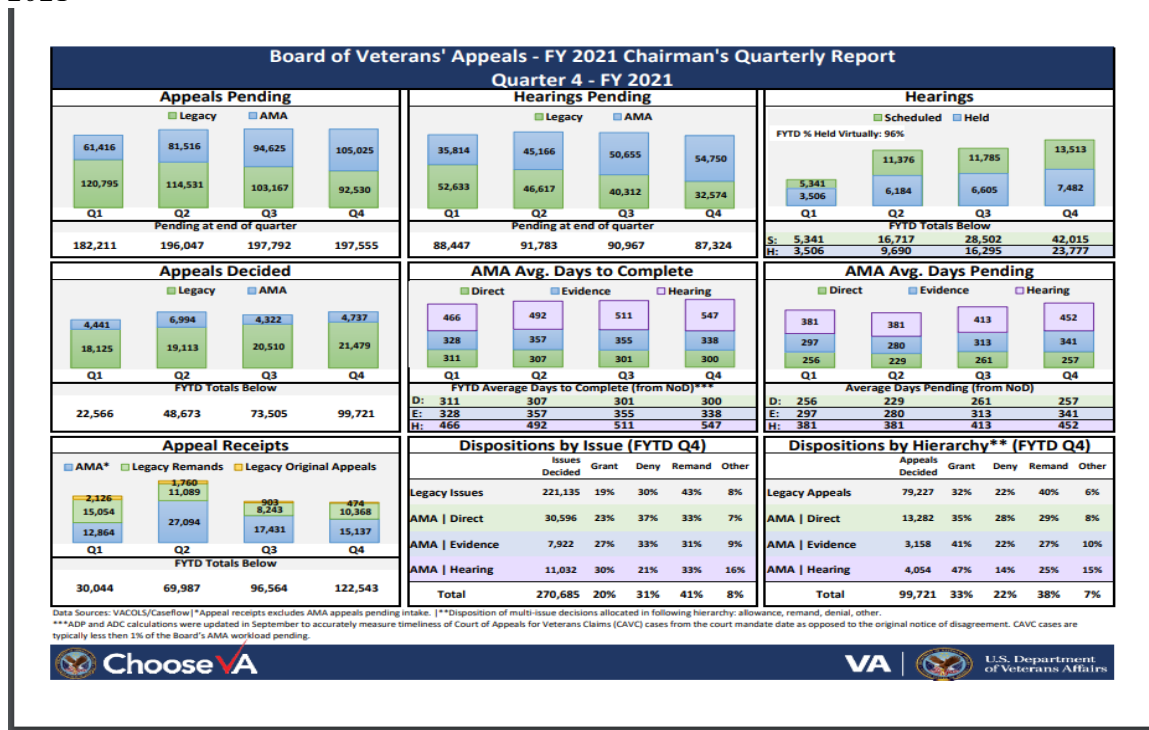
Note. A better understanding of VA Appeal Process before RAMP comes into play in February 2019, go to

<https://www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets/appeals/Appeals-Factsheet.pdf>

Based on Figure 20 the backlog of Legacy and RAMP numbers are still showing numbers of outstanding backlogs for the Quarter 4 of Fiscal Year 2021 of the Board of Veterans' Appeals.

Figure 20

Board of Veterans' Appeals – FY 2021 Chairman's Quarterly Report Quarter 4 – FY 2021



Note. Located on Board of Veterans Appeals website

https://www.bva.va.gov/docs/Quarterly_Reports/Board_Quarterly_Chairmans_Reports_FY2021_4Q_Internal.pdf

Lack of Knowledge of Backlog of Claims at Department of Veterans' Affairs

With research question two “How will the inconsistent numbers of pending disability claims affect the veterans’ quality of life?” After doing all the interviews, Veteran 30 provided me with some interested information that Pennsylvania has a legislation from 2007 called “Act 66.” The study did a deep dive into Act 66 that explains the number difference between state of Pennsylvania, Regional offices from Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, and overall numbers from Monday Morning Workload Reports that came out of VBA.

I was amazed that only six of the 37 veterans did not realize the Department of Veterans Affairs had a seriously backlog from 1998 to present that cause veterans to discourage them from submitting their claim, see table 7. After a veteran got out of the service, one thing each interviewee indicated that they needed to get back to work to support their family. That was the most important thing to them not submitting for benefits to receive extra cash in their pockets. When I mentioned about the inconsistency of claim numbers, they were not surprised because of the horrible stories from fellow veterans at VA Medical Centers and going to functions at VFW and American Legion. A few of the veterans did not realize they qualify for benefits because they did not have any lost limbs. Veteran 1 commented, “No, I did not know there was a backlog of claims. I did not have that much knowledge. When I heard that coming from a veteran, I was thinking how many others will think that way. Go to Veteran 2, 6, 14, and 34 and read their responses that caught my attention in table 7 on pages 159-162.

I think today more veterans are finally filing a disability or pension claims, 65 years with other criteria, see Eligibility For Veterans Pension | Veterans Affairs (va.gov). The Gulf War of Iraq and Afghanistan war forced the Department of Veterans Affairs to change from using hard copies paper forms to electronic processing system for accountability purposes. Even though the VBA set up accountability for benefits, throughout the years they improved the Monday Morning Workload Reports that is available for the public to see on <https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/mmwr/>.

After the interviews were completed, I saw a media articles from Leo Shane, Military Times, mentioned the new Secretary of Veterans Affairs McDonough stated how his Field Operations Department was processed more claims and reduced the backlog of original claims and the appeal backlog. My last review of Monday Morning Workload Reports was the pending number not the complete fiscal year to date before my proposal was approved August 2020. I reviewed Monday Morning Workload Reports again for the past three fiscal years and noticed overwhelming numbers of claims processed, see Tables 13 and 14 for Fiscal Year 21, and 20 with end of Fiscal Year 19 (September 2019) below.

Table 13

True Historical Data from Field Operations and VBA Monday Morning Workload Reports that Contains VBA Overall, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh RO Claim Numbers for beginning of Fiscal Year 202 to end of Fiscal Year 2021.

Fiscal Year 21 End of each Month/Year	Pending	Backlog >125 Days	Complete Month to Date	Complete Fiscal Year to Date	Legacy Appeals Pending
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9/30/21 End of FY					
21					
VBA/Field Overall	604611	207777	108138	1496263	30708
Philadelphia RO	2241	821	3497	62548	11
Pittsburgh RO	653	257	1148	13951	186
August-21					
VBA/Field Overall	594660	178584	128849	1375259	30927
Philadelphia RO	725	356	1391	12639	10
Pittsburgh RO	1356	419	2912	27515	207
July-21					
VBA/Field Overall	582172	186724	106530	1213818	30994
Philadelphia RO	2287	362	3823	52784	10
Pittsburgh RO	758	253	1222	10842	220
June-21					
VBA/Field Overall	581396	187912	115418	1086560	30,909
Philadelphia RO	2280	523	4743	48098	11
Pittsburgh RO	576	243	1100	9397	222
May-21					
VBA/Field Overall	520467	187068	129766	971022	31544
Philadelphia RO	1871	335	5854	43353	9
Pittsburgh RO	592	181	1229	8297	224
April-21					
VBA/Field Overall	467551	198329	103876	808504	30703
Philadelphia RO	2249	614	4965	35934	17
Pittsburgh RO	484	209	890	6743	227
March-21					
VBA/Field Overall	475363	205773	121278	685086	30,837
Philadelphia RO	2426	659	5,969	30,614	536
Pittsburgh RO	361	129	959	5,727	290
February-21					
VBA/Field Overall	478,401	209,603	114,058	563,724	32,045
Philadelphia RO	2,847	762	5,901	24,645	606
Pittsburgh RO	645	216	947	4,768	285

January-21					
VBA/Field Overall	476,026	210,238	117,149	449,547	33,940
Philadelphia RO	2,187	746	5,885	18,722	674
Pittsburgh RO	748	263	903	3,821	296
December-20					
VBA/Field Overall	475854	210100	93818	311996	37026
Philadelphia RO	10752	5058	2547	10001	736
Pittsburgh RO	5442	2455	831	2638	320
November-20					
VBA/Field Overall	481106	201493	113641	113641	42962
Philadelphia RO	2821	754	4161	4161	884
Pittsburgh RO	702	188	1077	1077	474
October-20					
VBA/Field Overall	473413	202735	85487	85487	44012
Philadelphia RO	2943	1148	3120	3120	893
Pittsburgh RO	711	228	784	784	480
10/5/2020					
Beginning of FY 21					
VBA/Field Overall	475,290	203,837	9,753	9,753	47,023
Philadelphia RO	2,454	545	352	352	959
Pittsburgh RO	613	171	82	82	521

Note. The numbers were pulled from website

<https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/mmwr/>

Table 14

True Historical Data from Field Operations and VBA Monday Morning Workload

Reports that Contains VBA Overall, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh RO Claim Numbers for

end of Fiscal Year 2019 overall totals to the end of Fiscal Year 2020

Fiscal Year 20 End of each Month/Year	Pending	Backlog >125 Days	Complete Month to Date	Complete Fiscal Year to Date	Legacy Appeals Pending

September-20					
VBA/Field Overall	463,222	204,302	91,561	1,374,997	49,100
Philadelphia RO	2,142	672	3,535	59,137	1,019
Pittsburgh RO	583	174	821	12,514	566
August-20					
VBA/Field Overall	452,420	202,207	93,390	1,278,227	57,967
Philadelphia RO	2,177	564	3,369	55,415	1,263
Pittsburgh RO	427	178	814	11,638	738
July-20					
VBA/Field Overall	428,849	197,166	69,303	1,163,327	69,773
Philadelphia RO	10,763	4,517	3,181	49,781	1,339
Pittsburgh RO	4,557	2,195	554	10,362	817
June-20					
VBA/Field Overall	407,342	153,603	73,261	1,086,496	108,245
Philadelphia RO	3,115	811	3,252	47,741	1,335
Pittsburgh RO	286	119	759	9,865	652
May-20					
VBA/Field Overall	386,060	115,338	77,273	1,013,229	119,345
Philadelphia RO	3,295	1,047	3,202	44,489	1,259
Pittsburgh RO	472	85	823	9,106	795
April-20					
VBA/Field Overall	366,858	80,187	107,044	918,754	141,924
Philadelphia RO	2,420	500	4,876	40,644	1,063
Pittsburgh RO	532	168	789	8,111	843
March-20					
VBA/Field Overall	409,415	75,311	142,316	797,588	148,417
Philadelphia RO	3,699	562	6,999	34,977	1,339
Pittsburgh RO	790	152	1,439	7,201	1,022
February-20					
VBA/Field Overall	426,040	71,481	128,553	655,272	156,822
Philadelphia RO	3,429	856	5,525	27,978	2,141
Pittsburgh RO	1,033	188	1,281	5,762	1,202
January-20					

VBA/Field Overall	403,559	69,622	106,920	493,810	173,383
Philadelphia RO	3,675	1,227	4,509	21,106	2,773
Pittsburgh RO	804	210	842	4,098	1,577
December-19					
VBA/Field Overall	383,874	67,724	121,415	375,706	183,895
Philadelphia RO	2,959	804	5,233	16,327	2,299
Pittsburgh RO	719	254	861	3,167	975
November-19					
VBA/Field Overall	385,350	66,972	122,126	254,291	191,064
Philadelphia RO	4,289	1,276	5,629	11,094	4,209
Pittsburgh RO	862	248	1,082	2,306	2,373
October-19					
VBA/Field Overall	367,498	73,019	4,642	136,807	199,172
Philadelphia RO	3,940	1,047	282	5,747	4,580
Pittsburgh RO	672	269	61	1,285	2,428
Beginning of FY20					
VBA/Field Overall	362,722	71,017	23,307	23,307	207,662
Philadelphia RO	3,625	1,042	960	960	4,988
Pittsburgh RO	736	165	212	212	2,945
End of FY2019 September 2019					
VBA/Field Overall	353,011	70,355	131,600	1,439,172	209,513
Philadelphia RO	3,942	1,287	5,596	74,061	5,141
Pittsburgh RO	650	176	1,367	12,597	3,392

Note. The numbers were pulled from website

<https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/mmwr/>

Even though the completed claims overwhelmed the pending, the backlog still existed with the supplemental claims that came in for increase from old completed claims. When looking at the overall numbers that Field Operations Regional Offices processed 1,496,263 service-connectivity claims (original and supplemental) in Fiscal

Year 21; 1,374,997 in Fiscal Year 20; and 1,439,172 in Fiscal Year 19, there were still some backlogs in place today.

The Changes in the Legacy Backlog Appeals in the Last Year to Present

What really amazed me was the overall backlog total for appeals. In Fiscal Year 2021, the numbers dropped significantly from six figures to five figures. For the state of Pennsylvania's Regional Offices (Philadelphia and Pittsburgh) the numbers went from 8,533 end of Fiscal Year 2019 to 197 end of Fiscal Year 2021. The appeal numbers, in theory, would have increased when Appeal Board needed to suspend all in-person hearings due to coronavirus outbreak in 2020. Based on MMWR, the appeal backlog was 148,417 in March 2020. The only explanation for this dramatic drop was the Appeal Process went to virtual tele-hearings after April 20, 2020, when President Trump signed "Tele-hearing Modernization Act" on April 10, 2020 (DVA Fact Sheet, April 2020). What confused me was why the Department of Veterans Affairs did not push tele-hearings when they were overwhelmed with appeals from 2008 through 2019. In 2012, Skype was available for meetings and personal interaction with friends around the world. The Department of Veterans Affairs waited eight years to reduce a backlog of appeals. When reading all the documentation from the Department of Veterans Affairs Budget Reports and Strategic Reports, they concentrated on improvement of eBenefits and websites to reach military veterans and families to use.

For the years when looked at the MMWR during the research, I thought the numbers from State Commission were the same numbers for overall of Pittsburgh and Philadelphia Regional Offices submission for each month. After looking at the numbers

again and after completed the interviews and talked to two Veteran Service Officers about Act 66, went back to reviewed the meeting reports under State Commission’s website. After looking hard at their numbers, it was primarily only the numbers from Act 66 Advocacy Groups that supported the PA Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. Their numbers did not match the total number of claims that were pending in VBA Monday Morning Workload Report because there were more veterans started to do their own filing based on information from Facebook and fellow veterans help.

Act 66 – Veteran Service Officer Grant Program 2007

After retrieving the PA State Commission report for August 2021 from PA DMVA website, on page 24 showed the totals from fiscal year 2008 to present. During my interviews, I interviewed two veterans that worked as National Service Officers that mentioned the “Veteran Service Officer (VSO) Grant Program” was signed on December 12, 2007, as Act 66 of 2007. The VSO Grant Program granted fiscal funds to various Veteran Advocacy Groups to process claims for military veterans.

As of today, the VSO Grant Program has a total of 55 employees working as National, State, and or Veteran Service Officers that process all benefit claims for military veterans, see table 15. Each of these employees work in five organizations.

Table 15

The Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs website provided an updated list of Veteran Service Officers Contact Information as of January 2021

City/Name	Organization	Phone
Allentown		

Tim Davis	Disabled American Veterans	(610) 969-2082 (By appointment)
Altoona		
Cindy Kinzey	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(814) 943-8164 EXT 8166
Dona Foy	Vietnam Veterans of America	(814) 943-8164 EXT 7085
Larry English	Vietnam Veterans of America	(814) 943-8164 EXT 7085
Tim Susengill	Vietnam Veterans of America	(814) 943-8164 EXT 7085
Lory Liebegott	Disabled American Veterans	(814) 943-8164 EXT 4848
Annville – Ft. Indiantown Gap		
Robert Forbes	AMVETS	(717) 865-9982
Michael Price	AMVETS	(507) 264-3979 Butler (878) 271-6976 (At VAMC)
Linda Eshenbaugh	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(724) 287-4718 EXT 6977 (Mon., Tue., & 1st and 3rd Wed. at VAMC)
Janice Nulph	Disabled American Veterans	
Camp Hill		
Bruce Kosack	Disabled American Veterans	(717) 761-4060 (Tue., Thur., and some Wed.)
David Gui	Disabled American Veterans	(717) 761-4060 (Mon., Tue., and Thur. by appointment) and (717) 761-4060 (2nd and 4th Fri. at CBOC)
Coatesville		
Miguel Rivera	Disabled American Veterans	(610) 384-7711 EXT 4912 (Thur. and Fri. at VAMC)
Harvey Greenawalt	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(267) 322-1688
Erie Amber Moore	American Legion	(814) 864-4240
Stephen Wagner	American Legion	(814) 864-4240
Bradley Baranski	American Legion	(814) 864-4240
Rachel Van Dyne	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(814) 835-8494
Julie Hutchison	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(814) 835-8494
Christine Bentley	Disabled American Veterans	(814) 860-2503 (At VAMC)
Harrisburg		
Anthony Jorgensen	American Legion	(877) 720-8387
Scott Brenner	American Legion	(877) 720-8387
Amber Heinbaugh	American Legion	(877) 720-8387
John Chiodi	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(717) 234-7927
Ronald Smith	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(717) 234-7927

Elizabeth Graybill	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(717) 234-7927
Emily LeVault	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(717) 234-7927
Linda Jayman	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(717) 234-7927
Audrey Bergstesser Johnstown	Vietnam Veterans of America	(717) 635-9114
Nancy Tavalsky Kittanning	Vietnam Veterans of America	(814) 244-6125
Sam Massouh	Disabled American Veterans	(717) 823-4321 (2nd & 4th Wed. at CBOC Armstrong County)
Lancaster		
Jonathan Hart	Disabled American Veterans	(717) 576-6674 (Wed. at CBOC)
Lebanon		
Matt Kelly	Disabled American Veterans	(717) 272-6621 EXT 4538 (Mon. & Fri. at VAMC)
Lock Haven		
David Bower	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(570) 748-5929
Cynthia Bardo	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(570) 748-5929
Karen Bombria	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(570) 748-5929
Mahanoy City		
Matt Kelly	Disabled American Veterans	(570) 773-3075 (1st Wed. at Representative Neil Goodman's by appointment)
Mount Carmel		
Matt Kelly	Disabled American Veterans	(717) 884-4315 (3rd Wed. at VFW) . Philadelphia
Robert Gardner	American Legion	(215) 381-3032
Joseph Gunkel	American Legion	(215) 381-3032
Kyle Rooney	American Legion	(215) 381-3032
Glenn King	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(215) 381-3123
John Foster	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(215) 381-3123
Trudy Strain	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(215) 381-3123
Michael Nicol	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(215) 381-3123
Evangeline Johnson	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(215) 381-3123
Catherine Priore	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(215) 381-3123
Gilda Reid	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(215) 381-3123
Tyrone Beach	Vietnam Veterans of America	(215) 238-8052
Andrew Brassington Pittsburgh	Disabled American Veterans	(215) 381-3065 (At RO)

Graham Wieland	American Legion	(412) 395-6230
Stephanie Wilson	American Legion	(412) 395-6230
Josh Conley	American Legion	(412) 395-6230
Victor Campeau, Jr.	American Legion	(412) 395-6230
Stephen Schott	American Legion	(412) 395-6230
Herman Moreno	AMVETS	(724) 384-6681
Milton James	AMVETS	(412) 395-6265
Joshua Corner	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(412) 395-6256
Elizabeth Salvador	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(412) 395-6256
Clarence Madigan	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(412) 395-6256
Kyra Price	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(412) 395-6256
Kevin Joos	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(412) 395-6256
Tim Owens	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(412) 395-6256
Pottsville		
Matt Kelly	Disabled American Veterans	(570) 622-5253 (Tue. at Career Link by appointment)
Reading		
Gary Letterhouse	Vietnam Veterans of America	(610) 781-0480
Elizabeth Graybill	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(484) 577-6898
Matt Kelly	Disabled American Veterans	(717) 884-4315 (Thur. at CBOC Walk-In)
Wilkes-Barre		
Brian Stolarski	American Legion	(570) 821-2526
Louis Ybarra	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(570) 821-2535
Lorie Ybarra	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(570) 821-2535
Joann Kane	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(570) 821-2535
Jo Ellen Grandelli -	Disabled American Veterans	(570) 821-2521 (Mon., Tue., Wed., and Thur. at VAMC)
York		
Jonathan Hart	Disabled American Veterans	(717) 576-6674 (1st & 3rd Wed. at CBOC) RO - Regional Office CBOC - Community Based Outpatient Clinic VAMC - VA Medical Center

Note. The list came from the PA DMVA Website under the article [PensionPoaching](#)

[\(pa.gov\)](#)

Based on the August 31, 2021, report, the overall number of claims processed was 237,692 (State Commission, Aug 2021). In the literature review, I indicated that PA DMVA and State Commission numbers were inconsistent with the numbers that Monday Morning Workload Reports for Philadelphia and Pittsburgh Regional Office from 2008 to 2018. The State Commission numbers were only of VSO's submissions, the report did not include the ones that individuals submitted on their own. One area of the report "Outreach Statistics" has shown how COVID-19 Pandemic has affected the communication with veterans after first fiscal quarter. The PA DMVA used their Mobile Outreach Van for eight out of ten events, which was the last time it was used due to COVID-19 Pandemic restrictions. The outreach statistics indicated only 271 veteran interactions, 33 claim referrals to County Directors and Service Organizations, and eight claims were referred to other state, county, and location organizations assisting Veterans in the first quarter (State Commission, Aug 2021). The rest of the quarters were marked zero due to restrictions that CDC and State of Pennsylvania restrictions on interaction with people due to coronavirus pandemic. The number for claims processed is 11,099 for fiscal year 20-21 with two more months left of the fiscal year 2021 (State Commission, Aug 2021).

Summary

Working on Chapter 4 Data Collection was a little frustrating because I wanted to do more in person interviews. Due to COVID 19 Pandemic and regulations that the Governor of Pennsylvania put on restrictions of not allowing to use facilities, I was unable to have one on one interface except the interviews I did on Zoom. The interviews

on Zoom were time limited to 44 minutes since I did not pay for unlimited service. I did learn about issues that fellow veterans were having and did not understand why they could not receive full percentage on each of their injuries. What I did do for the veterans that had questions, I referred them to a fellow veteran friend and a State Service Officer for DAV since I was not an authorized State Service Officer and or Veteran Service Officer. After all the interviews were completed, I went back to looked at the Monday Morning Workload Reports to see how many changes had been done with the backlog of all claims and appealed cases. The data collection finalized my study in Chapter 5 and any further studies.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of the study was to see if the claim delay caused issues with the veterans' quality of life waiting for an answer from the Department of the Veterans Affairs. The study will help identify the communication issues between the veteran and Veterans Benefits Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs, Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, and supported veteran's advocacy groups that processes the veteran benefits claims. The Office of Inspector General investigations and evaluations and audits had shown issues with leadership, management, and processing service-connected claims. Most of the other critical factors are adding or revising programs to help veterans receive benefit claims results quicker. Each veteran interviews had shown frustrations of lack of information for service members on processing disability claims for their injuries and medical needs. The interviews demonstrated the confusion on where to get applications (hard copy) forms, how to use the eBenefits portal established in 2008 that only a few knew about it, and the lack of communication from Veteran Advocacy Groups (DAV, American Legion, VFW, and the area County Veteran Service Officers from Pennsylvania for not reaching out to the veterans when they separated from the military. Received had mixed responses from veterans concerning the Transition Assistant Program (TAP) which was established in 1995 for both service members and spouses. One of the critical areas of the quality-of-life issue was the appeal process, or if the veteran decided to appeal a partial claim that mentioned a denial on non-service-connected results and rating percentage. The veterans that thought about appealing their claim felt it took too long with fellow veteran friends,

so they decided to stick with the results. For veterans that decided to appeal, they waited for months to years to received words from slight increase, not-service connected, no increase, downgrade percentage, and or disapproved which made the veteran still not happy.

Interpretation of Findings

The literature review in Chapter 2 helped a lot with the decision of who to reach out to for one-on-one interviews. The data collection was slowed during the COVID-19 pandemic from November 2020 to the end of January 2021. To gather data for the reports, the researcher invited military veterans to participate in my study with the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Newsletter that get e-mailed to military veterans who signed up for 30 days before the end of February 2021.

During the COVID-19 pandemic at the beginning in 2020 to present, the Veterans Benefits Administration needed to figure out ways to continue the C&P exams by contracting outside medical facilities to do their exams instead of VA Medical Center doctors to prevent an additional backlog of disability claims. One of the most famous veteran support groups on Facebook is “VA Comp and Pension Group.” This social networking group has helped the Regional Offices on claim questions from military veterans, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, since the Field Office staff members were remote with their expertise answers. As of February 28, 2014, this VA Comp and Pension Group has over 93 thousand group members today that fellow veterans and staff members to help fellow veterans. This support group in the last few years of 2019 to 2021, has seen many veterans receive their 100 % permanent and total

service-connected disability benefits. Only, most of these claims were from the backlog that existed from original and or appeal cases. Veterans still get some disappointing stories about why veteran didn't get a high percentage or non-service-connected comments on specific medical conditions. When a veteran reaches out to one of support groups in Table 16, that veteran then submits their service-connected disability claim on their own. As I noted in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, Literature Review, there are so many veteran support groups that did not reach out to veterans because they were only concentrating on the social network instead of reaching out to veterans that did not use the internet for one reason or another, see Table 16 that list of all of the veteran's support groups that are listed on Facebook.

Table 16

List of Social Support Groups on Facebook that is willing to help Veterans with preparation, presentation, and prosecution of claim.

Name of Group	Established	Private or Public	Total Members
VA Comp & Pension Claims*	2/25/2014	Private	93.5K+
Veteran 2 Veteran Info	5/19/2014	Private	680K
Veterans Help & Assistance	3/10/2013	Private	7.6K+
100% Service-Connected Disabled Veterans Support Group, "VETS HELPING VETS"	9/26/2013	Private	5.1K+
Veterans Claim Support	10/17/2015	Private	60K+
Veterans on Veterans Benefits		Private	7.4K+
Veterans Claims Assistance Group	3/28/2014	Private	39k+
Veterans VA Disability Claims, C&P Exams & Nexus letter Assistance	6/21/2019	Private	59K+
Veterans Military Compensation Benefits Assistance and More	5/9/2014	Private	22K+
100% Disabled Veterans Benefit Rights	8/10/2011	Private	5.8K+
VA Disability Chatter That Matters	1/7/2015	Private	42K+

VA Claims - Veterans helping Veterans	8/30/2017	Private	29K+
Veterans Recovery Group	2/8/2014	Public	3.4K+
Disabled veterans	8/6/2014	Public	877
Veterans Military Compensation Benefits Assistance and More	5/9/2014	Private	22K+
Disabled Veterans and Benefit Info	2/25/2013	Private	5.4K+
Veterans Claims - Assistance	3/28/2014	Private	42.1K+
VA Disability Service Officials (VA, VHA, VBA, VRE, SSDI, Veterans Claims	3/28/2018	Private	10.2K+
DVA Claims, Cards, and Payments			
Veterans Information Group	4/22/2014	Private	14K+
FFERS and VA Disability Claim Support	6/19/2020	Private	69
All Veteran Disability Claims	10/17/2021	Public	2
U.S. Military Female Veterans helping each other	4/16/2015	Private	2.6K+

Note. *The number one group to go to on Facebook to ask advice on what and how to file a claim.

During the interview process, the investigator interviewed two Veteran Service Officers from American Legion and Disabled American Veteran advocacy groups that provided their own opinion on how each felt about their process to received compensation benefits. Both Veteran Service Officers agreed that the Act 66 Grant helped the state of Pennsylvania veterans file all supported benefits. Each one felt veterans needed to contact them as their veteran advocacy support groups for advice and assistance.

The Backlog of Disability Claims Will Exist Forever

During a press conference with Secretary of the Veterans Affairs McDonough and press media reporters on Wednesday, September 16, 2021 (Shane, 2021). First thing

Secretary McDonough stated, “the problem is going to get worse before it gets better” (Shane, 2021). In the press conference the Secretary McDonough agreed with past VA Secretary’s that complexity of claims due to incomplete medical records has causes the backlog (Shane, 2021). Shane’s article mentioned about claims backlog “hadn’t been above 200,000 cases since 2015” but figure 2 has a different story based on VBA owned calculations (Shane, 2021). It is possible that Secretary McDonough numbers were off on the claims inventory in figure 1. The Veterans Benefits Administration and the Field Offices of Regional Offices across the United States fought hard to reduce the backlog from fiscal years 2019 to present. The backlog under supplemental claims is coming back twice the amount since Congress passed recent laws to add new medical conditions to help the Vietnam and Gulf War veterans. For example, Agent Orange and Blue Water Veterans fought over Vietnam coastal waters that exposed various chemical defoliants (Shane, 2021). Based on Leo Shane conference meeting with Secretary McDonough on September 16, 2021, one of the VA internal department data “about 95 percent of cases are correctly completed, a figure that has remained steady over the last three years” with the increase of claims caseload (Shane, 2021). It is possible the internal department that Leo mentioned in his article did not review the Audits and Evaluations Reports from the Office of Inspector General for the reviews of claims and pension failures for that last year (Reinkemeyer, 2021).

The Office of Audits and Evaluation, Assistant Inspector General Reinkemeyer, signed various reports that misrepresent the Secretary of Veterans Affairs McDonough comments on May 18, 2021, VA OIG 20-00049-122 (Reinkemeyer, 2021). The Audits

and Evaluation team reviews and evaluates the Quality Assurance Program during the COVID Pandemic in 2020 could have prevented each veteran from receiving the appropriate benefits by denials and or approvals (Reinkemeyer, 2021). The Quality Assurance Program is under the Secretary of Benefits that supports the Compensation Service that reviews all the Office of Field Operations disability and pension claims that managed at 57 Regional Offices across the United States. The Audits and Evaluation teams completed four additional reviews to support the Quality Assurance Program results from July to September 2020: These reviews did not show a 95 percent accuracy in Field Offices. The first Audits and Evaluation report was the “Site Visit Program Can Do More to Improve Nationwide Claims Processing” was signed on August 18, 2020, by Assistant Inspector General Reinkemeyer. The Audit and Evaluation Team went to each veteran’s service center to check to see if staff members were following the VBA policies and procedures on disability processing claims (Reinkemeyer, 2020). From October 1, 2015, through April 30, 2019, the OIG visited 47 of 57 Regional Offices that had a total of 406 action items and 390 were resolved before January 13, 2020. Of those 406 actions items, there was not surprised to read on Page 8 that Office of Field Operations do not help Regional Managers to review other site visits reports to help their staff members to improve on accuracy with processing their disability and pension claims (Reinkemeyer, 2020). The next evaluation and audit from the Office of Inspector General was “The Systematic Technical Accuracy Review (STAR) Program Has Not Adequately Identified, and Corrected Claims-Processing Deficiencies” was signed on July 22, 2020, by Assistant Inspector General Reinkemeyer. The STAR is part of the Quality Assurance

Program that is used as doublecheck on random claims deficiencies and results decisions across the Regional Offices. Based on OIG review, the STAR program needs to improve and ensure that analysts under the STAR team needs to get their feedback out quicker to all Veterans Service Representatives and staff members that work on disability and pension claims. Audit and Evaluation Team provide three key factors for STAR

Analysts' Failure:

1. An inadequate second-review process for quality reviews
2. Lack of a formal training plan for STAR analysts
3. Less emphasis placed on procedural deficiencies (Reinkemeyer, July 2020).

When OIG Audit and Evaluations Investigation provided a recommendation to the Under Secretary for Benefits concurred to work on training plans, claims accountability, and management. For 50 years, VBA still has disengaged communication from senior to junior employees on manage of disability and pension claims. Where is the disconnect with training, the leadership from the top down to their supervisors of each team? The next evaluation and audit were the Deficiencies in the Quality Review Team (QRT) Program. Based on the reading of this report, both Philadelphia and Pittsburgh Regional Offices were not part of the audit and evaluations. The QRT has been working under Compensation Service since March 2012 and, having 8 years of training doing their job, would expect a better outcome with the review. Based on Executive Director of Compensation Service, the public does not see the QRT results on how the processes of claims. The report specifies that only two QRT specialists are assigned to each Regional

Office a Rating QRT specialist and an Authorization QRT specialist. No wonder they are overworked looking at all the claim records of Rating Veteran Service Representatives, Decision Reviews Officers, and Veterans Service Representatives for accuracy which claims development, promulgation, and authorization awards (Reinkemeyer, 2020). The Quality Review Process changed in July 2017 to VBA's Office of Performance Analysis and Integrity, which operates at VA Central Office. As a result, QRT Specialists no longer reviewed cases at the Regional Office since January 2018. The Audit and Evaluation Team prepared and provide two figures on page 6 that is figure 2 "Quality review process from assignment to notification" and figure 3 "Quality review process from notification to completion" on page 7 (unable to present figures on paper due to lack of permissions from OIG). Based on figure 3, a veteran will not receive an answer back on his or her claim within the 90 to 125 days policy (Reinkemeyer, 2020). Based on the outcome of this review, OIG concluded that superiors are not holding QRT specialist accountable for their work. Overall, the review showed that senior level managers and up needed improvement on action errors identified by quality review staff. The final evaluation and audit that was requested during COVID Pandemic was "Greater Consistency Study Participation and Use of Results Could Improve Claims Processing Nationwide." The OIG reviewed 60 consistency studies from October 1, 2015, through April 30, 2019, that was based on "Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2008" which required by law to show consistency with disability ratings across the regional offices of the Veterans Benefits Administration (Reinkemeyer, 2020). The scope period was March 2019 to August 2020, when the OIG Audits and Evaluations reviewed the studies. Even

though Compensation Service completed the requirement for the Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2008, the Field of Operations senior leaders failed not to order or active role on following up on Compensation Service consistency studies on improvement of claims processing, see page 15. On page 15, the leaderships of the Office of Field Operations challenged the rating claims-processing team by finalizing 255,000 claims on May 6 to June 30, 2019 (Reinkemeyer, 2020). The team met the challenge successfully, but how many 255,000 claims were accurate without any deficiencies that could have put a Veteran overpayment or underpayment?

Assistant Inspector General Reinkemeyer of Audits and Evaluations, signed May 18, 2021, indicated, "As of December 31, 2020, about five million veterans were receiving these benefits." In most people's eyes, there would be many military veterans, but when you google search "How many military veterans," it produced 26.4 million before 2000, which is now 18.0 million between 2000 to 2018 (Census, 2020). The VBA still has a long way to help all military veterans with service-connected benefits.

During his years as president, President Trump signed a few new Act's that would increase or decrease the disability claims for Vietnam Era through the Gulf War era from 1993 to 2021. The Blue Water Navy (BWN) Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 (PL 116-23) had somewhere over 60,000 BWN Sailor veterans from January 9, 1962, to May 7, 1975. The Sailors were exposed to herbicide and other biological agents, such as Agent Orange by the offshore waters of Republic of Vietnam. When BWN was passed, the Regional Offices under the Field Operations Department started to received claims in January 2020. Most of the 45,000 BWN claims did get approved with Agent Orange exposure.

For the thousands whom Veteran Rating Service Officers rejected based on fact, the Sailors was not part of the soldiers on the ground. It took a court order from the U.S. District Court in Northern California to have those claims be reevaluated, which compelled the Department of Veterans Affairs (DAV, 2021).

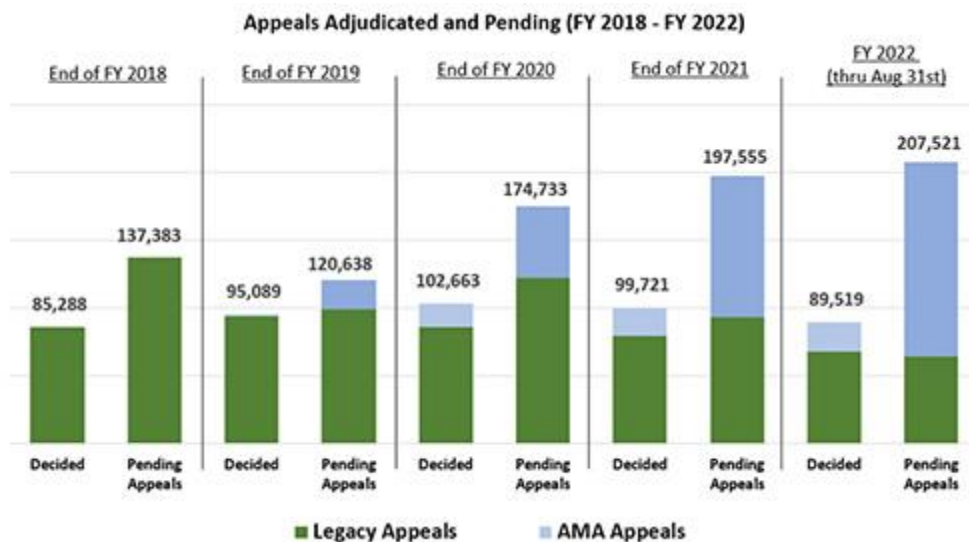
The second Act, the VA decided to start implementing was the William M. Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 (Public Law 116-283), it will allow veterans to resubmit for conditions like bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, and parkinsonism from Agent Orange (VA/OPA, May 2021). In addition, the policy will double the number of claims pending if Regional Offices do not process within 125 days.

The biggest Veteran Act that President Trump signed was the “Tele-hearing Modernization Act” on April 10, 2020. The virtual hearings allowed Veterans to have a choice of location for their hearing by using a videoconference by computer, cellphone, and or central location with lawyer, if veteran had one present. Within one year the appeal backlog drop dramatically, see table 14 (page 223-224) and 15 (page 225-226). It is hard to predict the future, but research indicates that the old legacy backlog numbers to rise further next year. However, the number of new appeals might increase with all the upcoming supplemental and original claims with low percentage rate and/or denials on service-connected claims. As of September 2022, the Board of Veterans Appeals provided an update chart with outstanding pending Legacy Appeals cases and Appeals Modernization Act (AMA) in figure 21. Figure 21 matches the outstanding pending of 197,555 and decided number of 99,721 with figure 20 *FY 2021 Chairman’s Quarterly*

Report Quarter 4 – FY 2021 on page 225. As of FY 2022 numbers for end of August it shows only 10,000 or so more than a whole fiscal year 2021.

FIGURE 21

Appeals Adjudicated and Pending (FY 2018- FY 2022)



Note. The above graph came directly from the Board of Veteran Appeals website

<https://www.bva.gov> .

Mishandling Paperwork Through Mail Processing Offices and Database

The Veterans Benefits Administration needed to provide updated guidance on benefits correspondence when President Trump released documents on March 13, 2020, for national emergency as of March 1, 2020, that would affect veterans’ disability and pension claims. Based on VA Office Inspector General’s Audits and Evaluation report 20-02825-242 signed September 17, 2020, the VBA guidance that was signed on April 6, 2020, was not implement by all Regional Offices (Reinkemeyer, 2020). The audit review team evaluated 120 of 3,200 claims from April 7-20, 2020, that “failed to used postmark

date and used the date of February 29, 2020, when postmark date was unavailable,” and not putting reasons for estimates of receipt (Reinkemeyer, 2020). Based on my literature review a lack of communication and training from leaders to staff members still exists today. When the review team decided to review regional staff members about training on new guidance, they indicated no training was given, team meetings, and some employees mentioned they are not sure about received guidance and policy letter from Deputy Under Secretary for Field Operations and or Deputy Executive Director of Policy and Procedures (Reinkemeyer, 2020). According to Audit and Evaluation of September 17, 2020, the Veterans Benefits Administration received 476,000 disability packets for the months of March and April 2020 (Reinkemeyer, 2020). Our military veterans get frustrated when they cannot talk to a claim representative, so they use the mail to communicate. All disability packages are entered (uploaded) into the web-based electronic program called Veteran Benefit Management System (VBMS) as an eFolder for each veteran that I mentioned in Chapter 2. The eBenefits portal allowed a more accurate count of incoming and outgoing claims.

VBA Cause Excessive Overpayments to Veterans during COVID-19

While reviewing the Office of Inspector General on Audits and Evaluation and completing the data collection, the report 20-03229-155 dated July 8, 2021, was discovered, which stated that VBA was looking into reducing veterans benefits from February 1, 2019, through January 31, 2020, before the coronavirus pandemic (Reinkemeyer, 2021). The VBA Office of Field Operations must inform any military veteran 60 days before starting the due process with rate percentage to see if it needs to

be lowered or discontinued of benefits (Reinkemeyer, 2021). Additionally, the Acting Secretary for Benefits requested the Field Operations to start working on oldest claims that have been overlooked in the National Work Queue. The Veterans Benefits Management System is used to monitor and track the items that each regional offices were using for processing, while National Work Queue (NWQ) distributes the disability claims to regional offices. Based on the report, regional offices completed 51,700 claims to propose decrease in benefits (Reinkemeyer, 2021). The excessive payments due to the delay during the pandemic is in figure 4 on page 8 (Reinkemeyer) that was remarkably interesting since the total was \$116 million dollars that might have affected 51,700 veterans' quality of life. When March 2020 arrived, the government was ordered to shut down and cancel all in-person exams and the numbers started to increase with backlogs, rating, and proposal inventory, see Reinkemeyer (2021) figure 5 Fiscal Year 2020 rating on page 11.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study were due to Coronavirus Pandemic that started in March 2020 that caused the state of Pennsylvania to shut down all social facilities and going to military veterans' homes to do interviews after Thanksgiving 2020. All VFW's and American Legion facilities started to close in mid-October 2020 by the executive orders of the Pennsylvania Governor. It was a slow process of closes since he did it by counties that had the most cases. The East and West of Pennsylvania was work from home and limited places to go except going to the grocery store. For myself, was able to get some interviews at homes and outside seating locations with protection on until

December when temperatures were dropping between 30 to 40 degrees. My protocols were extremely limited since I was the only one doing the data collections. Going through the pandemic demanded creativity to meet the interviewees, so Zoom and Facebook video conference were used.

One fundamental limitation was the possibility of the changes and understanding of the numbers in reports. The Veterans Benefits Administration changes the Excel Monday Morning Workload Reports spreadsheets to meet the criteria set by Congress and Senators for Veterans Affairs Committees. After reading an article from Shane Leo, Military Times, when he listened to the new Secretary of Veterans Affairs McDonough about processing over one million disability and pension claims. A deep dive was conducted on the historical data numbers from VBA Monday Morning Workload reports. When looking at the Pennsylvania State Commission numbers for claim submissions for the past three years, check if their numbers matched up to Philadelphia and Pittsburgh Regional Office submission. When writing about the Pennsylvania State Commission numbers being different in Chapters One through Three, the reason was that the Monday Morning Workload Reports were different. The numbers were off; taking a closer at State Commission numbers, and noticed it was the Act 66 W Program numbers only not Regional Offices of Pennsylvania in Monday Morning Workload Reports. Even though there was a difference with the numbers, the Act 66 Grant Program needs more Veteran Service Officers to support over 800,000 military veterans in Pennsylvania.

Past and Present Interactions with Communication to Our Military Veterans

Getting the Word Out Better to the American Military Veterans

During the Coronavirus pandemic 2020-2021, our older military veterans were lost because they did not have internet connectivity at home and or phone. It was up to social networking or word of mouth from fellow veterans to their veteran friends to tell the news. One area that helped was when the local news media on television talked about getting information as where to go to get assistance with VA Medical Center, MyHealtheVet website, Veterans Benefits Administration, VA.Gov, MOAA website, and PA DMVA newsletter to keep them up to date when they talked about shot and medical concerns. Late October 2021, started to see DAV putting advertisements on ESPN channels to let military veterans know “they are there for them to process claims and other benefits programs they sponsor.” It was remarkably interesting to see since I had interviewed one of their Service Officers about their lack of advertisements. The problem with their advertisement is not on local channels.

When a veteran does research on the internet to see who else can help them with their disability claims; you will find a lot of disability attorneys’ advertisements and or other veterans support groups that a veteran will need to pay for assistance. These veteran groups and disability attorneys usually get pay after a veteran gets approved for his or her rate percentage. Researching the data, I had to sign up to receive newsletters and update information on a weekly or monthly basis. The most informational article was “Hill & Ponton Disability Attorneys,” which provided videos about injuries and

health issues to claim (www.hillandponton.com) and you can locate them on Facebook.com). Facebook.com by searching “veterans support with disability claims” which include Brian Reese, Theresa "Tbird" Aldrich CEO/Founder HadIt.com Veteran to Veteran LLC, and the Military.Com newspaper help my paper tremendously. The internet is a fabulous research tool to found answers on how to file a service-connectivity claim for injuries and health issues while serving on active-duty service. It would have been a great tool for our military veterans that fought in peacetime, wars and military operations were called a war before 2003.

Recommendations

This study can go further by understanding how the military veterans are feeling about their claim process with Veteran Benefits Administration and supported Field Offices at Regional Offices across the United States on all benefit claims. The process can be very frustrating and waiting times long to receive word on original disability claims and or appeal process with an approved or denied. In this area of study, there can be changes that Veteran Benefits Administration and Field Offices of the Regional Offices with getting the veterans C&P exams done outside of the Veteran Medical Centers during Coronavirus Pandemic in March 2020 to present. One of the benefits for any research is all the information is on a public domain without having an account with VA.gov. A lot of old data research can be found on the www.data.va.gov and the eBenefits side of the old website that is under the new VA.Gov website. Which is very confusing because you go into old websites that do claims, then you go to the new site for results of approval and or denial.

One benefit of Facebook (social networking database) is it allows Veterans Support Groups to network their nonprofit to get the word out for claims, benefits, education, and death claims for veterans and families. Based on the “VA Comp and Pension Group that was established in Facebook on February 28, 2014, with Secretary McDonald, VBA was part of the Department of Veterans Affairs. You can only see the comments of other military veterans by joining the group. That is the same with all the other social networking groups that support veterans, you need to join their groups to get information on how to do a disability claim, appeal process, medical needs, and other support for homeless veterans. The Veterans Benefits Network that was established in 2002, set up C&P examines complaints with entries started in 2017 (VBN, 2017). Some of the complaints on how their C&P exams were a noticeably short visit, for example 15 minutes to a half hour, writing information that was not true on veteran, and disrespect, etc. The 2017 complaints are when VBA contracted outsourced medical doctors prior to COVID-19 pandemic to get the backlog down. With the short examination comments, the veterans did not reach 100 percent total permanent disability. Additionally, I have noticed a lot of veterans had received 100 percent and put out comments on VA Comp and Pension Group “thanks to all that help them.” As indicated in the literature review, a military veteran will need to have internet capability by computer or smart phone that has website capability.

One other area the study can be continued is with the state of Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veteran Affairs (PA DMVA) on their communication with quality-of-life programs, County Veteran Service Officers that work with PA DMVA,

and supported State Service Officers, Veteran Service Officers, and National Service Officers that work for Veterans Support Groups that do benefit packages. The PA DMVA is depending on its new website “PAVetConnect ([Home \(pa.gov\)](http://Home.pa.gov))” that has all the benefit programs for veterans and their family members in one place. The state of Pennsylvania does not have enough service officers to get all 800,000+ veterans to receive benefits they deserve.

Another great area of research would be why Veterans Benefits Administration does some of the recommendations that Office of Inspector General on hotline investigations with the audits and evaluation reviews. The investigations, evaluations, and audits were done to help them to improve the quality of work and ensure the training was performed with staff members at Field Offices across Regional Offices. Based on all the audits and evaluations I had read for this research study; the Office of Field Operations and Compensation Service only do some of the recommendations and are limited to what recommendations they pass on to the analysts that do the claims and pensions.

In the state of Pennsylvania and any other state, a study needs to be done to see who completed and not completed a service-connected claim. This will help the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to know who is still outstanding with submitting their claim and assist with their quality-of-life issues. The question that needs to be answered, where will the money come from to do this massive study since the government has limited staffing to reach out to 800,000 plus

military veterans and families in person. Because today, they are depending on the PAVetConnect website to do the job.

Implications of Positive Social Change

To see a positive social change with processing a veterans' service-connectivity claims, pensions, and veterans' quality of life, we need to keep communication open by in-person and internet networking for the veterans that understand computer and or with advertisements on the media or bulletin boards. The state of Pennsylvania has estimate of 800,000 military veterans that need to be reached out to in the old fashion way in person instead of internet. Or waiting for a veteran to come to see them for help with their veteran benefits.

Implications of Positive Social Change with Department of Veterans Affairs in the last few years, during the COVID-19 and present

The Veterans Benefits Administration needed to find new ways to provide a positive social change with the military veterans, spouses, families, and survivors of death veteran when Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID 2019) took control of the United States in January 2020. In March 2020, the President of the United States put out an Executive Orders 13909 on 18 March 2020 and 13910 on 23 March 2020 about workers need to stay home to prevent the spreading of the virus at workplaces with the recommendations from Center of Disease Control and Prevention. Also in March 2020, the Veterans Benefit Administration reach out to the military veterans that gave their email addresses to do a survey on how they can improve their business with veterans. That survey received an overwhelmed response which made the survey successful. I

have seen more newsletters with updated changes without any interface with Veterans Affairs Congressional Committees. Most of the time, the Department of Veterans Affairs cannot do anything without congress approvals.

To prevent another major backlog of disability and pension claims, the Veterans Benefit Administration had to change quickly on C&P medical exams by using the Medical Disability Examination (MDE) program that was established in 2016, since VA Medical Centers had to shut down the C&P exams due to government shutdowns in March 2020. Reinkemeyer (2019) Office of Inspector General investigation report 18-04266-115 had an interesting reading on page i, the Committee of Veterans Affairs (Senate) passed, and the President of the United States signed "*The Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 1996*" to authorize the VA to contract outside medical sources to improve disability and pension backlog. Why did the VBA wait to contract five medical sources in 2016 to help with disability medical exams for next five years which are: Logistics Health Inc. (LHI); Medical Support Los Angeles (MSLA); QTC Medical Services Inc. (QTC); Veterans Evaluation Services (VES); and VetFed Resources Inc. (VetFed). The VBA is still using LMI, QTC, VES, and VetFed for disability medical exams for service-connectivity claims.

One area of positive social change was the Virtual Hearings for Board of Appeals when Veterans Affairs Congressional Committee (House/Senate) pushed up a modification to the "*Modernization and Improvement Act of 2017*" to "VA Tele-Hearing Modernization Act" of 10 April 2020 due to COVID-19 Pandemic restrictions to have closed meetings. As you can see the Board of Appeals was able to decrease the backlog

of RAMP cases and some of the Legacy Appeal Cases, see tables 14 and 15 for the last two years. In the last three years, the Field Offices push out over a million service-connectivity and pension claims but still have backlog of compensation claims. What was remarkable when Board of Appeals kick out their backlog by using virtual hearing in 2020 to present.

One unexpected change was in July 2020 when the Department of Veterans Affairs financial department at each medical centers was unavailable during COVID-19 Pandemic until mid-2021 when medical centers slowly open for medical care. Plus, DVA needed a better way to help the Community Care Program with using outside medical source for service-connected medical exams to determine rate percentage benefits. The Department of Veterans Affairs change the Travel Kiosk machines to a computer-based program for veterans to use for Travel Claim Pay. The Beneficiary Travel Self-Service System (BTSSS) started about in July 2020 during the COVID-19 Pandemic. A veteran can located VA Travel Claim Pay under the "AccessVA" page that has variety of other links to use under the new VA.Gov website. One thing about using the BTSSS is that a veteran has 30 days to create the travel claim for their doctor appointment at VA Medical Center or Community Care. I agree with a fellow Travel Claim worker that I talked to at a VA Medical Center about many veterans who do not have a computer to do the new travel claim process. I know the Coronavirus pandemic 2020-2021 changed operations with VA Medical Center.

One key area that improved the Department of Veterans Affairs was in 2015 with the ex-Secretary of Veterans Affairs McDonald. In his Public Affairs and Veterans

Benefits Administration, Secretary McDonald reached out to add social network sites to Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, News releases with Vantage Point, blog, and anything else that supports VA's social media and reaches all military veterans' families. On October 16, 2018, the ex-Under Secretary Lawrence of Veterans Benefits Administration started Quarterly Webcast with Veterans and families after being sworn in April 2018. Ex-Undersecretary Lawrence "Managing VBA Performance and Results" completed eight webcasts from January 2019 to January 2021, which was his last one. You can review each one by going to this link

<https://www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/stakeholder.asp>.

The Department of Veterans Affairs and Veterans Benefits Administration had success on a few Veterans Acts during ex-President Trump's term from 2017 to 2020. The Board of Appeals (BOA) Program started its success with the enormous legacy backlog in April 2020 after ex-President Trump signed an updated Modification Act to allow BOA to do hearings during COVID-19 restrictions that eliminated closed contact meetings.

Agent Orange and other bad biological or chemical agents that cause major Health Symptoms or Injuries with Veterans and changes that develop in last three years to today

During the writings throughout the writing of the paper, the researcher mentioned how bad the Vietnam Era, Operations of Desert Storm/Shield, and Iraq with Afghanistan war veterans' complained that no one was helping them. What veterans did not realize is that our Veterans Support Advocacy Groups (VFW, The American Legion, AMVETS,

and the Disabled American Veteran (DAV) Commanders fought hard with Veterans Affairs Congressional Committees (House/Senate) to provide significant changes for veterans affected by Agent Orange chemicals from Vietnam to Gulf Wars. The turnaround for Agent Orange was the new law passed by both House and Senate as a passed over veto on January 1, 2021. The *William M. Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021* added three additional conditions to Agent Orange was bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, and Parkinsonism (Vantage Point, 2021). Secretary of Veterans' Affairs McDonough stated to reporters on August 2, 2021, the Department of Veterans Affairs understands about the toxic and harmful burn pit smoke cause a lot of illnesses. Some things need Congress approvals, but we are slowly recognizing conditions, for example asthma, rhinitis, and sinusitis. As of August 2, 2021, the VBA received about 241,000 veterans signed up Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry that will help Veteran Rating Representatives and Supervisors to determine that veteran was expose to chemicals or other hazmat (Shane, 2021).

On March 3, 2022, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee just passed H.R. 3967 the *Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act (Honoring our PACT Act of 2021)* that is now in the Senate side for approval (Takano, 2022). The PACT Act bill was passed 84-14 in June 2022 by the Senate, except it had numerous administrative issues that caused the bill for a second vote scheduled end of July 2022 (Dalton, 2022). In July, 11 of 84 Republicans joined the other 14 that rejected the bill, putting it in jeopardy over funding cost issues on July 30, 2022 (Dalton, 2022). Once the word got out about the bill being rejected, all the veterans' advocacy groups immediately

started protesting in Washington DC and at the Senator's location that rejected the bill on Monday, August 1, 2022. On August 2, 2022, the Senate Committee finally passed the Act after numerous failed debates on why it was too expensive compared to other bills that are up for review this past year (Davis, 2022). The "*The Sergeant First Class Health Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act, or the PACT Act of 2022*" will change many military veterans that fought in wars that were exposed to toxic chemicals (Davis, 2022). The Veterans Affairs advocacy groups must ensure all the veterans know the details of the bill (Dalton, 2022). This includes the Vietnam Era veterans because it will grant all service members that serve in widespread area of chemical agents that included Agent Orange (Takano, 2022 and Shane, 2021). The President will sign this bill on Monday, August 11, 2022, to act immediately with Veteran Benefits Administration on claims and Veteran Health Administration for medical care. It will cause an increase in backlog claims when the VBA and Field Operations of 52 Regional Offices develop more service-connectivity disability claims in the next year or two. One of the benefits for VBA is that they already have a location database program for veterans that fought in offshore waters of the Republic of Vietnam called Blue Water Act 2019.

Big Social Change for Vietnam Era Veterans was Blue Water Act of 2019

The *Blue Water Act of 2019* was signed by President Trump on June 25, 2019, for VBA to get working on database called "Ship Deck Log" to enter all U.S. Navy and Coast Guard vessels served within 12 nautical miles offshore from January 6, 1962, to May 7, 1975; plus, veterans that served in Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) from January 1,

1967, to August 31, 1971 (Takano, 2019). Based on numbers from Veteran Benefits Administration reports, they estimated about 50,000 to 90,000 claims will be submitted after the effective date of January 1, 2020. Suppose the veteran is still alive or has passed away with one of the 14 presumptive conditions with herbicides (Agent Orange) in that case, the survivor can submit claim and receive special priority (VA, 2019).

Reinkemeyer, 2021 display a figure 2 *Presumptive health conditions for herbicide exposure* that was mentioned under the 38 C.F.R. §3.309(e) (1976). Figure 22 in the paper lists the conditions of herbicides (Agent Orange) for veteran to use for filing disability claims. These conditions usually develop years after a veteran is completed his or her time of service.

Figure 22

Conditions from herbicides (Agent Orange) for veterans to use for filing disability claims and VBA Vantage article).

- AL amyloidosis
- Chloracne or other acne-form disease consistent with chloracne
- Type II diabetes
- Hodgkin's lymphoma
- Ischemic heart disease
- All chronic B-cell leukemias
- Multiple myeloma
- Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
- Parkinson's disease
- Early-onset peripheral neuropathy
- Porphyria cutanea tarda (skin disorder)
- Prostate cancer
- Respiratory cancers (cancer of the lung, bronchus, larynx, or trachea)
- Soft-tissue sarcoma (other than osteosarcoma, chondrosarcoma, Kaposi's sarcoma, or mesothelioma)

Note. The conditions came from the Blue Water Act of 2019 in two areas
(Congress.gov)

When you reviewed the Blue Water Act of 2019, Congress requested the VBA procedures on how they plan to reach out to all Vietnam Era veterans that serve in the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard that participated in offshore waters of the Republic of Vietnam and veterans that already had submitted claims in the past. Based on an Office of Inspector General Audit and Evaluation report of September 2, 2021, it was fascinating because they only used eight instead of all 52 regional offices to analyze, research, and make decisions based on Blue Water Act 2019 requirements (Reinkemeyer, 2021). All Pennsylvania Blue Water veterans' cases went to the following eight regional offices Cleveland, Ohio; Phoenix, Arizona; Roanoke, Virginia; St. Louis, Missouri; St. Paul, Minnesota; St. Petersburg, Florida; Salt Lake City, Utah; and Waco, Texas (Reinkemeyer, 2021). I can understand to use minimum regional offices with less than 90,000 claims that would get one on one attention by each Rating Veteran Service Representative and Veteran Service Representative. Based on Audit and Evaluation investigation, the VBA did concur with Congress by notification of all 77,000 Blue Water veterans and survivors that had previous denied claims with a letter on or about October 2019. Each letter provided information about the upcoming new law, upcoming changes to their benefits, and how to submit or resubmit for illness related to herbicide-related conditions (Reinkemeyer, 2021). You can look at a letter as a personal communication, but VBA did all their communication by media (radio, television, website (YouTube, LinkedIn, Fox News), tele-townhalls, and electronic newsletters from

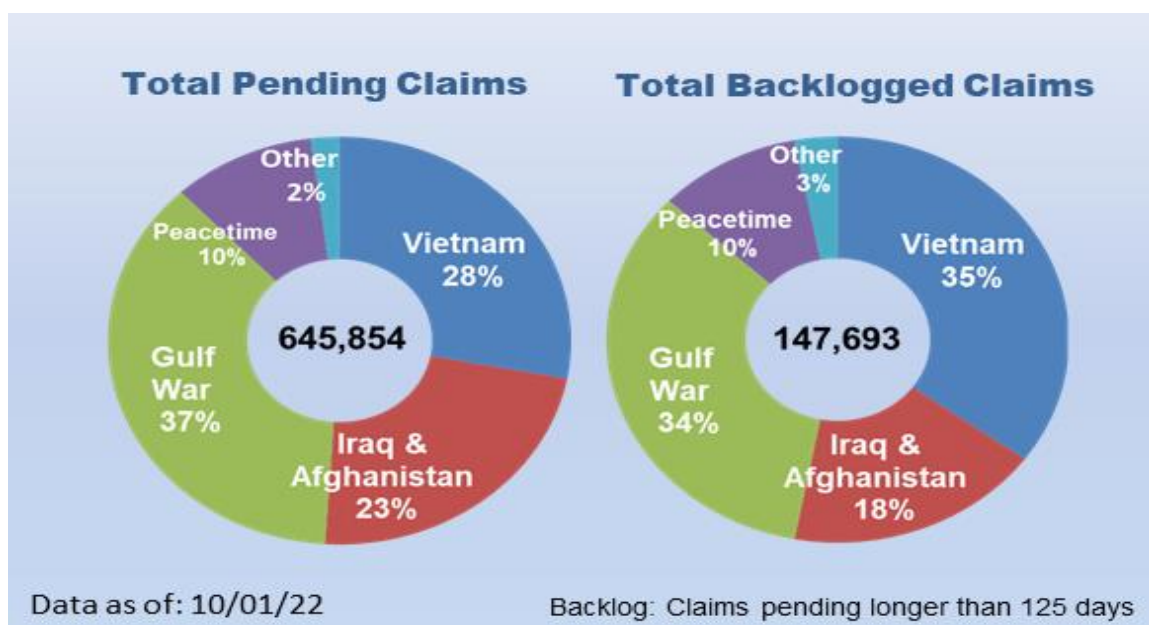
veteran advocacy organizations, etc. see page 9 and 10 with other communications (Reinkemeyer, 2021). Again, OIG Audit and Evaluations found a lack of training, a lack of procedures, and worse, inaccurate decisions from April to June 2020 that cost millions over and under payments at seven of the eight regional offices. The Cleveland Regional Office made sure they had their t's cross by adding local special focus quality review checks to ensure accurate process of claims (Reinkemeyer, 2021). Even though VBA had issues in the beginning of Black Water veteran claims, the VBA and Field Offices of Department of Veterans Affairs are showing improvements with all Agent Orange cases. These changes are allowing the VBA to review the original U.S.C. Title 38, Chapter 1, Part 4, Subpart B under Disability Ratings to review and update the percentage numbers on certain health symptoms and injuries for military veterans.

As of October 1, 2022, Veterans Benefits Administration updated their Characteristics of Claims on the total of pending and outstanding backlogged claims. Figure 6 on page 78-29 indicated pending numbers were 346,163 and backlogged was 82,832 on December 22, 2018; where figure 23 double the pending to 645,854 with the updated symptoms to claim with Agent Orange and other chemical agents that veterans fought in Vietnam War to Gulf War in 1990 and 2001 to August 30, 2021. The backlog numbers almost double from Figure 6 backlogged number 82,832 to 147,693 on October 1, 2022. Once the pending numbers go past 125-day policy, they will move over to backlog section.

Figure 23

Veterans Benefits Administration Reports for Total Pending and Backlogged Claims

Veterans Benefits Administration Reports Characteristics of Claims



Claims by Era

Total Pending Claims

- Post-9/11 (Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts) claims make up 23% of the total inventory.
- Gulf War (1990s conflict) claims make up 37% of the total inventory.
- Peacetime (the end of Vietnam to the Gulf War) claims makes up 10% of the total inventory.
- Vietnam War claims make up 28% of the total inventory.
- Other era claims make up 2% of the total inventory.

Total Backlogged Claims

- Post-9/11 (Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts) claims make up 18% of the backlog.

- Gulf War (1990s conflict) claims make up 34% of the backlog.
- Peacetime (the end of Vietnam to the Gulf War) claims makes up 10% of the backlog.
- Vietnam War claims make up 35% of the backlog.
- Other era claims make up less than 3% of the backlog.

Original vs. Supplemental Claims

The current inventory of compensation claims contains two types of claims:

- Original claims, which are those submitted by Veterans of all eras who are claiming disability compensation or pension from VBA for the first time.
- Supplemental claims, which are those submitted by Veterans of all eras who have previously filed for disability compensation or pension with VBA. For example, where a Veteran's condition has worsened, they may file for review to see if they are entitled to greater compensation, and supplemental claims include Veterans already on the rolls who claim a new condition.

Contentions and Claims Complexity

- The number of claims is magnified by growing complexity. There has been a 200 percent increase over the last 10 years in original claims containing eight or more specific medical issues, or contentions.
- The number of individual disabilities claimed has doubled in just the last five years.

More About Original and Supplemental Claims in Inventory

- 63% of pending claims are supplemental and 37% are original.
- 81% of Veterans filing supplemental claims are receiving some level of monetary benefit from VBA.
- 10% of Veterans filing supplemental claims already have a 100% disability rating (i.e., they receive \$2,800 or more per month) or qualify for Individual Unemployability and are compensated at the 100% disabled rate.
- 48% of Veterans filing supplemental claims are already rated at 50% disability or higher.
- 34% of supplemental claims are from Vietnam-era Veterans and 26% are from Veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts.

Note. Veterans Benefit Administration pulls the numbers from Monday Morning Workload Report every 10th day of each. The report is show on VA Benefits and Health section under [Characteristics of Claims - Veterans Benefits Administration Reports](https://benefits.va.gov/reports/characteristic_of_claims.asp) (https://benefits.va.gov/reports/characteristic_of_claims.asp)

New Life for LGBTQ Community with Department of Veterans Affairs

Secretary McDonough decided to make an in-house policy change on the 10th anniversary of President Obama repeal President Clinton's Don't Ask, Don't Tell, which allow all gay, lesbian, and bi-sexual to serve openly in the United States military service (Wentling, 2021). On September 20, 2021, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs McDonough had announced one of the biggest social changed in history to LGBTQ veterans' community that were administrative discharge for being gay in the military (Wentling, 2021). Before President Clinton announced the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy for the LGBTQ community in 1990s, there was a major witch hunt to track down who was gay and discharged them under other than honorable condition discharges. When any service member receives less than an Honorable or General Discharge, they are ineligible for veterans' benefits that includes burial, home loans, health care, and any disability compensation.

The Assistant Secretary of Public Affairs Kayla Williams indicated that all VA adjudicators will approve a LGBTQ benefit claims unless other military record shows a disqualification (Wentling, 2021). Each LGBTQ veteran that was separated with other than an honorable condition discharge will need to request an upgrade to General or Honorable discharge. For this to happen, they need to contact the VA for assistance; in

the meantime, contact the VBA to see what medical services and other benefits they can obtain. Then, once LGBTQ veteran receives approval for an upgrade to General or Honorable Condition discharge, they can submit or resubmit service-connectivity disability claim for health and injuries they receive during active duty before separation. It will be a long progress, with the Field Operations to have another backlog with over 125,000 more cases to be reviewed.

VBA is Working on Updating Rating Disability

Mid-February 2022, Director, Northeast District and Delegable Duties of the Under Secretary for Benefits announced the VA are looking into VA Schedule for Rating Disabilities. The three areas are respiratory, auditory, and mental disorders body systems. Based on “VA Comp & Pension Claims” from Facebook, veterans did not understand why some veterans received compensation and others did not even though veteran had documentation to prove disability, the veteran received notification that their disability was “not service-connected.” The conditions are sleep apnea, tinnitus (ringing in the ears) and evaluating mental health conditions based on robust and comprehensive approach that impact cognition, interpersonal relationships, task completion, life activities and self-care (Murphy, 2022). What was interesting about this propose; Director Murphy is reaching out to the public to provide comments to the two proposed updates. The rate percentage for each proposed respiratory, auditory, and mental disorders will change each percentage that will help a veteran to reach 100 percent easier with other disorder claims. This is one of the biggest social changes to happen if it gets

finalize. Once this is finalized, they will look at other improvements in the U.S.C Title 38 for Veteran Benefits by upgrading symptoms with higher percentage.

The Newest VA Launch to help their Social Change with Disabled Veterans

On January 18, 2022, the Secretary of VA Denis McDonough informed the reporters that the Veterans Benefits Administration created and using an automation pilot program called Office of Automated Benefit Delivery for service-connected disabled claims. The pilot program is only concentrating on service-related hypertension health issues. What was interesting about the article is the Acting Deputy Undersecretary Rob Reynolds indicated the Automated Pilot started in December 2021 at Boise Regional Office (Heckman, 2022). I would think they would have at least two Regional Offices to get the issues fix quicker. Reynolds is hoping every quarter to add three diagnostic codes, for example asthma, sleep apnea and prostate cancer (Heckman, 2022). One thing each military veteran hears every four or less years the Department of Veterans Affairs hires more employees to help with the VBA service-connected backlog of claims. On January 18, 2022, the Secretary of VA announces he hired over thousand employees to work on the Automation Pilot. Of those thousand employees and additional 1,094 by end of Spring 2022 will be claims processors and support staff that is divided up between 52 Regional Offices (Heckman, 2022). I really hope this works for Veterans Benefits Administration and Field Offices across the United States and most of all our military veterans having a quicker response to their claim package. The veteran has voiced concerns about the automated program; they are concerned about the system rejecting the claim if the documentation was given but placed under the wrong health issue. Acting

Undersecretary of Benefits Reynolds ensured “at no point in time will the decisions be left up to the system and the algorithms (Kime, 2022). Reading Kime’s article was enlightening because she used the photograph of claims on top of filing cabinets in Winston-Salem Regional Office in North Carolina that came from VA Office of Inspector General report. The Office of Inspector General Audits and Evaluation Branch needs to keep up and monitor this program because programs need to be updated with new and changes to rating disabilities. One other thing the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and Undersecretary for Benefits needs to have backup plans in place if the program goes hard down by cyberattack, cloud attack, virus attack, or gets fried by missed calculations in downloads. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs is depending on this automation pilot to get rid of their claims and pension backlog.

Improvements and Social Change for the Pennsylvania Veterans

One area that hurt the veterans in Pennsylvania was the canceling of the Mobile unit due to COVID-19 Pandemic that reaches out to counties to assist military veterans with their benefits and disability and pension claims. The Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs had to figure out a new way to reach their veterans. So they developed a program called “PAVetConnect” on the DMVA website. The only issue with this public service, you need to sign up. The importance of social change for the state of Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs is finding new ways to reach all military veterans that live in Pennsylvania not just the ones that sign up for DMVA Newsletter and utilizing the PAVetConnect website.

During the data collection, the researcher decided to dive deeply into the Veterans Benefits Administrations Annual Benefits Reports from 2003 to 2020; table 17 shows the estimated total of veterans living in Pennsylvania, with the absolute difference between PA and VBA Compensation and Pension Receipts. As of 2020, the estimated total of Veteran population in Pennsylvania is closed to 800,000 from 1,180,309 in 2003.

Table 17

Veterans Benefits Administration Annual Benefit Reports from Fiscal Years 2003 to 2020 with Pennsylvania numbers

Fiscal Year	Estimated total Veteran Population in PA	Disability Compensation Recipients in PA	Veteran Pension in PA	VBA Overall Compensation Recipients	VBA Overall Pension Receipts
2020	791912	137513	9267	5527195	378670
2019	768094	135081	10201	5378239	409151
2018	793321	130242	11138	5166087	452912
2017	819185	125847	11797	4964209	478003
2016	894681	121167	12406	4755662	491685
2015	916638	116648	12917	4559083	501453
2014	939069	111696	13556	4331329	516270
2013	1035565	107317	13336	3743259	308116
2012	980529	103318	14567	3536802	314790
2011	933404	99489	14150	3354771	313665
2010	964132	97036	14095	3210261	313563
2009	995135	94917	14255	3069952	314245
2008	1025770	93939	14280	2952282	315763
2007	1088220	93045	14436	2844178	322875
2006	1088220	91592	14308	3582255	329856
2005	1117004	90704	14384	2636979	335787
2004	1145919	90128	14437	7284267	342903
2003	1180309	90253	14774	6787857	332077

Note: You can find all fiscal year reports at <https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/abr/>

Either way the Government of Pennsylvania need to update the Act 66 to add more Veteran Service Officers (VSO) and money for Disabled American Veteran (DAV), Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW), The American Legion, AMVETS and Counties with more than one or two more to aid with veteran benefits. The reason behind the increase of State Veteran Officers, National Service Officers or Veteran Service Officers is because Table 18 below shows the in FY 2019 VA Disability Pension Recipients in state of Pennsylvania we still have a long way to go to reach each veteran that is not 100 percent disabled.

Table 18

FY 2019 VA Disability Pension Recipients by Pennsylvania

**** Small cell counts have been suppressed to protect the privacy and identity of individual Veterans.**

State	Total	Male	Female	Service-connected Disability Rating							Age	
				0% to 20%	30% to 40%	50% to 60%	70% to 90%	100%	17-44	45-64	65 or older	
VA	239,108	227,586	11,522									
Pennsylvania	10,269	9,786	483									
Counties	Total: Disability Comp.			0% to 20%	30% to 40%	50% to 60%	70% to 90%	100%	17-44	45-64	65 or older	
Adams	1,240	1,093	147	363	231	185	312	149	290	397	551	
Allegheny	12,222	11,156	1,066	4,193	2,241	1,732	2,441	1,615	2,892	3,423	5,907	
Armstrong	800	752	48	252	129	125	166	128	147	193	460	
Beaver	2,052	1,894	158	682	386	326	417	241	410	573	1,069	
Bedford	707	663	44	217	119	126	156	89	140		388	
Berks	3,587	3,281	306	1,015	569	521	928	554	912	1,030	1,645	
Blair	2,048	1,891	157	539	327	325	532	325	460	573	1,014	

Bradford	938	858	80	243	132	130	261	172	238	280	420
Bucks	5,153	4,749	404	1,390	813	684	1,397	869	1,208	1,347	2,597
Butler	2,115	1,968	147	704	391	299	415	306	477	630	1,007
Cambria	2,194	2,056	138	676	382	339	508	289	476	598	1,120
Cameron	103	**	**	25	24	17	26	11	23	24	56
Carbon	973	916	57	248	131	142	270	182	201	256	516
Centre	1,624	1,486	138	541	285	197	408	193	453	469	702
Chester	4,469	4,080	389	1,264	629	606	1,222	748	1,027	1,353	2,089
Clarion	469	440	29	146	79	85	104	55	108	136	225
Clearfield	1,188	1,111	77	348	217	165	264	194	245	347	596
Clinton	789	747	42	258	123	112	177	119	153	225	411
Columbia	806	744	62	221	139	106	199	141	187	222	397
Crawford	1,419	1,330	89	467	237	203	313	199	295	400	724
Cumberland	3,939	3,484	455	1,054	724	678	981	502	850	1,618	1,471
Dauphin	3,563	3,141	422	960	624	519	933	527	872	1,263	1,428
Delaware	4,617	4,185	432	1,132	746	660	1,270	809	1,032	1,416	2,169
Elk	436	403	33	113	88	63	104	68	93	115	228
Erie	3,931	3,629	302	1,268	602	592	886	583	951	1,078	1,902
Fayette	1,692	1,606	86	468	289	267	391	277	293	436	963
Forest	153	143	10	45	29	28	31	20	15	44	94
Franklin	2,210	2,012	198	625	432	358	529	266	517	775	917
Fulton	147	**	**	41	24	21	38	23	33	38	76
Greene	468	430	38	130	90	64	116	68	96	127	245
Huntingdon	686	629	57	198	128	112	163	85	133	207	346
Indiana	1,049	991	58	300	182	177	228	162	250	248	551
Jefferson	607	559	48	205	112	80	134	76	155	163	289
Juniata	195	179	16	53	29	32	51	30	49	45	101
Lackawanna	2,820	2,607	213	727	376	395	811	511	670	705	1,445
Lancaster	4,421	3,980	441	1,223	760	633	1,096	709	1,196	1,231	1,994

Lawrence	1,006	933	73	317	180	146	208	155	222	302	482
Lebanon	2,032	1,831	201	515	324	289	566	338	422	736	874
Lehigh	2,934	2,669	265	800	436	426	757	515	751	829	1,354
Luzerne	4,701	4,366	335	1,300	646	677	1,248	830	980	1,289	2,432
Lycoming	1,664	1,520	144	484	246	262	430	242	436	474	754
Mckean	748	696	52	228	117	103	191	109	128	205	415
Mercer	1,307	1,201	106	370	236	173	294	234	299	377	631
Mifflin	514	476	38	126	72	84	155	77	108	162	244
Monroe	2,102	1,921	181	497	287	265	582	471	516	604	982
Montgomery	6,333	5,751	582	1,702	1,030	880	1,697	1,024	1,582	1,747	3,004
Montour	236	220	16	67	31	39	67	32	74	69	93
Northampton	2,581	2,396	185	748	374	339	686	434	605	688	1,288
Northumberland	1,239	1,147	92	351	196	166	309	217	261	372	606
Perry	615	561	54	177	106	81	157	94	148	212	255
Philadelphia	14,389	12,940	1,449	3,141	1,911	1,990	4,491	2,856	3,182	4,900	6,306
Pike	902	844	58	232	140	110	249	171	185	256	461
Potter	363	338	25	128	47	37	92	59	65	111	187
Schuylkill	1,973	1,823	150	512	314	277	531	339	414	524	1,035
Snyder	347	319	28	105	50	57	78	57	79	94	174
Somerset	1,040	975	65	293	193	182	236	136	210	279	551
Sullivan	92	**	**	31	14	11	22	14	16	24	52
Susquehanna	544	508	36	147	74	86	142	95	113	134	297
Tioga	744	698	46	189	112	121	217	105	165	239	340
Union	370	346	24	100	50	66	93	61	97	113	160
Venango	835	783	52	263	131	131	192	118	167	254	414
Warren	830	781	49	337	128	99	158	108	157	225	448
Washington	2,326	2,182	144	736	464	362	483	281	488	587	1,251
Wayne	838	788	50	242	91	107	233	165	145	191	502
Westmoreland	4,023	3,726	297	1,357	804	610	785	467	833	1,052	2,138

Wyoming	363	336	27	91	46	54	103	69	71	81	211
York	5,106	4,603	503	1,409	889	798	1,293	717	1,377	1,716	2,013

Note. The table was developed from National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, www.va.gov/vetdata. This is estimate numbers for each county in the state of Pennsylvania

The other issues that our VSO need to help with social change is showing our military veterans that they care about them and their families when a veteran passes away. So many veteran survivors do not know whom to reach out to get their spouses survivor benefits from Department of Veterans Affairs.

One great benefit today with next generation of military service members is how the military is providing better Transition Assistance Program (TAP) for separated service members and family. The COVID-19 Pandemic forced each military bases to provide an online (virtual) program to all service member in all classes before leaving the service in 2020 to present. The TAP class provides each member online documents or hard copies of each state's information for service members to reach out to Veterans Advocacy Groups for Veteran's benefit services. In addition, the state can help service members transition back to home of record or stay at a separation location and provide a Veterans Service Officer information on base to help process their service-connect disability claim.

When writing for Chapters 4 and 5, one website called LiveStories.com provided some interesting data on Pennsylvania military veterans who served in the military. Unfortunately, no information on any Veterans Advocacy Groups or the Pennsylvania

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs utilized the data from LiveStories.com. In addition, the veteran demographics from website showed how many veterans do not have service-connected disability and veterans that have not submitted for benefits that would help Veterans Service Officers. The website presented issues downloading the charts, so use the following link <https://www.livestories.com/statistics/pennsylvania/veteran-demographics>.

The Outcome of the Methodological

After reviewing Chapter 1, three theories about “organizational, professional identity, and human resource” support theoretical and IAD frameworks. The Department of Veteran Affairs agency has worked hard on all three theories by working together to process disability and pension claims. The Office of Inspector General Audit and Evaluations reports on the performance of Field Operations under Veterans Benefits Administration for the past three years indicated how challenging the work is. For example, every time the OIG audits the Field Operation, they recommend how to make improvements for lack of training, fix errors in misdiagnosing injuries, and how to follow up five-year evaluations on unemployment claims that for puts professional identity into question. One other area is human resource theory with the hiring process for Veterans Rating Representatives and Supervisors with leadership skills. When you look at the organizational theory, it is important to have the right senior level positions with great leadership skills and be able to collaborate with other superiors and supervisors of each key departments. In the last three years, there have been improvements when Under Secretary of Benefits Paul Lawrence prior Army Captain and veteran was confirmed by

the Senate on April 26, 2018. One area that Under Secretary of Benefits started was webcast on January 31, 2019, he explains how things were going to improve with processing claims and the pensions. In that webcast, he provided information on the new appeal process was to change a lot of military veterans' quality of life. Secretary Lawrence provided a webcast every quarter for two years. As of July 25, 2022, the Biden Administration has no nomination for Under Secretary of Benefits, the VA moved up Joshua Jacobs, Senior Advisor to Acting, Secretary of Benefits to manage the operation. The Social Construction Framework (SCF) comes into play with Democratic Policy Design using policy feedback theory from Office of Inspector General Audits and Evaluations reports. The report provides valuable information to improve the operation of the Veterans Benefits Administrations under Field Operations and Disability Assistance under Compensation Service Department. In reviewing all the Audits and Evaluations reports on processing disability and pension claims in the past 40 years; some of the employees at various Field Operations and Compensation Service Department still have issues with lack of training in recent changes on medical diagnoses and support policy changes that upper leadership. Leadership fails to pass or publish for employees to see.

On the Veterans Benefits Administration, Monday Morning Workload Reports provides constant updates for anyone interested to know about the accountability of claims. It is important to understand the Excel changes in the updated formats. One problem with the webpage on "National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics" is that it is not updating as quickly to support the social construction frameworks. The slow

updates of the VA.Gov webpage may be due to the old websites only gets a partial update.

For the last three years, the operational procedures that Veterans Benefits Administrations has implemented on Gulf War symptoms has helped the Vietnam Era and Gulf War veterans with their disability claims.

Conclusions

Throughout the study and opportunity to interview fellow military veterans, it showed the difference in opinions and attitudes that military veterans felt about processing their service-connectivity claims and quality of life. What was remarkably interesting, is how many of the interviewees felt they were not qualified for benefits. It took a major terrorist war to change the outlook process from hard copy paper to electronic portal process for accountability purposes. Additionally, the terrorist war changed the views of older veterans that they can receive some tax-free money to help with their quality of life. Even though the Veterans Benefits Administration has proven they processed over one million disability and pension claims for past three Fiscal Years, some of the veterans are still frustrated with the system since they have not received 100 percent Permanent and Total Disability like fellow veterans and friends. In the last three years, the Office of Inspector General completed eight Audits and Evaluations investigations on the Under Secretary of Veterans Benefits Administration Departments from Compensation Service and Field Operations at various Regional locations on processing disability and pension claims. All the reviews from IG team members

indicated they still have issues processing claims due to lack of training, leadership, and tracking locations.

The Department of Veterans Affairs, the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, and all the Veteran Advocacy Groups that does disability compensation claims are depending on internet interaction for communication with our military veterans and survivor spouses. It is up to the Veteran to find ways to improve their quality of life with minimum to maximum of tax-free money that Veterans Benefit Administration with a approved or denied a 100 percent benefit. One area that Department of Veterans Affairs is concentrating on is the millennials to use internet services more with VA.Gov website. And the state of Pennsylvania would like the veterans to sign up and use the PAVetConnect under the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs website Veterans Affairs (pa.gov).

Even today economically, the quality of life for all Americans including the military Veterans will struggle if our government is depending on internet connection instead of personal networking. The Federal and State government, Advocacy Groups (DAV, VFW, American Legion, etc), and all veteran support groups that are helping veterans today will depend on internet services to get the word out for veterans. Plus, a military veteran needs to reach out to advocacy groups to get assistance. So, the older veterans will need to figure out a way to understand the internet because no one will go back in time to interact with them.

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Appendix A: Table of Appendix

AT1: Service-connected Disabled Veterans by Disability Rating Group FY 1986 to FY 2016

Service-connected Disabled Veterans by Disability Rating Group: FY1986 to FY2016

Fiscal Year	Total Veterans with a Service-Connected Disability	0 to 20 percent	30 to 40 percent	50 to 60 percent	70 to 100 percent
1986	2,225,289	1,255,399	495,655	224,588	249,647
1987	2,212,303	1,251,733	491,932	221,480	247,158
1988	2,198,857	1,246,938	488,117	218,394	245,407
1989	2,191,549	1,245,045	485,456	215,972	245,076
1990	2,184,262	1,242,103	483,479	214,399	244,281
1991	2,179,122	1,242,386	480,368	213,029	243,339
1992	2,180,936	1,245,352	479,501	212,178	243,905
1993	2,197,635	1,254,732	483,034	212,802	247,067
1994	2,217,908	1,266,403	487,251	213,807	250,447
1995	2,235,675	1,271,698	490,581	215,381	258,015
1996	2,252,980	1,272,924	494,802	217,648	267,606
1997	2,262,771	1,266,042	496,067	221,015	279,647
1998	2,277,049	1,255,055	499,907	226,586	295,501
1999	2,294,453	1,242,621	503,341	233,897	314,594
2000	2,308,186	1,227,207	506,019	241,260	333,700
2001	2,321,103	1,211,807	509,110	248,104	352,082
2002	2,398,287	1,209,274	527,820	266,886	394,307
2003	2,485,229	1,204,038	546,157	287,978	447,056
2004	2,555,696	1,200,715	558,306	304,341	492,334
2005	2,636,979	1,199,271	573,994	324,637	539,077
2006	2,725,824	1,207,358	594,765	345,832	577,869
2007	2,844,178	1,229,001	621,440	371,622	622,115
2008	2,952,285	1,237,868	643,882	398,679	671,856
2009	3,069,652	1,244,230	665,211	427,902	732,309
2010	3,210,261	1,258,882	689,599	459,657	802,123
2011	3,354,741	1,258,987	711,305	492,692	891,757
2012	3,536,802	1,266,501	729,813	532,192	1,008,296
2013	3,743,259	1,281,492	749,531	572,421	1,139,815

2014	3,949,066	1,294,797	765,587	609,450	1,279,232
2015	4,168,774	1,308,597	778,182	647,025	1,434,970
2016	4,356,443	1,318,939	785,687	675,865	1,575,952

Note: Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration; 1985-1998: COIN CP-127 Reports; 1999-2016: Annual Benefits Reports

Prepared by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, Office of Enterprise Integration, Department of Veterans Affairs, Aug 2018

AT2: *The List of Secretary of Veterans Affairs that came from the VA.Gov webpage*

Name	Dates
Ed Derwinski	March 15, 1989 – September 26, 1992
Jesse Brown	January 22, 1993 – July 3, 1997
Togo D. West Jr.	January 2, 1998 – July 25, 2000
Anthony Principi	January 23, 2001 – January 26, 2005
Jim Nicholson	January 26, 2005 – October 1, 2007
Retired Lt. Gen. James Peake	December 20, 2007 – January 20, 2009
Retired Gen. Eric Shinseki	January 20, 2009 – May 30, 2014
Robert A. McDonald	July 30, 2014 – January 20, 2017
David Shulkin	February 14, 2017 – March 28, 2018
Robert Wilkie	July 30, 2018 – January 20, 2021
Denis McDonough	February 2021 - Present

Note: Each Secretary of Veterans' Affairs came from www.va.gov.

AT3: *Supported Disability Benefit Acts from 1776 to 2019.* This list was built up from the History of VA, Military Times when they get signed by the President, and found on Congress public website.

Supported Disability Benefit Acts	Acts Signed by Presidents	Dates	Brief Descriptions
The nation's first pension law	Continental Congress	1/1/1776	The nation's first pension law was granted half pay for life in cases of loss of limb or serious disability. Payments were responsibility of each state to pay veteran.
Service Pension Law of 1818	James Monroe	1/1/1818	Every person who served in the War for Independence and need of assistance would receive a fixed pension for life. The rate was \$20 a month for officers and \$8 a month for enlisted men.
The Homestead Act of 1862	Abraham Lincoln	1/1/1862	Provided disability payments based on rank and degree of disability, and liberalized benefits for widows, children, and dependent relatives. This act covered military service in time of peace as well the Civil War. The act provided burial sites for many Union veterans were assigned special priority for western land at \$1.25 an acre.

The General Pension Act of 1862	Abraham Lincoln	1/1/1862	Provided disability payments based on rank and degree of disability, and liberalized benefits for widows, children, and dependent relatives. This act covered military service in time of peace as well the Civil War. The act provided burial sites for many Union dead of the Civil War at the National Cemetary System.
National Asylum for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers.	Abraham Lincoln	1/1/1865	Towards the end of the Civil War, Congress passed the first significant veterans' preference legislation. This act provided that:
The Consolidation Act of 1873	Ulysses S. Grant	2/15/1873	Paying the veteran based on disability instead of rank.
The Dependent Pension Act of 1890	Benjamin Harrison	6/27/1890	The Dependent Pension Act was to broaden the eligibility, providing pensions to veteran's incapable of manual labor. This act doubled the pension roll to 996,000 from 489,000. The act provided pensions for all veterans who had served at least ninety days in the Union military or naval forces, were honorably discharged from service and were unable to perform manual labor, regardless of their financial situation or when the disability was suffered. The bill was a source of contentious debate and only passed after Grover Cleveland had vetoed a previous version in 1887.
No new pension laws from Spanish-American War in 1898 or th Philippine Insurrection in 1899 to 1901			
The Sherwood Act of 1912	Woodrow Wilson	5/11/1912	Awarded pensions to all veterans included Mexican War and Union veterans of the Civil War receive pensions automatically at age 62. That includes the Revolutionary War veterans that were limited in 19th century.
The War Risk Insurance Act of 1914 and Amendment in 1917	Woodrow Wilson	9/2/1914	The first War Risk Insurance Act was to protect all merchant ships that delivers supplies to allies and service members across the ocean during World War I. In 1917, Congress amended the War Risk Insurance Act to give life insurance coverage to sailors in the United States Merchant Marine o 12 June 1917 and 6 October 1917 with another amendment for death or total permanent disability.
The Soldier Rehabilitation Act of 1918	Woodrow Wilson	Unknown	The Soldier Rehabilitation Act was established for injured veterans that no longer can do their old job due to injuries. The veterans will get to learn new job skills to match their abilities. Later changed to Vocational Rehabilitation Act.
World War Adjustment Compensation Act	Calvin Coolidge	5/19/1924	Congress passed and President signed the World War Adjustment Compensation Act on 19 May 1924 to help veterans between 5 April 1917, and 1 July 1919 with \$1.00 awarded each day that served in the United States and \$1.25 for those veterans that served abroad. No veteran that served after 11 November 1918 were excluded from Adjusted Service Certificate.

Veterans Administration Act	Herbert Hoover	7/3/1930	On 3 July 1930, Herbert Hoover signed Veterans Administration Act by a merged of U.S. Bureau of Pensions, the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers and the U.S. Veterans Bureau to merge functions into one agency named Veterans Administration. Brig. Gen. Frank T. Hines continued his military service as the first administrator for Veterans Administration.
The Board of Veterans' Appeals	Franklin D. Roosevelt	7/1/1933	The Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA) was created by Executive Order 6230 by President Roosevelt on 28 July 1933. The BVA was established to review a veterans' appeal that does not agree with their disability and benefits decision from the Veterans Administration. BVA operates under Chapter 71 of Title 38, United States Code that consists of Chairman that is appointed by Secretary of Veterans Affairs and approved by the President of the United States. The board consists of a Chairman, Vice Chairman, Senior Deputy Vice Chairman, 56 Veterans Law Judges (VLJs), 8 Senior Counsel, and 250 staff counsel.
The Selective Training and Service Act of 1940	Franklin D. Roosevelt	9/16/1940	Required that men between the ages of 21 and 35 register with local draft boards.
The Disabled Veterans' Rehabilitation Act of 1943	Franklin D. Roosevelt	5/1/1943 est.	The Disabled Veterans Rehabilitation Act was amended from 1918 Act to help disabled World War II veterans that served after 6 December 1941. This act will provide over 600,000 veterans with job training to return to civilian life.
The Servicemen's Readjustment Act	Franklin D. Roosevelt	6/22/1944	The Serviceman's Readjustment Act was to help WWII veterans to adjust after the war. The law created GI Bill to stipend payments for tuition and expenses while service members and veterans to attend college or trade school. Additionally, the Act help to finance new hospitals, low-interest mortgages called VA Home Loans, and unemployment compensation.
Veterans' Preference Act of 1944	Franklin D. Roosevelt	6/27/1944	It required the federal government to favor returning war veterans when hiring new employees in an attempt to recognize their service, sacrifice, and skills.
The Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act of 1952	Harry S. Truman	7/16/1952	Called the Korean GI Bill by provided unemployment insurance, job placement, etc. provided education and training benefits, as well as home, farm, and business loans.
Public Law 85-810,	Harry S. Truman	5/11/1958	Confederate soldiers started to receive their veterans benefits when Congress pardoned all service member and extended benefits to the single remaining survivor.
The Civil Service Reform Act of 1978	Jimmy Carter	10/13/1978 est	Persons honorably discharged from the military or naval service by reason of disability resulting from wounds or sickness incurred in the line of duty shall be preferred for appointments to civil offices, provided they are found to possess the business capacity necessary for the proper discharge of the duties of such offices.
Veterans' and Survivors' Pension Improvement Act	Jimmy Carter	11/4/1978	Amend title 38, United States Code, to provide improvements in the pension program for certain veterans of a period of war with non-service-connected disabilities, for certain surviving spouses of veterans of a period of war, and for certain surviving children of veterans of a period of

			war, to increase the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving parents of certain veterans, to provide for automatic annual cost-of-living adjustments in the rates of pension and in the rates of parents' dependency and indemnity compensation, to prevent reductions in and terminations of pension and terminations of parents' dependency and indemnity compensation solely attributable to cost-of-living increases in social security benefits, and for other purposes.
Emergency Veterans' Job Training Act of 1983	Walter Mondale	8/15/1983	An act to establish an emergency program of job training assistance for unemployed Korean conflict and Vietnam-era veterans, and for other purposes.
Veterans' Compensation and Program Improvements Amendments of 1984	Ronald Reagan	3/2/1984	This Act was the start of improving the Disability Compensation and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation Program with Rate Increases for (1) veterans' disability compensation; (2) additional compensation for dependents; (3) the clothing allowance for certain disabled veterans; (4) dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving spouses according to a specified table; (5) dependency and indemnity compensation for children; and (6) supplemental dependency and indemnity compensation for children that took effect on December 1, 1984. In Part B, there was some decreases in various compensation program. And Title II, child and adopted children for veterans' benefit purposes. Plus, there was some additional changes with guaranteed loans for home improvements, educational assistance, State veterans' cemeteries, and other areas. One key improvement is the increase of members from 50 to 65 to Board of Veterans' Appeals to help the backlog of World War II, Korea War, and Vietnam War veterans' claims.
Department of Veterans Affairs Act	Ronald Reagan	10/25/1988	Changed the former Veterans Administration, an independent government agency established in 1930, primarily at that time to see to needs of World War I, into a Cabinet-level Department of Veterans Affairs.
Persian Gulf Conflict Supplemental Authorization and Personnel Benefit Act	George H. W. Bush	4/6/1991	Per Sec. 335 Both the Secretary of Defense and Secretary of Veterans Affairs were ordered to provide reports on services and treatments on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder to Veterans Affairs Committee Hearing. The Persian Gulf Conflict Supplemental Authorization was very important for military operations; the Personnel Benefit Act had importances for Reserves that left their job and build a student loan prior to going to war in Sec 372, see paragraph 3 with waiver requirements. In Sec 337 gave military service members, reserves service members, and veterans that used their Montgomery GI Bill for educational and training received an increase in payments. Under Part F of the Act is where the Farmer and Rancher Program was to help pay back or assist with loans of service members that left during chop season.

The Veterans Health Care Act of 1992	George H. W. Bush	11/4/1992	The details of this Act is to amend Title 38, United States Code, to improve health care services for women veterans, to expand authority for health care sharing agreements between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense to revise certain pay authorities that apply to Department of Veterans Affairs nurses, to improve preventive health services for veterans, to establish discounts on pharmaceuticals purchased by the Department of Veterans Affairs, to provide for a Persian Gulf War Veterans Health Registry, and to make other improvements in the delivery and administration of health care by the Department of Veterans Affairs with a lot of changes to health services for women and veterans.
the Defense Appropriations act of 1997	Bill Clinton	9/30/1996	The last major legislation affecting veterans' preference occurred in the form of the Defense Appropriations act of 1997. Under this legislation, preference was accorded to anyone who served on active duty during the Gulf War period (August 2, 1990, through January 2, 1992). This law also granted preference to certain service members who earned campaign medals for service in Bosnia and Herzegovina in support of Operation Joint Endeavor (November 20, 1995, through December 20, 1996) or Operation Joint Guard (December 20, 1996, through a date designated by the Secretary of Defense).
Veterans Claims Assistance Act of 2000	Bill Clinton	11/9/2000	Public Law 106-475. Chapter 51 of title 38, inserting a section 5101 with the following statement: The term "claimant" means any individual applying for, or submitting a claim for, any benefit under the laws administered by the Secretary. The sections of all 5100 had been amended that the claimants get assistance with all claims including appeal cases.
Veterans' Claims Processing Innovation Act	George W. Bush	<i>Never signed</i>	This bill was announced in Congress and later was closed out without any action. This act could have resolved some of the problem with backlog of claims in early 2000 before going over to fight for a Global War on Terrorism.
Veterans Benefits Act of 2003	George W. Bush	12/16/2003	To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve benefits under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes. This update to Veterans Benefits added the former prisoners of war and the filipino veterans. Plus, the benefits for children with spina bifida of veterans that service in Korea war. This update also provided changes to various sections of Title Code 38.
Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 2008	George W. Bush	10/10/2008	To improve and enhance compensation and pension, housing, labor and education, and insurance benefits for veterans, and for other purposes.
Veterans' Benefits Act of 2010	Barrack Obama	10/13/2010	To amend title 38, United States Code, and the Servicemen's Civil Relief Act to make certain improvements in the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes

Veterans National Remembrance Act	Barrack Obama	<i>Never signed</i>	The first introduction for Veterans National Remembrance Act on May 21, 2014, as H.R. 4712 (113th) and died that same month. It was re-introduced again on June 9, 2015, as H.R. 2706 that didn't go anywhere for two years that died again on January 3, 2017. Two different House Representatives try to amend the U.S.C. Title 38 to provide priority for the establishment of new national cemeteries by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes. Both House and Senate block this one too.
VA Appeals Backlog Relief Act	Barrack Obama	<i>Never signed</i>	H.R. 5349 (113th) and H.R. 1302 (114th) never got through and block by House Committee.
Veterans Fiduciary Reform Act of 2015	Barrack Obama	6/2/2015	States that, when in the opinion of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) a temporary fiduciary is needed to protect the benefits of a VA beneficiary while a determination of incompetency is being made or appealed or a fiduciary is appealing a determination of misuse, the VA may appoint one or more temporary fiduciaries for up to 120 days.
Combat-Injured Veterans Tax Fairness Act of 2016 (Public Law 114-292)	Barrack Obama	12/16/2016	More than 130,000 veterans are receiving letters on how to apply for refunds of taxes they paid on disability severance pay dating back to 1991 — a minimum of \$1,750 per veteran. Applies to veterans who received this pay dating back to Jan. 17, 1991, with taxes withheld. The eligible veterans will have a year after the date of their letter from the Defense Department to file a claim for the refund, or three years after filing their tax return that reported the disability severance pay, whichever is later. Survivors of those who paid the taxes are also eligible for the refund, which would be paid to the estate of the veteran.
Jeff Miller & Richard Blumenthal Veterans Healthcare & Benefits Improvement Act of 2016	Barrack Obama	12/16/2016	To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the furnishing of health care to veterans by the Department of Veterans Affairs, to improve the processing by the Department of claims for disability compensation, and for other purposes. A bill must be passed by both the House and Senate in identical form and then be signed by the President to become law. This bill was introduced in the 114th Congress, which met from January 6, 2015, to January 3, 2017.
Veterans Appeals Improvement Modernization Act of 2017	Donald Trump	2/17/2017	(The) VA's current appeals process is broken. Between fiscal year 2015 and fiscal year 2017, the number of pending appeals increased from approximately 380,000 to 470,000 – more than a 20 percent increase. Between fiscal years 2013 and 2016, Congress appropriated nearly \$200 million more than the president's request to address the appeals backlog. Despite the infusion of resources, VA estimates that it will take at least five years just to resolve the appeals currently pending.

Veterans Benefits and Transition Act of 2018	Donald Trump	12/31/2018	This act did not help many veterans with their quality-of-life problems. It was supported to Title 38 to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide certain burial benefits for spouses and children of veterans who are buried in tribal cemeteries, and for other purposes. Additionally, education has some amends on courses pending payment, housing stipend information under Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program, and authority to use educational assistance to pursue independent study programs at certain educational institutions that are not institutions of higher learning. Civil Relief for dependent survivors or spouses of death of service member while serving or veteran for termination leases, tax purposes, voting, and termination of multichannel video programming and internet access service contracts. And adding an old Act by doing a study on community-based transition assistance programs for members of the Armed Forces after separation, retirement, or discharge which was established back in 1991.
VA Mission Act of 2018	Donald Trump	6/6/2018	The original named is Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act of 2018 (Caring for Our Veterans Act of 2018) is to give medical care outside the network of the VA Medical Centers. The Mission Act actually benefits the health of veterans. The program establish a new Veterans Community Care Program (VCCP) to provide health care to veterans by: (1) ensuring timely scheduling of medical appointments, (2) ensuring the continuity of care and services, (3) coordinating among regional networks, and (4) ensuring that eligible veterans do not experience a lapse in care or an unusual or excessive burden in accessing care due to errors or delays by the VA or its contractors. The VA shall provide an eligible veteran with health care through the VCCP if: (1) the VA does not offer the care or services the veteran requires, (2) the VA does not operate a full-service VA medical facility in the veteran's state, or (3) the veteran was eligible for care under Veterans Choice Program criteria.
John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019	Donald Trump	8/13/2018	The John McCain National Defense Authorization Act for FY2019 only had support for Armed Forces Retirement Home under Subtitle C and support for active, retire, reserve, and veterans that has benefits, Authorization of appropriations for Armed Forces. The improvements to veterans that live at Armed Forces Retirement Home (sec. 1421) includes expansion of residence eligibility (sec. 1422); oversight of health care to residents (sec. 1423); modification of authority on acceptance of gights (sec. 1424); financial relief and limitation for veteras that were impacted by increase fees (sec. 1425 and sec. 1426).
Forever GI Bill Housing Payment Fulfillment Act of 2018	Donald Trump	1/3/2019	All this Act was to fix the housing payment that was not ready in the database. The act was to fix it only.

Haven Act	Donald Trump	8/23/2019	Prevents debt collectors from seizing veterans' disability compensations if they declare bankruptcy. The Honoring American Veterans in Extreme Need, or HAVEN, Act extends the same protection for veteran's disability payments that's afforded Social Security disability payments: By law, debtors are now not allowed to count these benefits as disposable income subject to seizure during a bankruptcy.
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AT4: Historical PA Veterans Disability and Pension Claims by PA County VSOs, Act 66 VSO Data (FY08), and the numbers VBA Monday Morning Workload Reports that states the number of claims submitted to regional offices of Pittsburgh and Philadelphia from Fiscal Year 2004 through 2018.

Fiscal Year	PA Veteran Population (The projected number of veterans in Pennsylvania, based on federal Veterans Administration estimates.)	County VSO	ACT 66 VSO Grant Program numbers from State Commission Reports	PA Fiscal Report addressed Difference totals against State Commission Numbers	DVA/VBA Pittsburgh Region Office	DVA/VBA Philadelphia Regional Office	Outstanding disability/pension claims with Pittsburgh and Philadelphia Together	Overall C&P Pending Claims at VBA	Veterans that Appeal their disability and pension claims. (Phila/ Pitt)
FY04-05	1,117,004				4746	6660	23390	419394	3905
FY05-06	1,088,220		N/A		4884	6438	39199	510364	4547
FY06-07			N/A		6419	7102	41979	588197	4813
FY07-08	1,057,073				9950	31318	41268	636261	4895
FY08-09	1,025,770	3,607	9782		5088	7052	42199	637056	5031
FY09-10	995,135	4,088	22133		4917	18861	93271	728598	5769
FY10-11	964,132	6,465	26675	26,134	5425	15151	55879	560495	5905
FY11-12	1,007,607	4,088	14312	14,132	8467	25038	51725	833606	6502
FY12-13	980,529	6,968	12927		10909	23414	55451	909781	6520
FY13-14	953,700	6500	14125		10428	20799	81483	796865	5765
FY14-15	939,069	7582	14891		6367	14071	20452	558256	No Data
FY15-16	916,638	8,362	18371		8906	14163	19048	385337	9220
FY16-17	894,681	8,780	32756		9007	15250	24257	371153	10800
FY17-18	873,340	9,219	34,708		6962	16747	33336	368858	10167
FY18-19		7195	18299		7412	21368	26860	338283	10707

Note: The numbers came from the Executive Budget Reports of the Governor of Pennsylvania website (public domain) and the Monday Morning Workload Reports from VA.Gov (public domain)

AT5: True Historical Data from Field Operations and VBA Monday Morning Workload Reports that Contains VBA Overall, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh RO Claim Numbers for Fiscal Year 2021.

Fiscal Year 21 End of each Month/Year	Pending	Backlog >125 Days	Complete Month to Date	Complete Fiscal Year to Date	Legacy Appeals Pending
9/30/21 End of FY 21					
VBA/Field Overall	604611	207777	108138	1496263	30708
Philadelphia RO	2241	821	3497	62548	11
Pittsburgh RO	653	257	1148	13951	186
August-21					
VBA/Field Overall	594660	178584	128849	1375259	30927
Philadelphia RO	725	356	1391	12639	10
Pittsburgh RO	1356	419	2912	27515	207
July-21					
VBA/Field Overall	582172	186724	106530	1213818	30994
Philadelphia RO	2287	362	3823	52784	10
Pittsburgh RO	758	253	1222	10842	220
June-21					
VBA/Field Overall	581396	187912	115418	1086560	30,909
Philadelphia RO	2280	523	4743	48098	11
Pittsburgh RO	576	243	1100	9397	222
May-21					
VBA/Field Overall	520467	187068	129766	971022	31544
Philadelphia RO	1871	335	5854	43353	9
Pittsburgh RO	592	181	1229	8297	224
April-21					
VBA/Field Overall	467551	198329	103876	808504	30703
Philadelphia RO	2249	614	4965	35934	17
Pittsburgh RO	484	209	890	6743	227
March-21					
VBA/Field Overall	475363	205773	121278	685086	30,837
Philadelphia RO	2426	659	5,969	30,614	536

Pittsburgh RO	361	129	959	5,727	290
February-21					
VBA/Field Overall	478,401	209,603	114,058	563,724	32,045
Philadelphia RO	2,847	762	5,901	24,645	606
Pittsburgh RO	645	216	947	4,768	285
January-21					
VBA/Field Overall	476,026	210,238	117,149	449,547	33,940
Philadelphia RO	2,187	746	5,885	18,722	674
Pittsburgh RO	748	263	903	3,821	296
December-20					
VBA/Field Overall	475854	210100	93818	311996	37026
Philadelphia RO	10752	5058	2547	10001	736
Pittsburgh RO	5442	2455	831	2638	320
November-20					
VBA/Field Overall	481106	201493	113641	113641	42962
Philadelphia RO	2821	754	4161	4161	884
Pittsburgh RO	702	188	1077	1077	474
October-20					
VBA/Field Overall	473413	202735	85487	85487	44012
Philadelphia RO	2943	1148	3120	3120	893
Pittsburgh RO	711	228	784	784	480
10/5/2020 Beginning of FY 21					
VBA/Field Overall	475,290	203,837	9,753	9,753	47,023
Philadelphia RO	2,454	545	352	352	959
Pittsburgh RO	613	171	82	82	521

Note. The numbers were pulled from website
<https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/mmwr/>

AT6: True Historical Data from Field Operations and VBA Monday Morning Workload Reports that Contains VBA Overall, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh RO Claim Numbers for end of Fiscal Year 2019 overall totals to the end of Fiscal Year 2020

Fiscal Year 20 End of each Month/Year	Pending	Backlog >125 Days	Complete Month to Date	Complete Fiscal Year to Date	Legacy Appeals Pending
September-20					
VBA/Field Overall	463,222	204,302	91,561	1,374,997	49,100
Philadelphia RO	2,142	672	3,535	59,137	1,019
Pittsburgh RO	583	174	821	12,514	566
August-20					
VBA/Field Overall	452,420	202,207	93,390	1,278,227	57,967
Philadelphia RO	2,177	564	3,369	55,415	1,263
Pittsburgh RO	427	178	814	11,638	738
July-20					
VBA/Field Overall	428,849	197,166	69,303	1,163,327	69,773
Philadelphia RO	10,763	4,517	3,181	49,781	1,339
Pittsburgh RO	4,557	2,195	554	10,362	817
June-20					
VBA/Field Overall	407342	153603	73261	1086496	108245
Philadelphia RO	3,115	811	3,252	47,741	1,335
Pittsburgh RO	286	119	759	9,865	652
May-20					
VBA/Field Overall	386,060	115,338	77,273	1,013,229	119,345
Philadelphia RO	3,295	1,047	3,202	44,489	1,259
Pittsburgh RO	472	85	823	9,106	795
April-20					
VBA/Field Overall	366,858	80,187	107,044	918,754	141,924
Philadelphia RO	2,420	500	4,876	40,644	1,063
Pittsburgh RO	532	168	789	8,111	843
March-20					
VBA/Field Overall	409,415	75,311	142,316	797,588	148,417
Philadelphia RO	3,699	562	6,999	34,977	1,339
Pittsburgh RO	790	152	1,439	7,201	1,022
February-20					
VBA/Field Overall	426,040	71,481	128,553	655,272	156,822

Philadelphia RO	3,429	856	5,525	27,978	2,141
Pittsburgh RO	1,033	188	1,281	5,762	1,202
January-20					
VBA/Field Overall	403,559	69,622	106,920	493,810	173,383
Philadelphia RO	3,675	1,227	4,509	21,106	2,773
Pittsburgh RO	804	210	842	4,098	1,577
December-19					
VBA/Field Overall	383,874	67,724	121,415	375,706	183,895
Philadelphia RO	2,959	804	5,233	16,327	2,299
Pittsburgh RO	719	254	861	3,167	975
November-19					
VBA/Field Overall	385,350	66,972	122,126	254,291	191,064
Philadelphia RO	4,289	1,276	5,629	11,094	4,209
Pittsburgh RO	862	248	1,082	2,306	2,373
October-19					
VBA/Field Overall	367,498	73,019	4,642	136,807	199,172
Philadelphia RO	3,940	1,047	282	5,747	4,580
Pittsburgh RO	672	269	61	1,285	2,428
Beginning of FY20					
VBA/Field Overall	362,722	71,017	23,307	23,307	207,662
Philadelphia RO	3,625	1,042	960	960	4,988
Pittsburgh RO	736	165	212	212	2,945
End of FY2019 September 2019					
VBA/Field Overall	353,011	70,355	131,600	1,439,172	209,513
Philadelphia RO	3,942	1,287	5,596	74,061	5,141
Pittsburgh RO	650	176	1,367	12,597	3,392

Note. The numbers were pulled from website
<https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/mmwr/>

AT7: *The Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs website provided an updated list of Veteran Service Officers Contact Information as of January 2021 under the article [PensionPoaching \(pa.gov\)](http://pa.gov)*

City/Name	Organization	Phone
Allentown		
Tim Davis	Disabled American Veterans	(610) 969-2082 (By appointment)
Altoona		
Cindy Kinzey	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(814) 943-8164 EXT 8166
Dona Foy	Vietnam Veterans of America	(814) 943-8164 EXT 7085
Larry English	Vietnam Veterans of America	(814) 943-8164 EXT 7085
Tim Susengill	Vietnam Veterans of America	(814) 943-8164 EXT 7085
Lory Liebegott	Disabled American Veterans	(814) 943-8164 EXT 4848
Annville – Ft. Indiantown Gap		
Robert Forbes	AMVETS	(717) 865-9982
Michael Price	AMVETS	(507) 264-3979 Butler
Linda Eshenbaugh	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(878) 271-6976 (At VAMC)
Janice Nulph	Disabled American Veterans	(724) 287-4718 EXT 6977 (Mon., Tue., & 1st and 3rd Wed. at VAMC)
Camp Hill		
Bruce Kosack	Disabled American Veterans	(717) 761-4060 (Tue., Thur., and some Wed.)
David Gui	Disabled American Veterans	(717) 761-4060 (Mon., Tue., and Thur. by appointment) and (717) 761-4060 (2nd and 4th Fri. at CBOC)
Coatesville		
Miguel Rivera	Disabled American Veterans	(610) 384-7711 EXT 4912 (Thur. and Fri. at VAMC)
Harvey Greenawalt	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(267) 322-1688
Erie Amber Moore	American Legion	(814) 864-4240
Stephen Wagner	American Legion	(814) 864-4240
Bradley Baranski	American Legion	(814) 864-4240
Rachel Van Dyne	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(814) 835-8494
Julie Hutchison	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(814) 835-8494

Christine Bentley	Disabled American Veterans	(814) 860-2503 (At VAMC)
Harrisburg		
Anthony Jorgensen	American Legion	(877) 720-8387
Scott Brenner	American Legion	(877) 720-8387
Amber Heinbaugh	American Legion	(877) 720-8387
John Chiodi	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(717) 234-7927
Ronald Smith	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(717) 234-7927
Elizabeth Graybill	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(717) 234-7927
Emily LeVault	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(717) 234-7927
Linda Jayman	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(717) 234-7927
Audrey Bergstesser	Vietnam Veterans of America	(717) 635-9114
Johnstown		
Nancy Tavalsky	Vietnam Veterans of America	(814) 244-6125
Kittanning		
Sam Massouh	Disabled American Veterans	(717) 823-4321 (2nd & 4th Wed. at CBOC Armstrong County)
Lancaster		
Jonathan Hart	Disabled American Veterans	(717) 576-6674 (Wed. at CBOC)
Lebanon		
Matt Kelly	Disabled American Veterans	(717) 272-6621 EXT 4538 (Mon. & Fri. at VAMC)
Lock Haven		
David Bower	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(570) 748-5929
Cynthia Bardo	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(570) 748-5929
Karen Bombria	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(570) 748-5929
Mahanoy City		
Matt Kelly	Disabled American Veterans	(570) 773-3075 (1st Wed. at Representative Neil Goodman's by appointment)
Mount Carmel		
Matt Kelly	Disabled American Veterans	(717) 884-4315 (3rd Wed. at VFW) . Philadelphia
Robert Gardner	American Legion	(215) 381-3032
Joseph Gunkel	American Legion	(215) 381-3032
Kyle Rooney	American Legion	(215) 381-3032
Glenn King	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(215) 381-3123

John Foster	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(215) 381-3123
Trudy Strain	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(215) 381-3123
Michael Nicol	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(215) 381-3123
Evangeline Johnson	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(215) 381-3123
Catherine Priore	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(215) 381-3123
Gilda Reid	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(215) 381-3123
Tyrone Beach	Vietnam Veterans of America	(215) 238-8052
Andrew Brassington	Disabled American Veterans	(215) 381-3065 (At RO)
Pittsburgh		
Graham Wieland	American Legion	(412) 395-6230
Stephanie Wilson	American Legion	(412) 395-6230
Josh Conley	American Legion	(412) 395-6230
Victor Campeau, Jr.	American Legion	(412) 395-6230
Stephen Schott	American Legion	(412) 395-6230
Herman Moreno	AMVETS	(724) 384-6681
Milton James	AMVETS	(412) 395-6265
Joshua Corner	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(412) 395-6256
Elizabeth Salvador	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(412) 395-6256
Clarence Madigan	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(412) 395-6256
Kyra Price	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(412) 395-6256
Kevin Joos	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(412) 395-6256
Tim Owens	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(412) 395-6256
Pottsville		
Matt Kelly	Disabled American Veterans	(570) 622-5253 (Tue. at Career Link by appointment)
Reading		
Gary Letterhouse	Vietnam Veterans of America	(610) 781-0480
Elizabeth Graybill	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(484) 577-6898
Matt Kelly	Disabled American Veterans	(717) 884-4315 (Thur. at CBOC Walk-In)
Wilkes-Barre		
Brian Stolarski	American Legion	(570) 821-2526
Louis Ybarra	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(570) 821-2535
Lorie Ybarra	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(570) 821-2535
Joann Kane	Veterans of Foreign Wars	(570) 821-2535
Jo Ellen Grandelli -	Disabled American Veterans	(570) 821-2521 (Mon., Tue., Wed., and Thur. at VAMC)
York		

Jonathan Hart	Disabled American Veterans	(717) 576-6674 (1st & 3rd Wed. at CBOC) RO - Regional Office CBOC - Community Based Outpatient Clinic VAMC - VA Medical Center
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Note: The list came from the PA DMVA Website under the article [PensionPoaching \(pa.gov\)](#)

AT8: *List of Social Support Groups on Facebook that is willing to help Veterans with preparation, presentation, and prosecution of claim.*

Name of Group	Established	Private or Public	Total Members
VA Comp & Pension Claims*	2/25/2014	Private	93.5K+
Veteran 2 Veteran Info	5/19/2014	Private	680K
Veterans Help & Assistance	3/10/2013	Private	7.6K+
100% Service-Connected Disabled Veterans Support Group, "VETS HELPING VETS"	9/26/2013	Private	5.1K+
Veterans Claim Support	10/17/2015	Private	60K+
Veterans on Veterans Benefits		Private	7.4K+
Veterans Claims Assistance Group	3/28/2014	Private	39k+
Veterans VA Disability Claims, C&P Exams & Nexus letter Assistance	6/21/2019	Private	59K+
Veterans Military Compensation Benefits Assistance and More	5/9/2014	Private	22K+
100% Disabled Veterans Benefit Rights	8/10/2011	Private	5.8K+
VA Disability Chatter That Matters	1/7/2015	Private	42K+
VA Claims - Veterans helping Veterans	8/30/2017	Private	29K+
Veterans Recovery Group	2/8/2014	Public	3.4K+
Disabled veterans	8/6/2014	Public	877
Veterans Military Compensation Benefits Assistance and More	5/9/2014	Private	22K+
Disabled Veterans and Benefit Info	2/25/2013	Private	5.4K+
Veterans Claims - Assistance	3/28/2014	Private	42.1K+

VA Disability Service Officials (VA, VHA, VBA, VRE, SSDI, Veterans Claims	3/28/2018	Private	10.2K+
DVA Claims, Cards, and Payments Veterans Information Group	4/22/2014	Private	14K+
FFERS and VA Disability Claim Support	6/19/2020	Private	69
All Veteran Disability Claims	10/17/2021	Public	2
U.S. Military Female Veterans helping each other	4/16/2015	Private	2.6K+

Note. *The number one group to go to on Facebook to ask advice on what and how to file a claim.

AT9: *Veterans Benefits Administration Annual Benefit Reports from Fiscal Years 2003 to 2020 with Pennsylvania and VBA*

Fiscal Year	Estimated total Veteran Population in PA	Disability Compensation Recipients in PA	Veteran Pension in PA	VBA Overall Compensation Recipients	VBA Overall Pension Receipts
2020	791912	137513	9267	5527195	378670
2019	768094	135081	10201	5378239	409151
2018	793321	130242	11138	5166087	452912
2017	819185	125847	11797	4964209	478003
2016	894681	121167	12406	4755662	491685
2015	916638	116648	12917	4559083	501453
2014	939069	111696	13556	4331329	516270
2013	1035565	107317	13336	3743259	308116
2012	980529	103318	14567	3536802	314790
2011	933404	99489	14150	3354771	313665
2010	964132	97036	14095	3210261	313563
2009	995135	94917	14255	3069952	314245
2008	1025770	93939	14280	2952282	315763
2007	1088220	93045	14436	2844178	322875
2006	1088220	91592	14308	3582255	329856
2005	1117004	90704	14384	2636979	335787
2004	1145919	90128	14437	7284267	342903
2003	1180309	90253	14774	6787857	332077

Note: The table was rebuilt by using all fiscal year reports at VBA benefits section

<https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/abr/>

AT10: FY 2019 VA Disability Pension Recipients by Pennsylvania

**** Small cell counts have been suppressed to protect the privacy and identity of individual Veterans.**

State	Total	Male	Female								
VA	239,108	227,586	11,522								
Pennsylvania	10,269	9,786	483								
	Total: Disability Comp.			Service- connected Disability Rating			Age				
Counties				0% to 20%	30% to 40%	50% to 60%	70% to 90%	100%	17-44	45- 64	65 or older
Adams	1,240	1,093	147	363	231	185	312	149	290	397	551
Allegheny	12,222	11,156	1,066	4,193	2,241	1,732	2,441	1,615	2,892	3,423	5,907
Armstrong	800	752	48	252	129	125	166	128	147	193	460
Beaver	2,052	1,894	158	682	386	326	417	241	410	573	1,069
Bedford	707	663	44	217	119	126	156	89	140	179	388
Berks	3,587	3,281	306	1,015	569	521	928	554	912	1,030	1,645
Blair	2,048	1,891	157	539	327	325	532	325	460	573	1,014
Bradford	938	858	80	243	132	130	261	172	238	280	420
Bucks	5,153	4,749	404	1,390	813	684	1,397	869	1,208	1,347	2,597
Butler	2,115	1,968	147	704	391	299	415	306	477	630	1,007
Cambria	2,194	2,056	138	676	382	339	508	289	476	598	1,120
Cameron	103	**	**	25	24	17	26	11	23	24	56
Carbon	973	916	57	248	131	142	270	182	201	256	516
Centre	1,624	1,486	138	541	285	197	408	193	453	469	702
Chester	4,469	4,080	389	1,264	629	606	1,222	748	1,027	1,353	2,089

Clarion	469	440	29	146	79	85	104	55	108	136	225
Clearfield	1,188	1,111	77	348	217	165	264	194	245	347	596
Clinton	789	747	42	258	123	112	177	119	153	225	411
Columbia	806	744	62	221	139	106	199	141	187	222	397
Crawford	1,419	1,330	89	467	237	203	313	199	295	400	724
Cumberland	3,939	3,484	455	1,054	724	678	981	502	850	1,618	1,471
Dauphin	3,563	3,141	422	960	624	519	933	527	872	1,263	1,428
Delaware	4,617	4,185	432	1,132	746	660	1,270	809	1,032	1,416	2,169
Elk	436	403	33	113	88	63	104	68	93	115	228
Erie	3,931	3,629	302	1,268	602	592	886	583	951	1,078	1,902
Fayette	1,692	1,606	86	468	289	267	391	277	293	436	963
Forest	153	143	10	45	29	28	31	20	15	44	94
Franklin	2,210	2,012	198	625	432	358	529	266	517	775	917
Fulton	147	**	**	41	24	21	38	23	33	38	76
Greene	468	430	38	130	90	64	116	68	96	127	245
Huntingdon	686	629	57	198	128	112	163	85	133	207	346
Indiana	1,049	991	58	300	182	177	228	162	250	248	551
Jefferson	607	559	48	205	112	80	134	76	155	163	289
Juniata	195	179	16	53	29	32	51	30	49	45	101
Lackawanna	2,820	2,607	213	727	376	395	811	511	670	705	1,445
Lancaster	4,421	3,980	441	1,223	760	633	1,096	709	1,196	1,231	1,994
Lawrence	1,006	933	73	317	180	146	208	155	222	302	482
Lebanon	2,032	1,831	201	515	324	289	566	338	422	736	874
Lehigh	2,934	2,669	265	800	436	426	757	515	751	829	1,354
Luzerne	4,701	4,366	335	1,300	646	677	1,248	830	980	1,289	2,432
Lycoming	1,664	1,520	144	484	246	262	430	242	436	474	754
Mckean	748	696	52	228	117	103	191	109	128	205	415
Mercer	1,307	1,201	106	370	236	173	294	234	299	377	631

Mifflin	514	476	38	126	72	84	155	77	108	162	244
Monroe	2,102	1,921	181	497	287	265	582	471	516	604	982
Montgomery	6,333	5,751	582	1,702	1,030	880	1,697	1,024	1,582	1,747	3,004
Montour	236	220	16	67	31	39	67	32	74	69	93
Northampton	2,581	2,396	185	748	374	339	686	434	605	688	1,288
Northumberland	1,239	1,147	92	351	196	166	309	217	261	372	606
Perry	615	561	54	177	106	81	157	94	148	212	255
Philadelphia	14,389	12,940	1,449	3,141	1,911	1,990	4,491	2,856	3,182	4,900	6,306
Pike	902	844	58	232	140	110	249	171	185	256	461
Potter	363	338	25	128	47	37	92	59	65	111	187
Schuylkill	1,973	1,823	150	512	314	277	531	339	414	524	1,035
Snyder	347	319	28	105	50	57	78	57	79	94	174
Somerset	1,040	975	65	293	193	182	236	136	210	279	551
Sullivan	92	**	**	31	14	11	22	14	16	24	52
Susquehanna	544	508	36	147	74	86	142	95	113	134	297
Tioga	744	698	46	189	112	121	217	105	165	239	340
Union	370	346	24	100	50	66	93	61	97	113	160
Venango	835	783	52	263	131	131	192	118	167	254	414
Warren	830	781	49	337	128	99	158	108	157	225	448
Washington	2,326	2,182	144	736	464	362	483	281	488	587	1,251
Wayne	838	788	50	242	91	107	233	165	145	191	502
Westmoreland	4,023	3,726	297	1,357	804	610	785	467	833	1,052	2,138
Wyoming	363	336	27	91	46	54	103	69	71	81	211
York	5,106	4,603	503	1,409	889	798	1,293	717	1,377	1,716	2,013

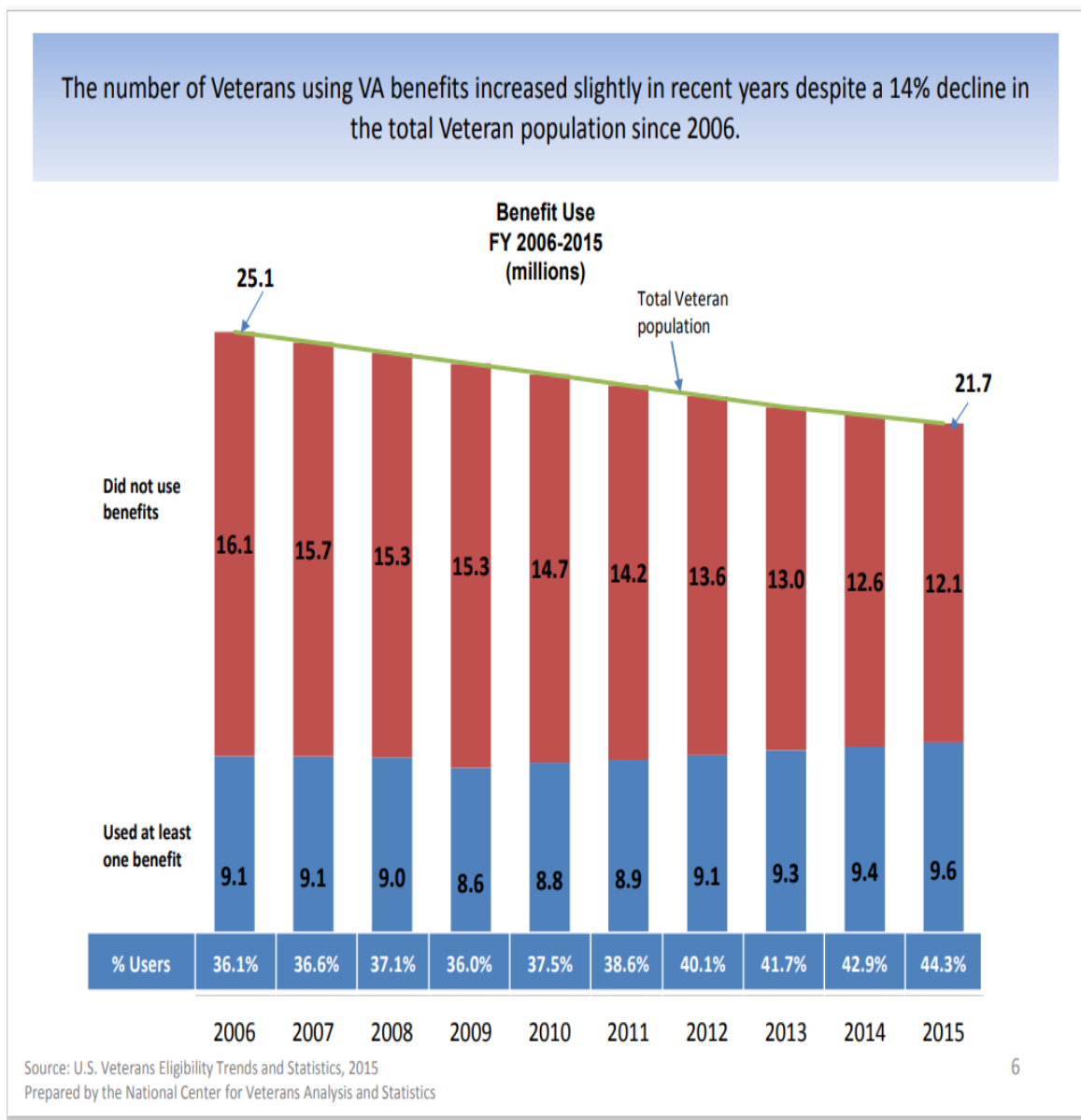
Note: VA Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Data Governance and Analytics, United States Veterans Eligibility Trends and Statistics (USVETS) 2019. The table was developed from National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, www.va.gov/vetdata. This is estimate numbers for each county in the state of Pennsylvania

AT11: Below is the exact sample spreadsheet that was used to transcript each question that was asked by researcher to interviewee.

<i>Demographics</i>
Birth Year
Race
Age
Gender
Education Level
Martial Status
Service Serve
Year Serve
Year Separate
Did you do any wars
Wars Serve In
Service-Connected Disability Claim (The answers will be different based on hard copy submission and electronic submission)
RQ4: Did you submit your service-connectivity claim immediately after you go out? Yes or No
RQ4A: If yes or no, what year did you submit?
RQ4B: How long did it take you to decide that you need to submit your disability claim?
RQ5A: Would you please provide me your reason why you decided not to submit a claim after you completed your service or later in years?
RQ5B: Did the backlog of claims discourage you from filing? Yes or No If
RQ5C: Did you feel it was too hard to fill out the paper forms before it went to
RQ5D: If yes, would you please explain to me what issues you had?
RQ5E: Did you reach out to any veteran's advocacy groups for help to apply? Yes or No
RQ5F: Which group?
RQ5G: Why not?
RQ5H: Has the process of obtaining veterans' benefits got harder or more comfortable
RQ5I: Would you explain why harder?
The outcome results from disability claim
RQ6: How long did it take to receive an answer from the Veteran Area Regional Office of Department of Veterans' Affairs?
RQ7: Were you satisfied with your results? Yes or No
RQ8: If you were not satisfied with your rate percentage, did you appeal all or partial? Yes or No
RQ8A: Did you hesitate at all on your appeal because of the backlog that Board of Appeals? Yes or No
RQ9: What year did you submit your appeal
RQ10: Or are you still waiting for an answer? Yes or No, N/A
RQ11: How long did it take to get an answer back from the Board of Appeals?
RQ12: Or are you still waiting for an answer? Yes or No, N/A
RQ13: Were you satisfied with your appeal response? Yes or No, N/A

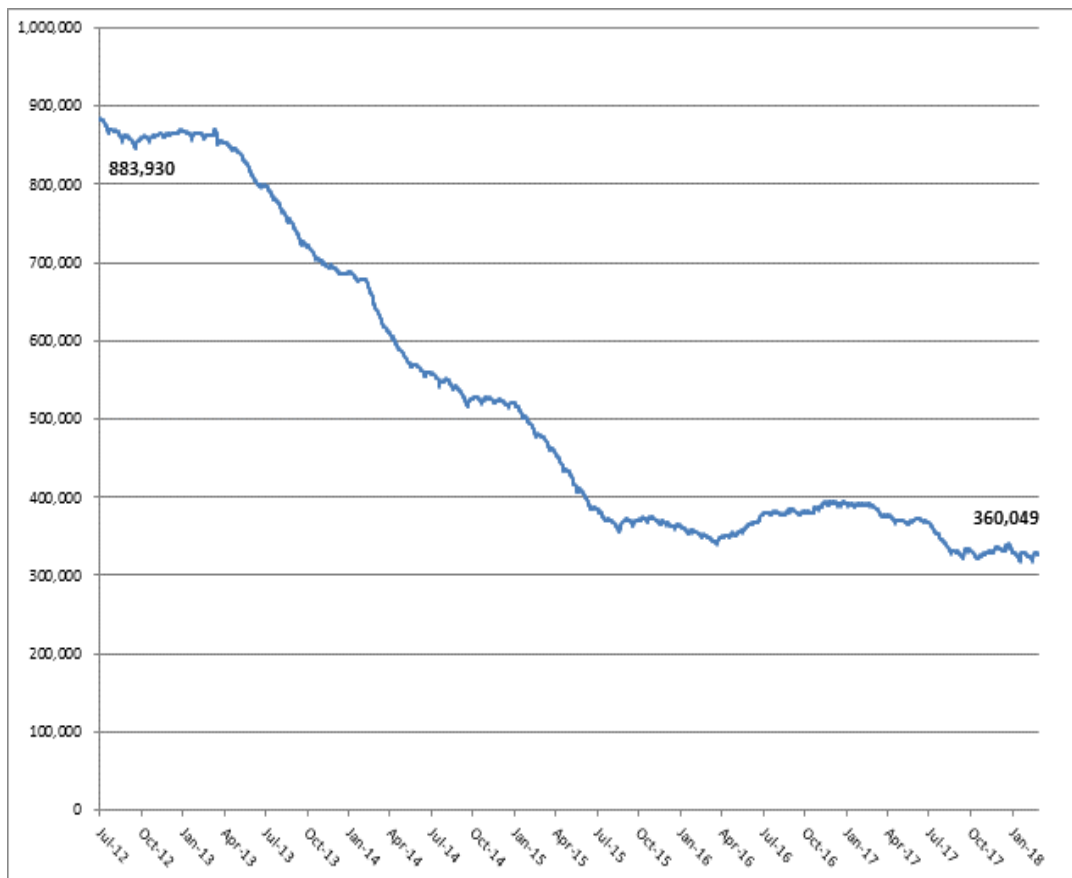
RQ14: Did you use the newest Appeal Modernization Act of 2019 that deals with three phases? Yes or No,
RQ15: If yes, did you receive a quick response within three months? Yes or No, N/A
RQ16: After all the appeals, what rate percentage are you with a service-connectivity disability?
Next Section deals with Veterans Advocacy Support, Pennsylvania of Military and Veterans Affairs, and Veterans Benefit Administration
RQ17: Do you feel we need better communication or interaction with a veteran on benefits and other outside needs for jobs, etc? Yes or No
RQ17A: If yes, would you please explain?
RQ18: Do you keep in contact with your VSO with updated changes to your benefits? Yes or No
RQ18A: Are you a member of veteran advocacy groups? Yes or No
RQ19: Have you searched for additional benefits with the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs: Yes or No
RQ19A: If no, why not?
RQ20: Did you sign up for DMVA Registry to receive news stories? Yes or No. If not, you should sign up to receive updated news and functions that are happening in PA.
RQ21: Do you review the Department of Veterans Affairs website? Yes or No
RQ22: How many times do you review the Department of Veterans Affairs website?
RQ23: What barriers do U.S. veterans perceive with processing their claims on the Department of Veterans Affairs www.va.gov website?
RQ24: Do you use any of the VA.Gov and MyHealtheVet websites to keep track of your health record? Yes or No
RQ25: Sometime in February 2020, the VA/Gov (Department of Veterans Affairs) added another website; did it confuse you more since they still utilize the old webpage for eBenefits portal? Yes or No
RQ25A: If yes, would you please explain?
RQ26: If not, would you like to sign up on VA.Gov and MyHealtheVet today? Yes or No

AB1: Unique Veteran Users Profile FY 2015

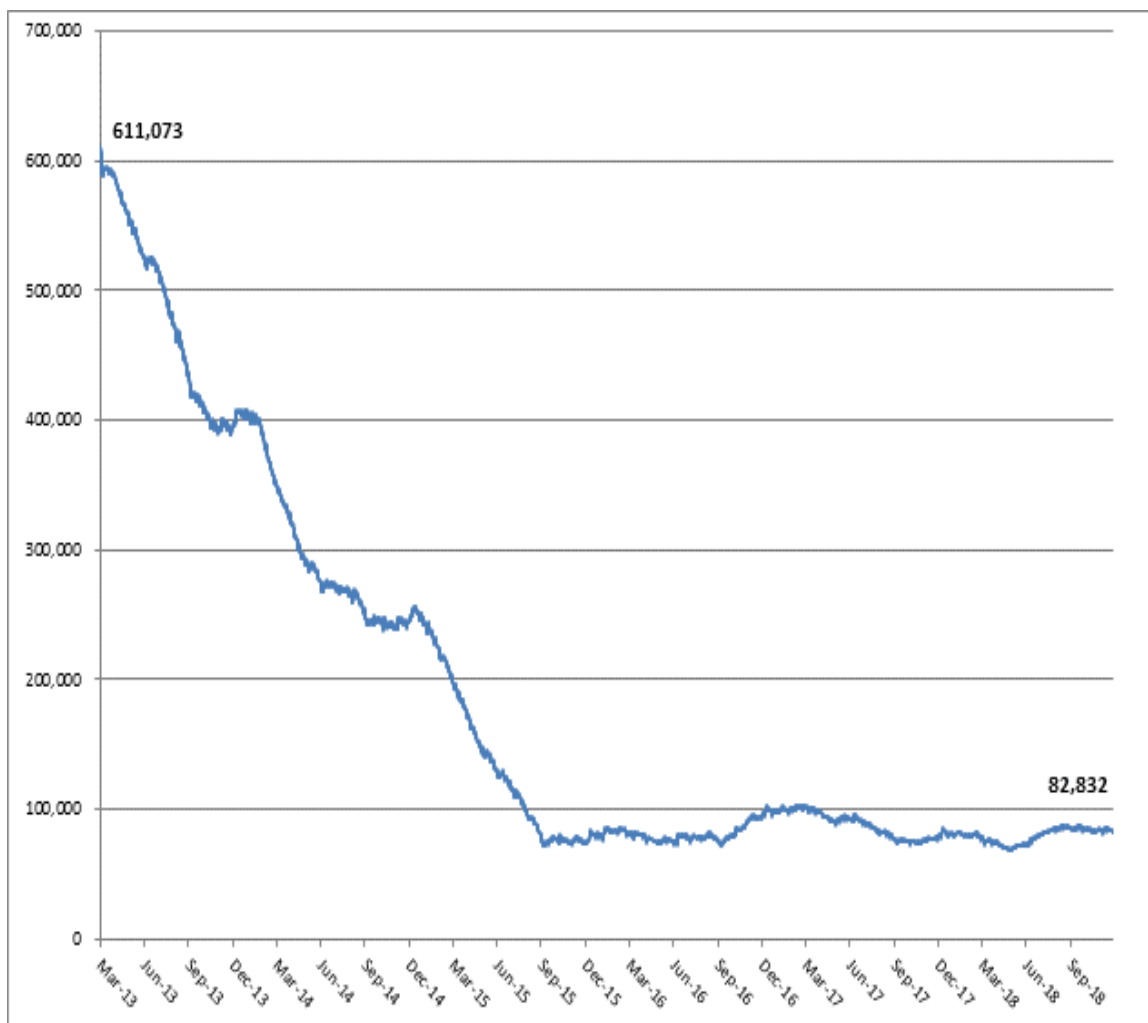


Note: The Benefit Use for FY 2006-2015 was prepared in December 2016 by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. As you can see the difference of Veteran users and non-users from 2006 to 2015 (NCVAS, 2016).

AB2: *Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration Division:
Claims Inventory from July 2012 to January 2018*



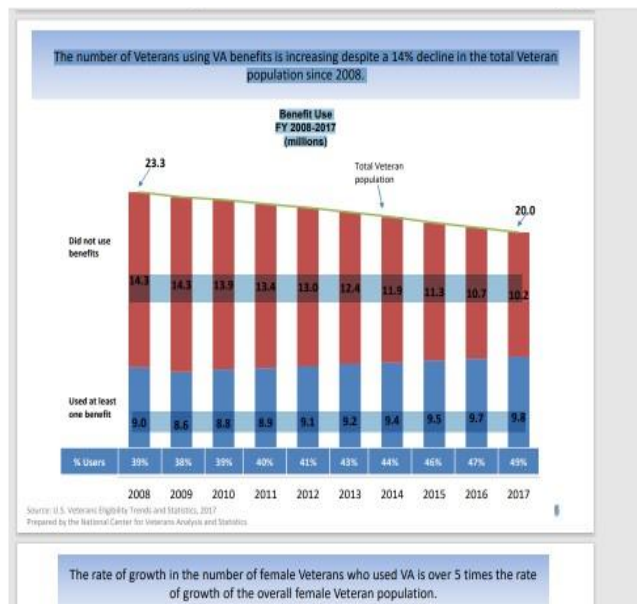
Note: Based on Disability Report on the VBA website, the picture showed the date as of March 2013 to September 2018. VA's claims backlog includes disability compensation and pension claims received by VA that require a rating decision. Once VA decides a claim, it's no longer in the claims inventory. https://www.benefits.va.gov/reports/mmwr_va_claims_backlog.asp

AB3: *Claims Backlog from March 2013 to September 2018*

Note. Based on Disability Report on the VBA website, the picture showed the date as of March 2013 to September 2018. VA's claims backlog includes disability compensation and pension claims received by VA that require a rating decision. Once VA decides a claim, it is no longer in the claims inventory.

https://www.benefits.va.gov/reports/mmwr_va_claims_backlog.asp

AB4: *The number of Veterans using VA benefits is increasing despite a 14% decline in the total Veterans population since 2008. Benefit Uses from FY 2008 to FY 2017*

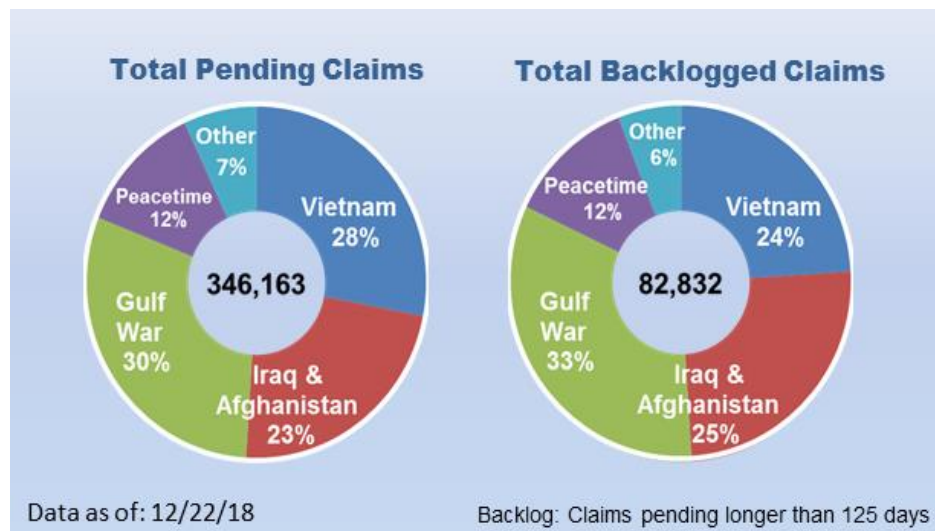


AB5: *Picture of hard copy disability claims on top of filing cabinets at Field Offices (Regional Offices)*



AB6: Breakdown from NCVAS statistics for claims by military era. This is updated every Monday after the Monday Morning Workload Report is released to the public.

Characteristics of Claims



Claims by Era

Total Pending Claims

- Post-9/11 (Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts) claims make up 23% of the total inventory.
- Gulf War (1990s conflict) claims makeup 30% of the total inventory.
- Peacetime (the end of Vietnam to the Gulf War) claims they make up 12% of the total inventory.
- Vietnam War claims make up 28% of the total inventory.
- Korean War claims make up 4.0% of the total inventory.
- World War II claims make up 2.3% of the total inventory.
- Other era claims make up 0.4% of the total inventory.

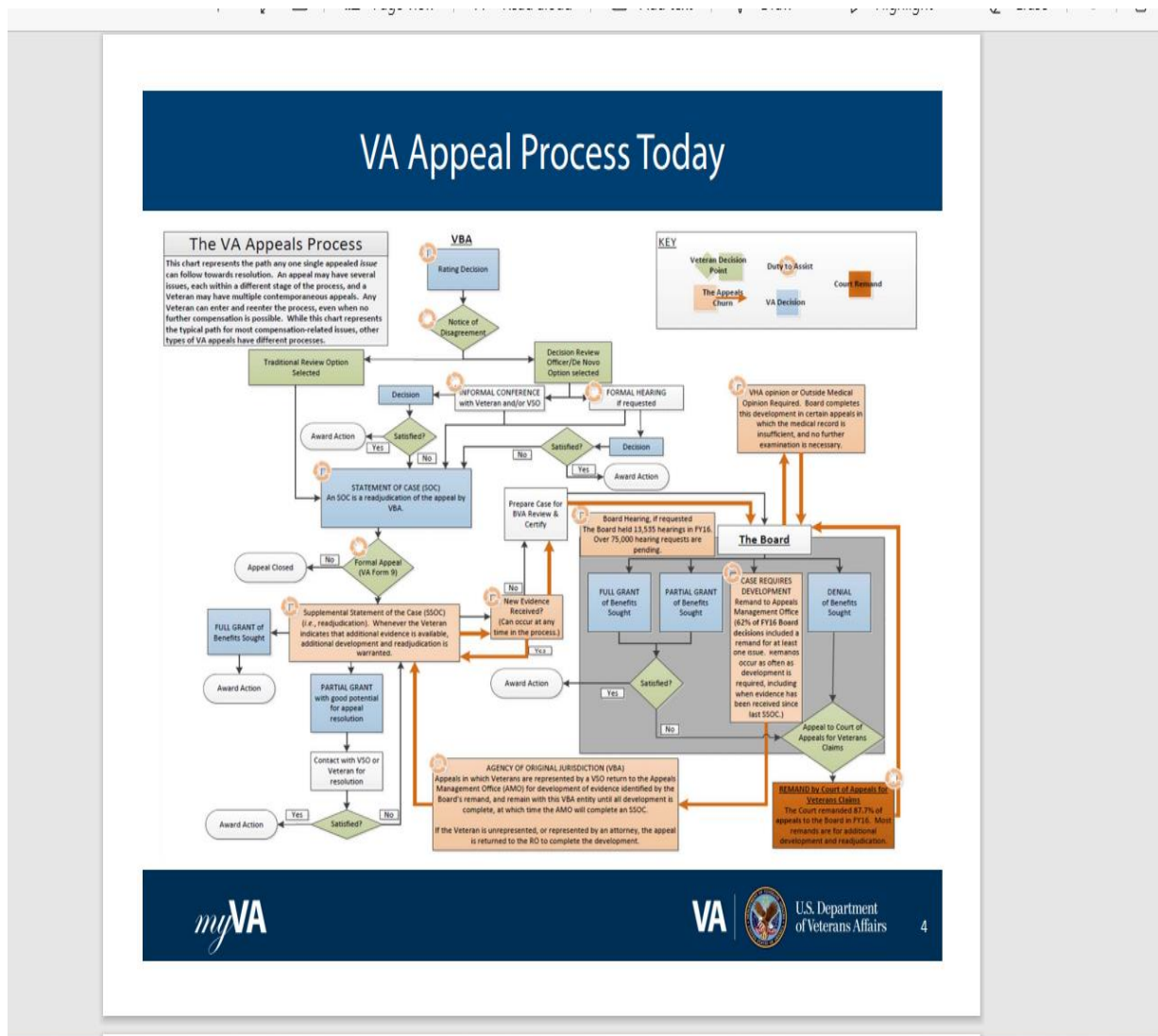
Total Backlogged Claims

- Post-9/11 (Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts) claims make up 25% of the backlog.
- Gulf War (1990s conflict) claims makeup 33% of the backlog.
- Peacetime (the end of Vietnam to the Gulf War) claims they make up 12% of the backlog.
- Vietnam War claims make up 24% of the backlog.
- Korean War claims make up 4.3% of the backlog.
- World War II claims make up 2.1% of the backlog.
- Other era claims make up less than 0.2% of the backlog.

Formula and breakdown are from the Veterans Benefits Administration Reports as of 22 December 2018.

https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/characteristics_of_claims.asp

AB7: VA Appeal Process before New Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modification Act of 2017 VA Appeal Process Today



Note: This figure was pull from the VA.Gov website under the Board of Veterans Appeals (<https://bva.va.gov>)

AB8: *Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Administration Benefit Division:
Appeals Backlog before RAMP was put in place by President of the United States in
February 2020*

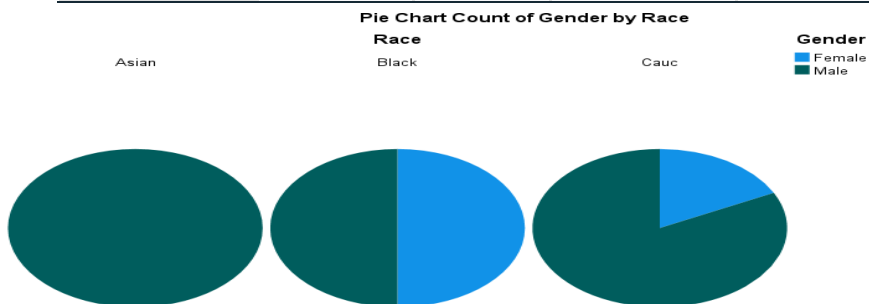


Note: This graph came from Disabled American Veterans website that shows how many outstanding appeals from FY2001 with 100,000 that increases every fiscal year for 16 years. As of FY17, the VBA BOA had reached up to above 450,000 appeal claims that are still waiting for review and decision. (<https://www.dav.org/wp-content/uploads/AppealsModernizationandRAMP.pdf>) (Plan to fix during the process of a dissertation)

AB11: *Demographic Profile of Military Veterans that participate in the study of “The Damages of Outstanding Veterans Disability Compensation Claims”*

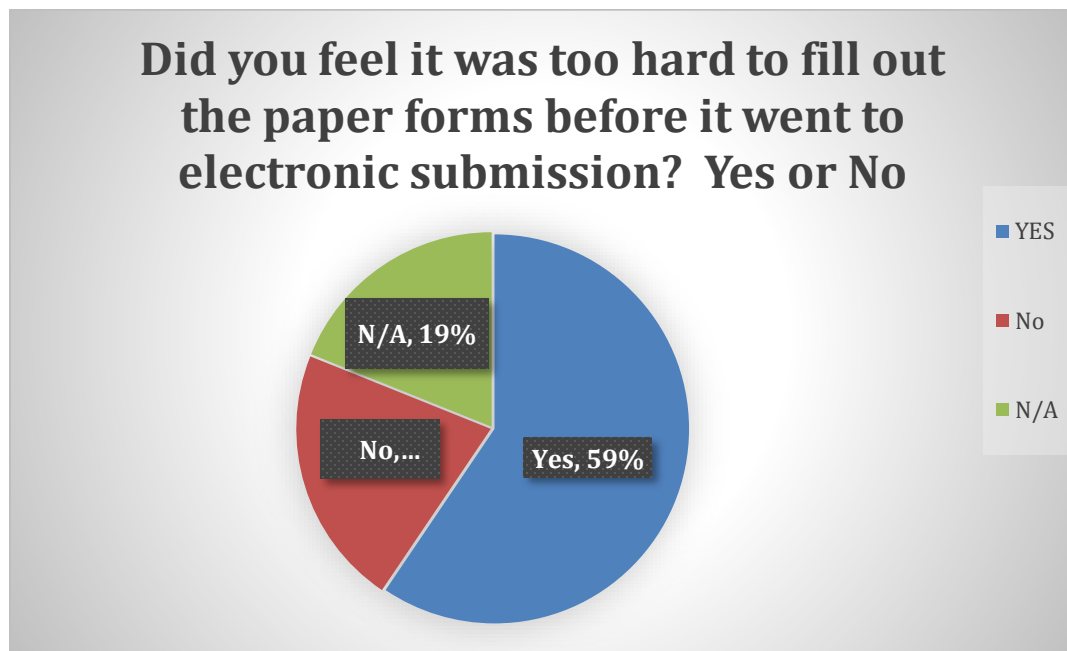
Race

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1874	98.1	98.1	98.1
Asian	1	.1	.1	98.1
Black	2	.1	.1	98.2
Cauc	34	1.8	1.8	100.0
Total	1911	100.0	100.0	

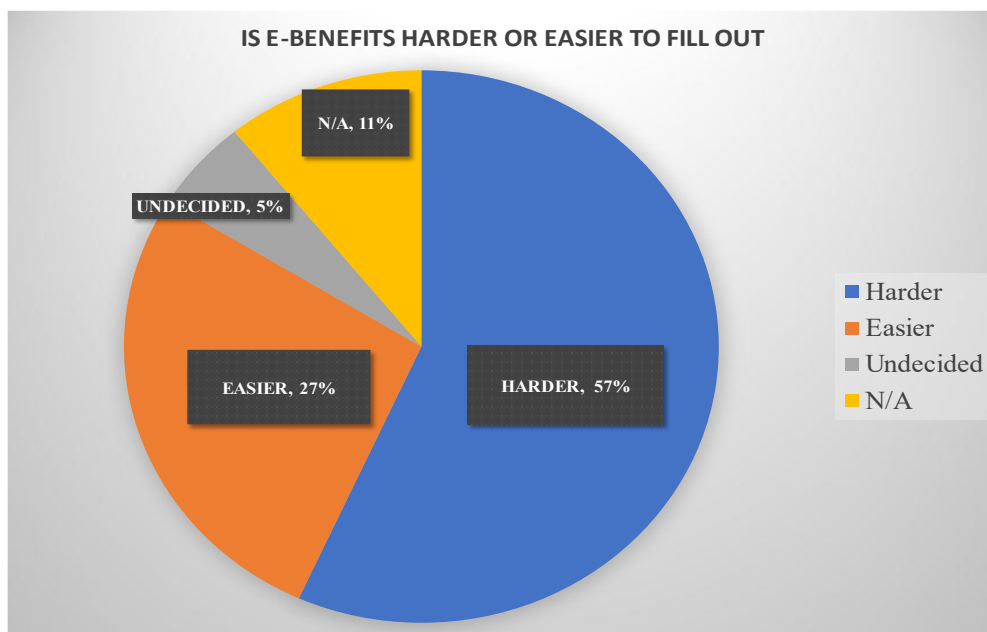


As seen on Figure 11, the graph showed the birth years of a mid to late Baby Boomer, Generation X and Y, and Millennial eras based on the IHMC CmapTools (2014) to set the stage for the scales and parameters.

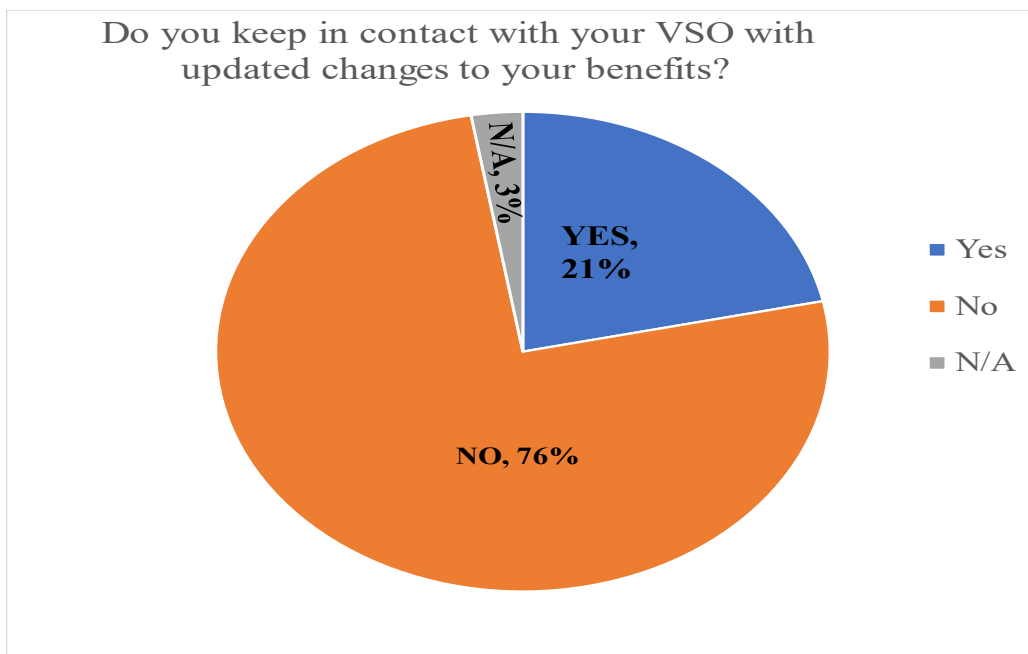
AB12: Based on question 5C: Did you feel it was too hard to fill out the paper forms before it went to electronic submission?



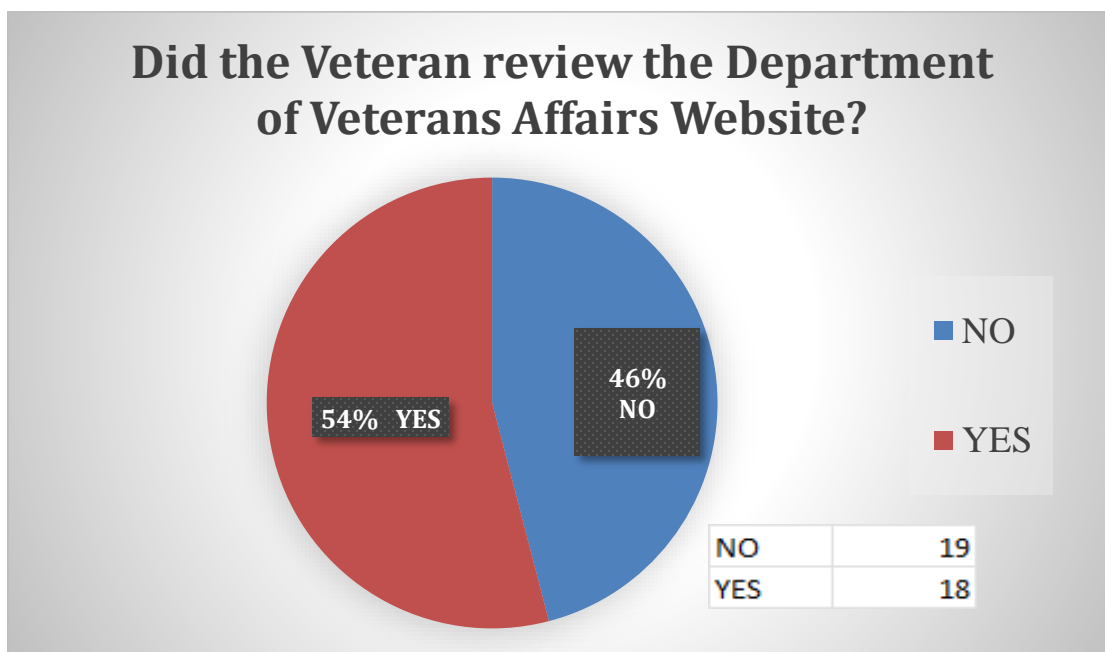
AB13: Was the process harder or easier to process with the eBenefits portal?



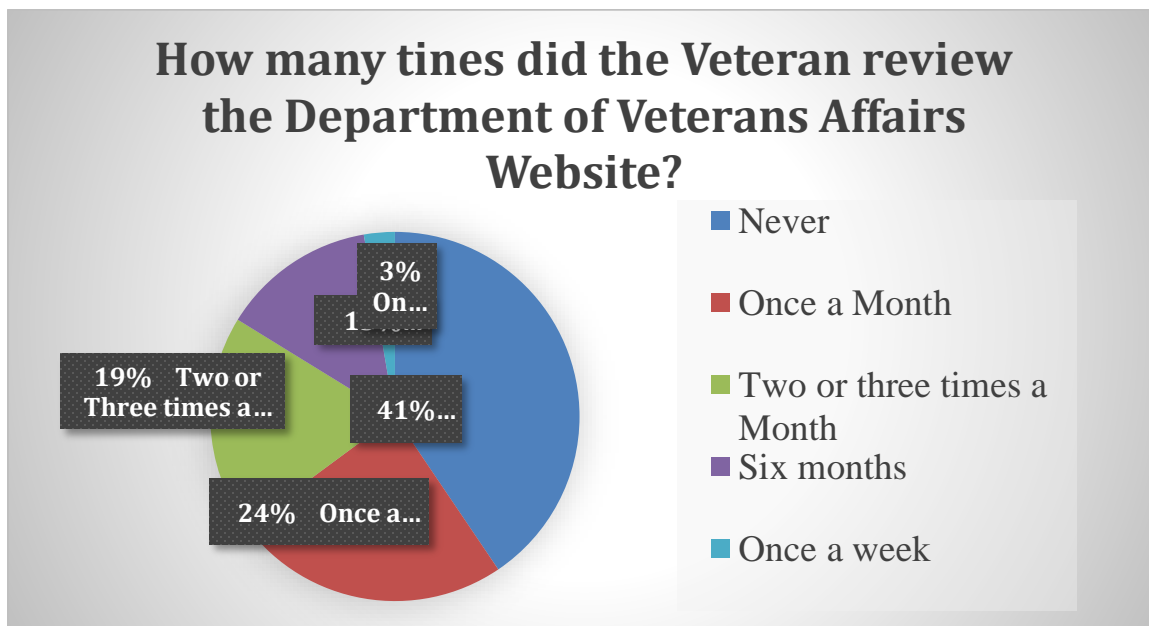
AB14: Do you keep in contact with your VSO with updated changes to your benefits?



AB15: Do you review the Department of Veterans' Affairs website? Yes or No. With a follow-up of how many times do you review



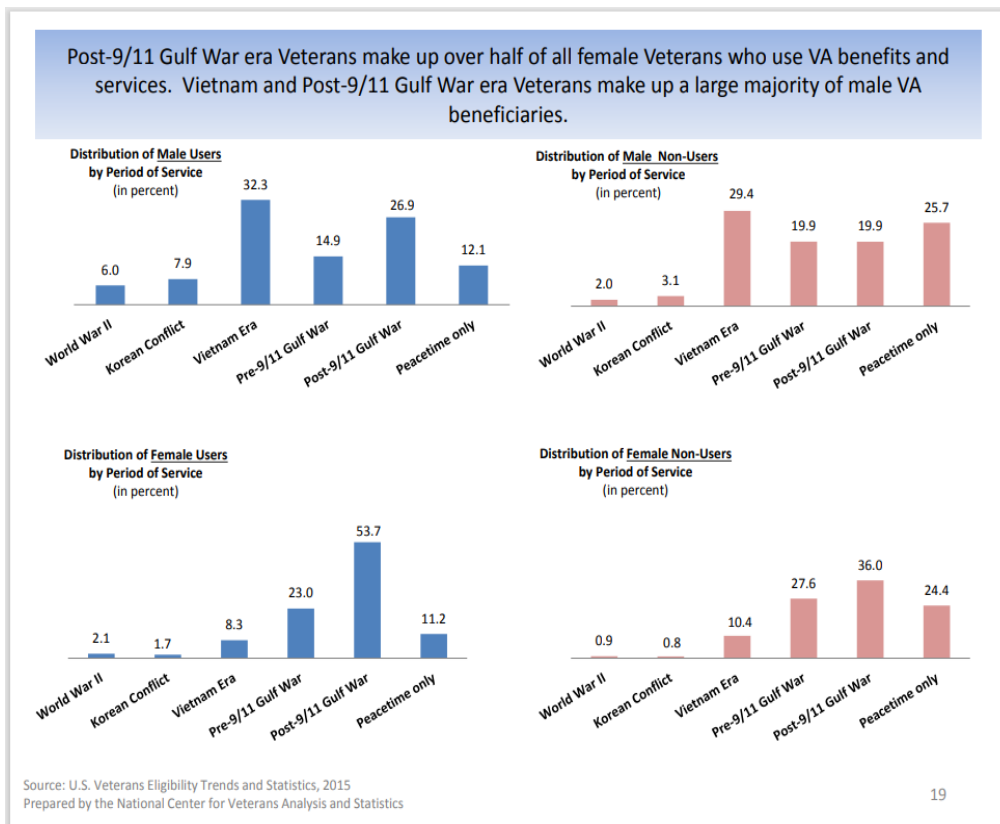
Second pie graph is the following question to support the yes or no on the Department of Veterans' Affairs website.



Note: The percent is based on 37 military veterans that participated in the study and each yes or no response was verbatim by each veteran. It was 15 for never, 9 for once a month, 7 for two or three times a month, 5 was for six months, and 1 for once a week.

AB16

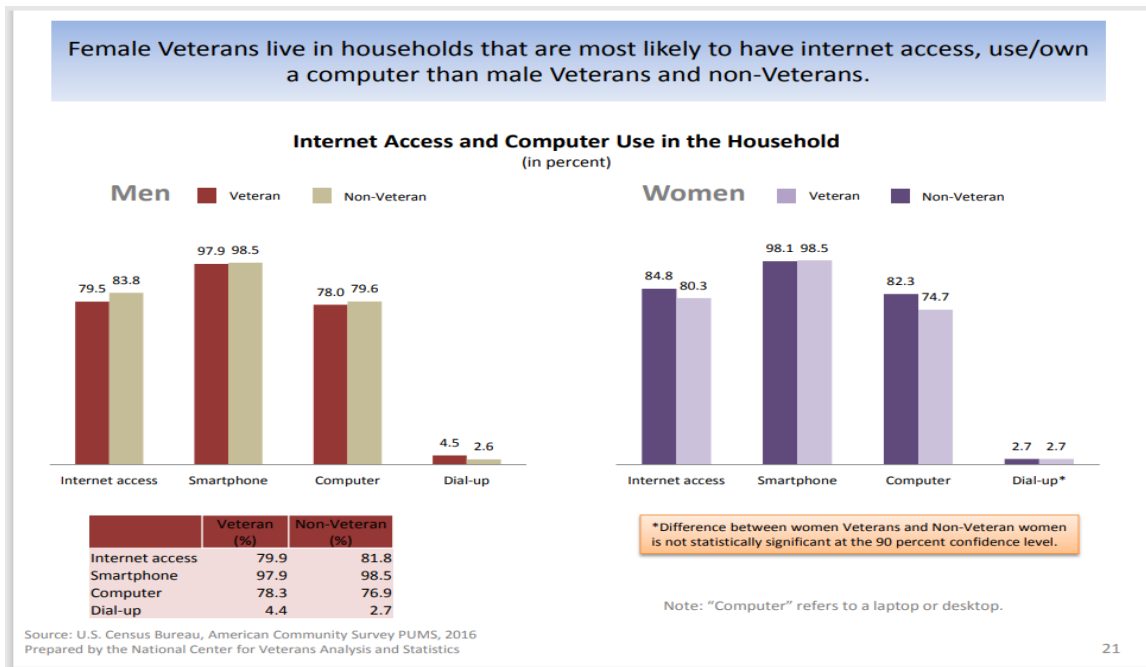
Comparison between military veterans (male/female) users and the non-users from Vietnam to Post-9/11 Gulf War with VA benefit, services, and beneficiaries



Note: The slide 19 came from the Comparison of VA Users and Non-Users FY 2016. The source is the U.S. Veterans Eligibility Trends and Statistics, 2016 and VetPop2016. That was prepared by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics

AB17

Internet Access and Computer Use in the Household



Note: The graph belongs to Profile of Veterans: 2016 of the Data from the American Community Survey that was prepared by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics February 2018 under https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/Profile_of_Veterans_2016.pdf

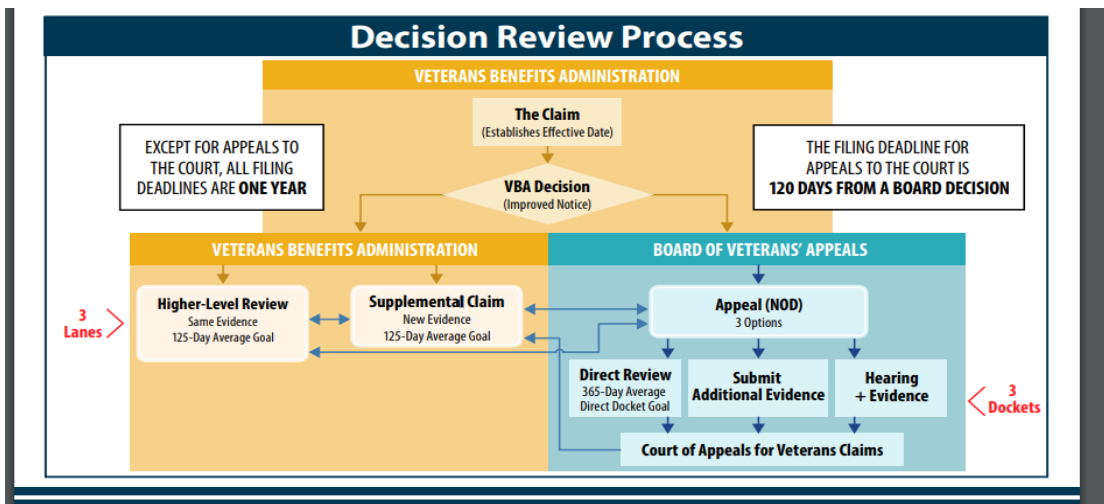
AB18: AccessVA Home

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <https://eauth.va.gov/accessva/#forVeterans>. The page has a blue header with navigation links: [AccessVA Home](#) | [About AccessVA](#) | [Contact Us](#). Below the header, a white section contains the text: "Welcome to AccessVA. A solution for accessing VA's online services. Click your category to see available applications you can sign in with:". A blue bar below this text reads "I am a Veteran". Underneath, a grid of 16 service icons is displayed, including: Direct Upload (Veterans Claims Intake Program), eSCREENING, Life Insurance Online Policy Access, MILLION VETERAN PROGRAM, My healthvet, QuickSubmit (Benefits Upload Service), ROES (Remote Order Entry System), Apply for Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance, STIPENDS4VETS (For Veteran Athletes), VIP (VENDOR INFORMATION PAGES), VIC (ChooseVA), Veteran Patient Statement, Veteran Travel Claim Entry, VHIC (Veteran Health Identification Card), and VA-VMC (VIRTUAL MEDICAL CENTER). A blue bar at the bottom of the grid reads "I am a Family Member".

Note: The screen shows multiple programs that is being place under one login location under the VA.gov website www.va.gov.

AB19: A better understanding of the VA RAMP Appeal Process – Decision Review

Process is two separate charts



VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs | **VA Appeals Modernization**

Which Review Lane is Right For You?

Supplemental Claim Lane (decisions within 125 days on average)	Higher-Level Review Lane (decisions within 125 days on average)	Appeal to the Board Lane
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Select this option if you have additional evidence that is new and relevant to support your benefit claim. VA will assist you in gathering new and relevant evidence to support your claim. VA's review will include any new and relevant evidence submitted since we last decided your claim. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A higher-level review consists of an entirely new review of your claim by a more experienced claims adjudicator. Select this option if you have no additional evidence to submit in support of your claim, but you believe that there was an error in the initial decision. VA cannot assist you in gathering new evidence, but if the higher-level reviewer discovers an error in VA's duty to assist in the prior decision your claim will return to decision makers to correct the error. You or your representative can request an optional, one-time, informal telephone conference with the higher-level reviewer to identify specific errors in the case, although this may cause a delay in the processing of your higher-level review. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you choose the Board, select one of the three following options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Direct Review You do not want to submit additional evidence or have a hearing. Evidence Submission You choose to submit additional evidence without a hearing. You will have 90 days from your Notice of Disagreement (NOD) to submit any additional evidence. Hearing You choose to submit additional evidence and have a hearing with a Veterans Law Judge. You will be scheduled for a Board hearing and may submit evidence at the hearing or within the 90 day window following the scheduled hearing.

What If You Still Disagree with a Decision?

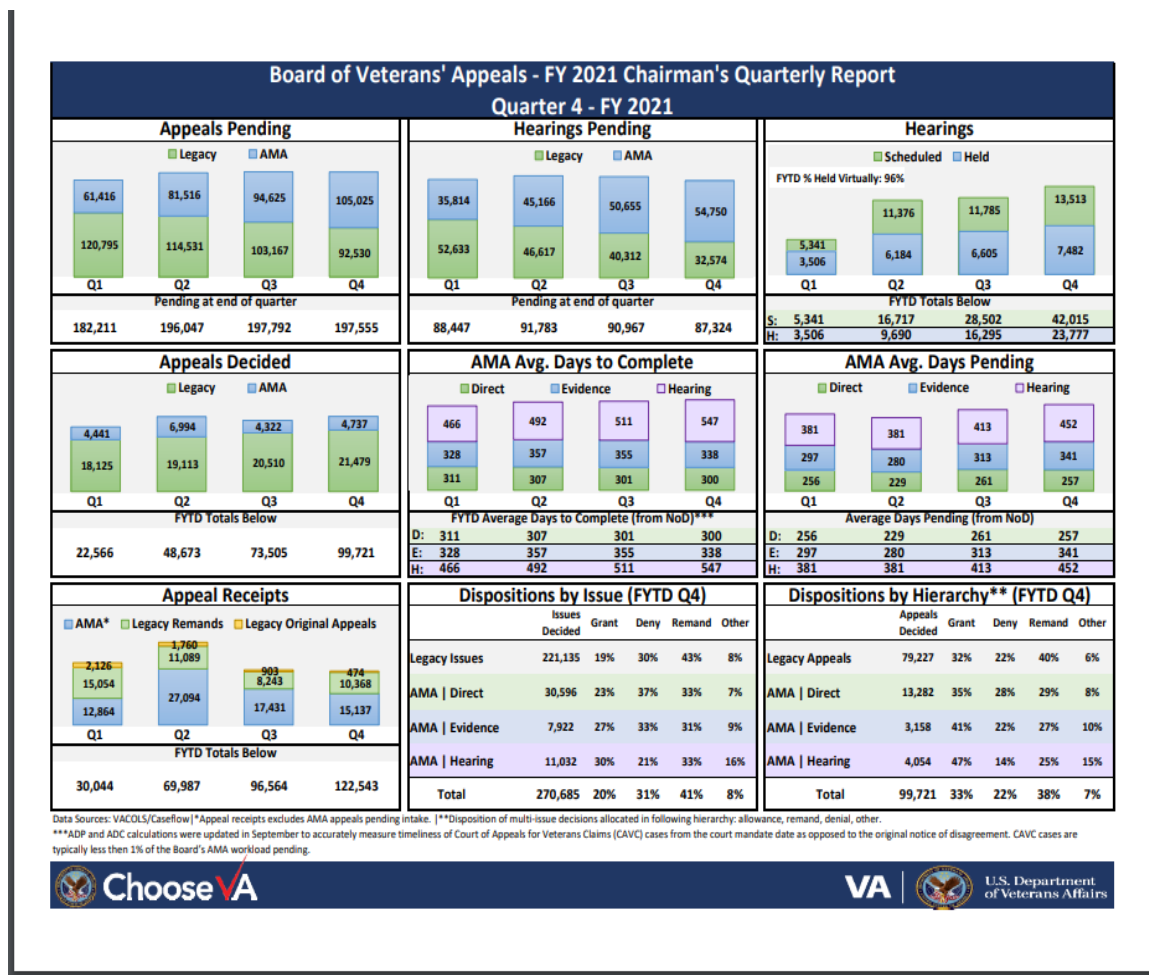
If you disagree with a decision from the Supplemental Claim Lane, you may choose to resubmit the claim as another supplemental claim with new evidence, as a higher-level review or as an appeal to the Board of Veterans' Appeals.

If you disagree with a decision from the Higher-Level Review Lane, you may choose to resubmit the claim as a supplemental claim or as an appeal to the Board of Veterans' Appeals.

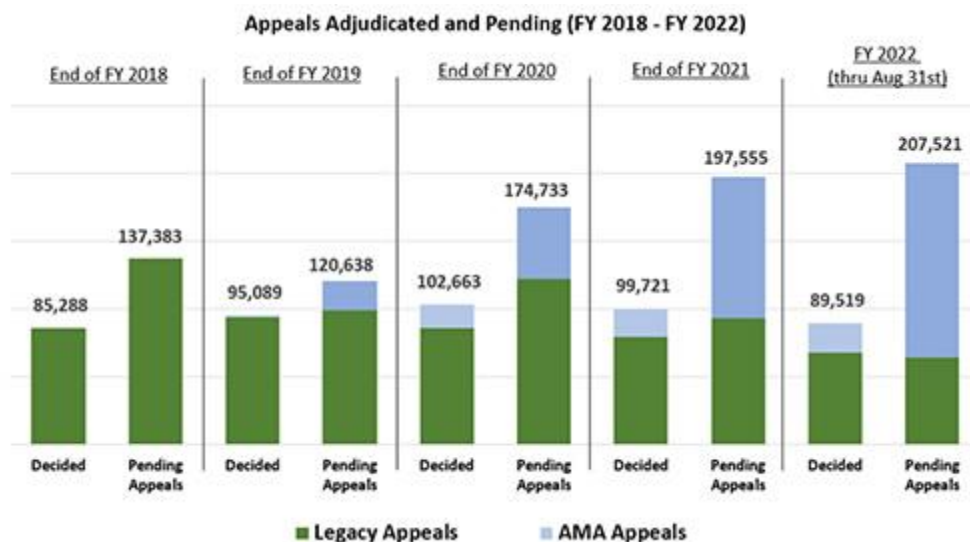
If you disagree with a Board decision you may either resubmit as a supplemental claim or through an appeal to the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims.

Note: A better understanding of VA Appeal Process before RAMP comes into play in February 2019, go to <https://www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets/appeals/Appeals-Factsheet.pdf>

AB20: Board of Veterans' Appeals – FY 2021 Chairman's Quarterly Report



Note: This graph was located at the Board of Veteran Appeals https://www.bva.va.gov/docs/Quarterly_Reports/Board_Quarterly_Chairmans_Reports_FY2021_4Q_Internal.pdf

AB21 Appeals Adjudicated and Pending (FY 2018 – FY 2022)

Note: This graph chart is a [Board of Veterans' Appeals \(va.gov\) https://bva.va.gov](https://bva.va.gov)

AB22

Conditions from herbicides (Agent Orange) for veterans to use for filing disability claims

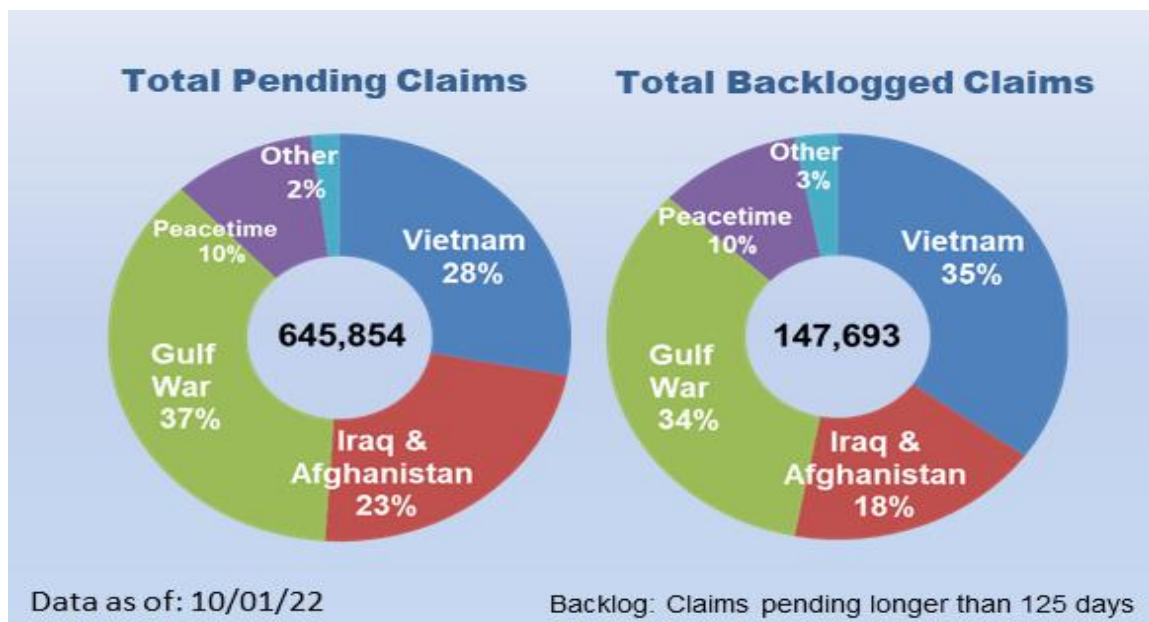
- AL amyloidosis
- Chloracne or other acne-form disease consistent with chloracne
- Type II diabetes
- Hodgkin's lymphoma
- Ischemic heart disease
- All chronic B-cell leukemias
- Multiple myeloma
- Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
- Parkinson's disease
- Early-onset peripheral neuropathy
- Porphyria cutanea tarda (skin disorder)
- Prostate cancer
- Respiratory cancers (cancer of the lung, bronchus, larynx, or trachea)
- Soft-tissue sarcoma (other than osteosarcoma, chondrosarcoma, Kaposi's sarcoma, or mesothelioma)

Note. The conditions came from the Blue Water Act of 2019 in two areas

(Congress.gov and VBA Vantage article).

AB23 Veterans Benefits Administration Reports for Total Pending and Backlogged Claims

Veterans Benefits Administration Reports Characteristics of Claims



Claims by Era

Total Pending Claims

- Post-9/11 (Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts) claims make up 23% of the total inventory.
- Gulf War (1990s conflict) claims make up 37% of the total inventory.
- Peacetime (the end of Vietnam to the Gulf War) claims makes up 10% of the total inventory.
- Vietnam War claims make up 28% of the total inventory.
- Other era claims make up 2% of the total inventory.

Total Backlogged Claims

- Post-9/11 (Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts) claims make up 18% of the backlog.
- Gulf War (1990s conflict) claims make up 34% of the backlog.
- Peacetime (the end of Vietnam to the Gulf War) claims makes up 10% of the backlog.
- Vietnam War claims make up 35% of the backlog.

- Other era claims make up less than 3% of the backlog.

Original vs. Supplemental Claims

The current inventory of compensation claims contains two types of claims:

- Original claims, which are those submitted by Veterans of all eras who are claiming disability compensation or pension from VBA for the first time.
- Supplemental claims, which are those submitted by Veterans of all eras who have previously filed for disability compensation or pension with VBA. For example, where a Veteran's condition has worsened, they may file for review to see if they are entitled to greater compensation, and supplemental claims include Veterans already on the rolls who claim a new condition.

Contentions and Claims Complexity

- The number of claims is magnified by growing complexity. There has been a 200 percent increase over the last 10 years in original claims containing eight or more specific medical issues, or contentions.
- The number of individual disabilities claimed has doubled in just the last five years.

More About Original and Supplemental Claims in Inventory

- 63% of pending claims are supplemental and 37% are original.
- 81% of Veterans filing supplemental claims are receiving some level of monetary benefit from VBA.
- 10% of Veterans filing supplemental claims already have a 100% disability rating (i.e., they receive \$2,800 or more per month) or qualify for Individual Unemployability and are compensated at the 100% disabled rate.
- 48% of Veterans filing supplemental claims are already rated at 50% disability or higher.
- 34% of supplemental claims are from Vietnam-era Veterans and 26% are from Veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts.

Note: Veterans Benefit Administration pulls the numbers from Monday Morning Workload Report every 10th day of each. The report is show on VA Benefits and Health section under [Characteristics of Claims - Veterans Benefits Administration Reports \(https://benefits.va.gov/reports/characteristic_of_claims.asp\)](https://benefits.va.gov/reports/characteristic_of_claims.asp)