YOUR VA DISABILITY CLAIM

A Veteran's Guide to the Claims Process

CLAIMS • C&P EXAMS • EVIDENCE • DECISIONS • NEXT STEPS

KEEP THIS BOOKLET

Use it to track your claim, prepare for examinations, write down questions, and understand what happens next.

BUTLER COUNTY VETERANS AFFAIRS

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Your Claim Starts Here

Filing a VA disability claim is a process—not a single appointment or form. Your County Veterans Service Office can help you understand the process, gather evidence, submit the claim, and review the decision.

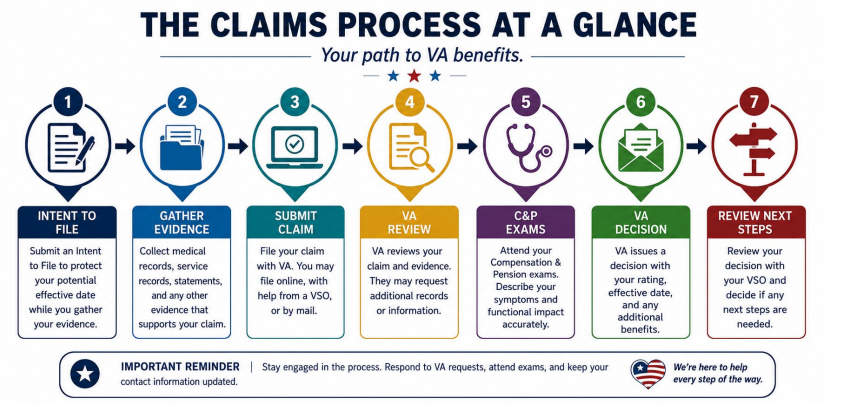
YOUR ROLE MATTERS

Stay involved. Attend examinations, respond to requests, keep your information current, and share important new evidence with our office.

- ☐ Attend all scheduled VA examinations.
- ☐ Tell our office about new medical records or evidence.
- ☐ Respond to requests from VA or our office.
- ☐ Keep your address, phone number, direct deposit, and contact information current with VA.
- ☐ Read VA letters carefully.
- ☐ Contact our office when you receive a rating decision.
- ☐ Keep copies of important records and correspondence.

IMPORTANT

Do not assume VA already has a record simply because the record exists.



Build a Strong Claim

Evidence tells the story; your statement explains the impact.

For direct service connection, VA generally looks for:

1. Current Disability

A current diagnosed condition or, in some cases, persistent symptoms that cause functional impairment.

2. In-Service Event

An injury, illness, event, exposure, duty, or circumstance during military service.

3. Connection

Evidence linking the current disability to military service.

Different rules may apply to secondary conditions, presumptive conditions, aggravation, increased-rating claims, and other claim types.

Evidence may include

Medical evidence

VA records, private records, hospital records, imaging, specialist evaluations, therapy, medications, and medical opinions.

Lay evidence

Your statement and observations from family, friends, coworkers, or fellow service members who have personal knowledge of what they observed.

A useful personal statement may describe:

- When symptoms began and how they progressed
- Frequency, duration, and severity
- Flare-ups and what triggers them
- Functional limitations
- Effects on work, sleep, relationships, and daily activities
- Things you can no longer do—or now do differently

VETERAN TIP

Specific examples are usually more useful than general statements. **Describe what happens, how often it happens, and what it prevents you from doing.**

Your C&P Exam

Compensation & Pension examinations gather information VA may use to decide your claim.

A C&P examination is not the same as a routine medical appointment. The examiner may evaluate the diagnosis, severity, history, functional impairment, or relationship of a condition to military service or another disability.

ATTEND YOUR EXAM

Missing a scheduled examination may negatively affect your claim. If you absolutely cannot attend, contact the scheduling company or VA immediately and notify our office.

Before the exam

☐ Review when the problem began.
☐ Think about your usual symptoms—not just how you feel on exam day.
☐ Know how often symptoms occur and how long they last.
☐ Think about your worst days and flare-ups.
☐ Be ready to explain how the condition affects work and daily life.
☐ Bring requested items and follow the scheduling notice instructions.

During the exam

BE ACCURATE

Do not exaggerate your symptoms. Do not minimize them either. Describe your actual experience in clear, specific terms.

Instead of saying "my back hurts," explain what the pain does: how long you can stand, whether you must change positions, whether bending or lifting increases symptoms, and what happens afterward.

Instead of saying "I get headaches," describe frequency, duration, severity, associated symptoms, and whether you must stop activity or lie down.

Functional Loss & Flare-Ups

VA needs to understand what your condition prevents you from doing.

Functional loss can include:

Movement Pain, weakness, fatigue, limited motion, repeated-use problems.	**Mobility** Difficulty standing, walking, climbing stairs, bending, lifting, or balancing.
Neurologic Numbness, tingling, burning, radiating pain, weakness, or other nerve symptoms.	**Daily life** Sleep disturbance, concentration problems, missed work, reduced productivity, or assistance with activities.

My flare-ups

How often? _____

How long do they last? _____

What triggers them? _____

What gets worse? _____

What can I not do during a flare-up? _____

GOOD DAY AT THE EXAM?

If the exam happens on a better day, explain what your condition is like during typical bad days and flare-ups.

Range-of-motion exams

For many joint and musculoskeletal exams, the examiner may measure movement. Do not force your body beyond the point where pain or limitation begins simply because you are being examined. Tell the examiner where pain begins and whether repeated movement, weakness, fatigue, or flare-ups further limit you.

Mental Health C&P Exams

These exams can involve personal and difficult topics.

The examiner may ask about depression, anxiety, panic, PTSD symptoms, sleep, nightmares, anger, memory, concentration, relationships, isolation, employment, motivation, self-care, suicidal thoughts, and traumatic experiences.

DESCRIBE THE PATTERN OVER TIME

Do not describe only how you feel today. Explain your symptoms over time, including difficult periods and how they affect functioning.

If a topic is difficult to discuss, you can say that. Try to provide enough information for the examiner to understand the symptoms and their effect on your life.

After any C&P exam

Date of examination: _____

Condition examined: _____

Examiner / location: _____

☐ Were your symptoms discussed?

☐ Were flare-ups discussed?

☐ Was range of motion measured, if applicable?

☐ Did the examiner discuss your statement or other evidence?

☐ Was there anything about the examination that concerned you?

CONTACT US PROMPTLY

If you believe there was a significant problem with your examination, contact Butler County Veterans Affairs as soon as possible.

While You Are Waiting

Continue care and keep your claim information organized.

☐ Continue appropriate medical care.

☐ Keep records of significant changes in your condition.

☐ Tell our office if VA requests additional evidence.

☐ Tell us if another exam is scheduled.

☐ Share correspondence you do not understand.

☐ Update VA if your address, phone number, or banking information changes.

☐ Tell us about important new medical evidence or diagnoses.

CLAIM STATUS

VA.gov and the VA mobile app may show claim activity. Status labels do not always explain everything happening behind the scenes.

My claim at a glance

Intent to File date: _____

Deadline to submit claim: _____

Claim submitted: _____

C&P exam(s): _____

Evidence submitted: _____

Conditions claimed:_____

Your VA Decision

A decision should be reviewed—not just the combined percentage.

When your VA decision arrives, provide it to our office for review.

We will look at:

- Which conditions were granted or denied
- Individual evaluations and the combined evaluation
- Effective dates
- Evidence VA considered
- Favorable findings
- Reasons for denial
- Dependents and retroactive benefits
- Whether additional benefits may apply
- Whether further review should be considered

If your claim is denied

Supplemental Claim Generally used when there is new and relevant evidence to submit.	**Higher-Level Review** A more senior reviewer considers the existing record for possible error; generally, new evidence is not submitted in this lane.
Board Appeal An appeal to the Board of Veterans' Appeals. Different Board review options are available.	**Before choosing** Appeal deadlines matter. Review the decision and your options with our office before selecting a review lane.

If your claim is granted

We still want to review the percentage, effective date, combined evaluation, dependents, retroactive benefits, unresolved conditions, and whether the evaluation matches the evidence.

Notes & Next Steps

Bring this page when you meet with our office.

Decision date: _____

Follow-up appointment: _____

Next deadline: _____

Questions for my Veterans Service Officer

_____

_____

Next steps

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

REMEMBER

You are your best historian. Medical records tell part of the story; you explain what living with the disability is actually like. Be honest. Be specific. Do not exaggerate. Do not minimize.

BUTLER COUNTY VETERANS AFFAIRS

Serving Butler County Veterans and their families

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GENERAL INFORMATION NOTICE

This booklet provides general educational information about the VA claims process. Every claim is different, and VA laws, regulations, procedures, and benefit requirements may change. Contact Butler County Veterans Affairs for individualized assistance before making important decisions about a claim or appeal.