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National Academy of Public Administration Completes Review of Veterans Benefits Administration Efforts to Eliminate Disability Claims Backlog *Report shows progress made, but additional process reforms needed*

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) has made progress in reducing its disability claims backlog, but needs to fundamentally transform both its claims and appeals processes in order to ensure the highest quality service for the nation’s Veterans, according to a [report](#) released today by the National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy).

Congress requested that the Academy conduct the review in order to ensure that VBA has processes in place to prevent the occurrence of a future backlog. Over the past five years, VBA has launched a concerted effort of more than 40 initiatives to reduce the number of Veterans waiting more than 125 days for disability claims processing. This claims backlog peaked at over 611,000 in March 2013 and has subsequently fallen to between 70,000 and 80,000 in the past several months. However, the inventory of appeals has doubled, to more than 443,000 pending cases earlier this year.

“VBA must continue its focused effort to use technology and transformed processes to enhance efficiency and quality, in order to achieve improved results for Veterans,” said John Kamensky, Chairman of the Academy’s VBA Panel. “A more comprehensive approach is also needed in which external stakeholders work with VBA to achieve a true process transformation. In the Panel’s view, this will require strong political leadership; adequate resources; greater partnership across parallel interest groups; and expanded interoperability with respect to medical and service records between the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the Defense Department, and private physicians.”

The Panel’s report outlines three notable findings:

- VBA reduced backlog by implementing an integrated set of process modernization initiatives such as training, re-organizing and streamlining business processes, and building and implementing technology tools; plus imposing mandatory overtime.
- VBA continues on an aggressive course to modernize. It should also use advanced technology tools, including data analytics, to transform its processes.
- Both claims and appeals processes need to be fundamentally transformed, also requiring concerted action by external stakeholders.

Over the past fifteen years, the number of Veterans receiving disability compensation benefits from VBA has nearly doubled, and the complexity of their claims has increased substantially. Against this

backdrop, VBA has implemented many new initiatives to address the challenges of disability claims and appeals processing. The report found that VBA cannot truly transform the program without concerted actions by such external stakeholders as Congress, the Executive Branch, Veterans Service Organizations, and Veterans themselves. This much-needed transformation would include new models of disability compensation, new ways of doing things, and a change in mindsets, behaviors, and approaches.

Based on the report's findings, the Panel recommended actions that VBA should adopt, including the use of rules-based and analytic approaches to adjudicate less complex claims and the development of new metrics to track the complexity of disability claims. The Panel also issued recommendations for VBA to leverage more strategically the expansive network of organizations supporting Veterans and to work more closely with the Department of Defense to create a seamless transition from military to civilian life. The Panel urged all stakeholders to take actions to ensure the program is structured to meet the challenges and opportunities of the 21st Century workplace, advances in medical science, and Veteran needs.

To read the full report, click [here](#).

About the National Academy of Public Administration:

Chartered by Congress to provide non-partisan expert advice, the Academy is an independent, non-profit, and non-partisan organization established in 1967 to assist government leaders in building more effective, efficient, accountable, and transparent organizations. Learn more at www.napawash.org

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