

# **Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)**

## **Veteran Townhall Broadcast – April 30, 2024**

### **Q&A**

The questions below were submitted through an online platform and to the USAG Stuttgart Retirement Services Office (RSO) prior to the Townhall Broadcast. Questions that were specific to the submitter have been edited to create a general question that is not specific to one Veteran or Servicemember. If you have a question specifically about your VA claim, you may submit that question at [AskVA](#). Similar questions were combined into one comprehensive question. The Department of Veterans Affairs is unable to provide answers for other agencies. However, representatives from the State Department and the Internal Revenue Service did provide resource links that can be found at the end of the Q&A responses. If you are seeking information on how to obtain a Virtual Identification Card (VIC) through VA, you can find that information here - [Veterans Identification Card \(va.gov\)](#).

#### **Department of Veterans Affairs Pittsburgh Regional Office**

**Q:** Why is it that some Veterans receive a higher disability rating than others, seemingly for the same disabilities, specifically for Sleep Apnea or PACT Act disabilities? Does it make a difference if you use a private attorney to assist with your rating?

**A:** All ratings are assigned using the VA Rating Schedule for the specific disability diagnosed based on the specific disability picture for that Veteran. It does not make a difference if you use a private attorney to assist.

**Q:** Does the VA Regional Office communicate with the Federal Benefits Unit (Department of State) in Germany?

**A:** No. The Stuttgart event was the first time the Regional Office had partnered with the FBU in Germany.

**Q:** Does the VA recognize domestic partnerships for Veterans living in Germany? If so, how can a domestic partner be registered as a dependent with the VA?

**A:** Determining the validity of Common Law Marriages outside of the US depends on the validity of common law marriages in the country in question. If the country in which the veteran resides recognizes common law marriages, then the dependent can be added like any other dependent. Claims to add a dependent should be filed on a VA Form 21-686c.

**Q:** How can a claim be denied when it is based on active duty time served?

**A:** There are many reasons why a claim may be denied. In order to grant service connection, the condition must be determined to have been incurred or caused by the Veterans active-duty military service.

**Q:** How can an overseas Veteran get an appointment with a VA representative about their personal claim?

**A:** Veterans can schedule a virtual appointment to speak with a VA representative using the Visitor Engagement Reporting Application (VERA) at this link: [VERA - Home \(site.com\)](#). Note that you should select Virtual appointment, Pennsylvania as the State and Pittsburgh as the Office. This will route your appointment to the Pittsburgh Regional Office, which has jurisdiction of all overseas claims. Veterans can also call the VA Benefits Customer Service line at 1-800-827-1000 to speak to a representative regarding their claim.

**Q:** If a Veteran served two terms in the military, with one Honorable discharge and one Other Than Honorable discharge, can they receive compensation for a service-connected injury? How do they apply? How do they get their bad discharge upgraded?

**A:** The facts and circumstances of each Veteran's service are unique, so one answer does not fit all cases. Depending on the facts in a Veteran's specific case, yes, it is possible for a Veteran to still be eligible for benefits if they have one good period of service and one bad period. Veterans should submit their application for benefits and claims processors will take any development action necessary to determine the Veterans eligibility to benefits. Once determined, the Veteran will be notified to which benefits he/she may be entitled. Veterans wishing to seek an upgraded discharge from the Service Department should visit the following link for more information on how to do so: [How To Apply For A Discharge Upgrade | Veterans Affairs \(va.gov\)](#)

**Q:** Can I receive a disability compensation evaluation in Thailand? How do I apply?

**A:** Yes, the VA has contract examiners available in Thailand. When a VA disability examination is requested, it will be scheduled in your current location. Please ensure that the VA has your current address so that exams are being scheduled in the appropriate location.

**Q:** Is there any benefit for a 100% disabled Veteran to reopen their claim to add additional information to their file regarding their status?

**A:** If the Veteran's current disability has worsened, regardless of their disability rating, they should seek entitlement for an increase as there may be additional benefits that the Veteran may be entitled to such as Special Monthly Compensation, etc.

**Q:** Are U.S. Veterans living in the Philippines entitled to VA service-connected compensation benefits?

**A:** Yes. The Manilla Regional Office has jurisdiction of all claims for Veteran's residing in the Philippines.

**Q:** Does VA provide benefits for siblings of Veterans?

**A:** The VA does not provide benefits for siblings of Veterans unless they are legally adopted by the Veteran.

**Q:** As a Veteran whose wife was recently diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, what are some services that can be used to help her?

**A:** You may be eligible for an additional benefit of Spousal Aid and Attendance if your spouse meets certain criteria. A claim for Spousal Aid and Attendance benefits can be filed on a VA Form 21-2680.

**Q:** Where can a Veteran, who is living overseas, obtain information about VA benefits available to them? What VA benefits have unique submission requirements for Veterans living overseas?

**A:** Veterans can visit [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) for information on eligible benefits. Veterans can also call the VA Benefits Customer Service line at 1-800-827-1000 to speak to a representative regarding their claim. Most benefits are unchanged for Veterans residing overseas. However, additional documentation may be required. For example, an overseas Veteran must submit dependency documents (marriage certification, divorce decrees, birth certificates, etc.) when seeking additional benefits for dependents.

**Q:** Can a Servicemember submit a retirement and disability claim simultaneously?

**A:** Yes

**Q:** Is a spouse entitled to VA death benefits if the service disabled Veteran dies from an ailment not rated for by the VA, but the ailment/cause of death is a disability covered by the Pact Act? Can the spouse make the claim retroactively and receive appropriate benefits?

**A:** Depending on the facts and circumstance of the specific claim, yes, a spouse may still be entitled to benefits. When in doubt, a claim should be submitted. The claim can be submitted at any time; however, delayed submittal may result in a later effective date of the benefits if awarded. Additional information can be found here: [\*\*About VA DIC For Spouses, Dependents, And Parents | Veterans Affairs\*\*](#)

**Q:** Please explain the spousal death benefits of a service disabled Veteran, e.g., Servicemember dies of rated ailment vs. Veteran dies of any cause as it relates to time rated at 100% P&T, etc.

**A:** Information on spousal death benefits is located here: [About VA DIC For Spouses, Dependents, And Parents | Veterans Affairs](#)

**Q:** Can a person determined “Unemployable” still obtain a job? Does the person have to be unemployed from the time the claim is submitted? Please explain.

**A:** VA Individual Unemployability (IU) is a benefit intended for Veteran’s that are unable to work due to their service-connected disabilities. To be eligible for IU this must be true: You cannot hold down a steady job that supports you financially because of your service-connected disability. Odd jobs (marginal employment) do not count. At the time the Veteran files a claim for IU, they should be unable to gain and maintain substantial gainful employment.

**Q:** Is there any additional financial assistance for a Veteran rated as Unemployable if conditions have worsened to the point of being in a wheelchair and not able to take care of themselves?

**A:** Additional benefits may be warranted for a Veteran rated as Unemployable, to include entitlement to additional benefits such and Special Monthly Compensation. More information on eligibility can be found here: [VA Aid And Attendance Benefits And Housebound Allowance | Veterans Affairs](#) and here: [Special Claims | Veterans Affairs \(va.gov\)](#)

**Q:** Can 100 percent P&T Veterans receive eyecare and dental care in Germany?

**A:** VA Medical treatment services are not currently available overseas. However, medical treatment for service connected conditions may be reimbursable through the Foreign Medical Program. You can visit our [Foreign Medical Program](#) page for more information

**Q:** Can 100 percent disabled P&T Veterans use the VA home loan for on post or off post housing?

**A:** Eligible properties for the VA Home Loan must be in the United States, its territories or possessions.

**Q:** With no VA Medical Facilities overseas, and now that Veterans are not allowed visit the Military medical facilities overseas (only space available), does the Foreign Medical Program and Tricare provide our updated medical information/records to the VA?

**A:** If you are being treated on a Military installation, claims processors have access to those records and are able to obtain them, if identified by the Veteran. We do not receive those records automatically.

**Q:** Does receiving medical services outside of the VA Medical System affect

the disability rating?

**A:** No

**Q:** How do you get Medical assistance when in Europe as a VA patient?

**A:** As a Veteran living or traveling abroad, you can receive medical care for VA service-connected disabilities through our VA Foreign Medical Program. Under this program, we assume payment responsibility for the necessary treatment of service-connected disabilities. You can visit our [Foreign Medical Program](#) page for more information. There are regional toll-free phone numbers on this page that you can call for additional assistance.

**Q:** Why can't VA healthcare be used in Europe if you are a 100% disabled Veteran?

**A:** As a Veteran living or traveling abroad, you can receive medical care for VA service-connected disabilities through our VA Foreign Medical Program. Under this program, we assume payment responsibility for the necessary treatment of service-connected disabilities. You can visit our [Foreign Medical Program](#) page for more information. There are regional toll-free phone numbers on this page that you can call for additional assistance.

### **VA Medical Disability Examination Office**

**Q:** What should I do if the doctor at my VA disability examination was not very interested in hearing my case even though I had a nexus letter signed by a military doctor stating my disability is a direct result of exposure to jet fuels in the military?

**A:** C&P providers do not determine whether Service Connection is warranted. VBA is required to consider and weigh all evidence that has been submitted. Veterans should submit the nexus letter to VBA to ensure that letter is considered when the claim is being evaluated. If a Veteran has a complaint or feedback about their contract examination experience, they should contact the VA at 1-800-827-1000 or 1-412-395-6272. Claimants are encouraged to complete the examination survey which is included with their appointment letter.

**Q:** VA contract examination vendors do not speak English well, and sometimes not at all. They call from offices in different countries on different continents. This contributes to inconsistencies and lack of continuity in regard to communication and service received to the point that a Veteran may be scheduled for two exams in different locations at the same time. Please address.

**A:** All providers are required to read and speak English. Vendor subcontractors may be located outside of Germany or the US; however, the examiners have been trained on

how to conduct C&P exams. Veterans should not be scheduled for appointments in different locations at the same time. If this occurs, Veterans should work with the vendor to reschedule one of the appointments.

**Q:** What oversight is in place for examination vendors throughout Europe? Is there anything in place to address the communication issues between examiners who do not speak English and the Veteran?

**A:** All providers are required to read and speak English. Vendors perform quality reviews on examinations. VBA also performs quality reviews on examinations performed by vendors, and MDE vendors are required to meet a quality performance standard. The MDE program office also provides regular feedback to vendors on the quality of their work. Additionally, any complaints received are investigated thoroughly.

**Q:** Can veterans get VA disability examination completed in the Stuttgart area?

**A:** Yes, there are providers available in the Stuttgart area.

## **VA Foreign Medical Program (FMP)**

### **Electronic Payments and Improved Claims Processing**

**Q:** Are there any plans to improve the FMP process, like being able to apply and track a claim online? Are there plans to institute electronic payments rather than paper checks?

**Q:** Veterans are being financially challenged because of the time it takes for an FMP claim to be processed. Local doctors have a lack of faith in receiving payments timely. This prevents Veterans from getting the care they need. Are there initiatives in place to improve the timeliness of FMP claims?

**Q:** Are there plans in place to improve the Foreign Medical Program and the current processing system by allowing online submission rather than submitting unsecure e-mail attachments? Are there plans to improve the timeliness? Are there plans to have a fully functional online portal to submit claims and receive electronic payments?

**A:** Delivering electronic payments to overseas Veterans is a priority and we are actively working to make that happen. Our first goal is to electronically pay Veterans with domestic bank accounts for their FMP claims by the end of 2024. After we complete this goal, the project will expand to include Veterans with international bank accounts and overseas medical providers to receive electronic payments.

We began work in September 2023, when the Foreign Medical Program received IT development funding to set up capabilities for electronic funds transfer (EFT). The IT development team is looking for ways to modify the FMP claims processing system to enable electronic payments using existing VBA payment information. The team recently found out that there are file parameter constraints that prevent different systems and application programming interfaces from completing EFT payments. Right now, the team is generating workarounds to overcome this challenge.

**A:** Improving how we process FMP claims is also a priority. VA is actively working to modernize the FMP registration and claims submission process over the next year. We are making improvements to the software we use to process claims faster. We are also making it possible for Veterans to view in real time where their application is, when the claim is under review and when the claim is approved. The timeline for full delivery remains under development and we will provide updates as they become available. Veterans can opt to send secure encrypted emails for claim submissions by using personal email server transport layer security (TLS) protocols. Veterans can also send secure communications to [Ask VA](#).

**Q:** I would like to know more about the Foreign Medical Program.

**A:** Thank you for your interest. Our presentation provided an overview of the program, and we will send copies to all attendees. If you have more questions, you can send a message to [Ask VA](#).

**Q:** What options are there for Veterans living in western European countries to receive mental health care, specifically for PTSD and TBI, other than private providers which results in Veterans not receiving the appropriate care because of the stigma regarding US Military and PTSD in those countries.

**A:** Under federal statutes (38 U.S.C. § 1724 and 38 CFR 17.35) and international law, FMP cannot authorize reimbursement for telehealth care provided to overseas Veterans from privately-based mental health providers in the continental United States (CONUS). CONUS-based VA medical providers are also not authorized to provide telehealth services outside the United States, territories and possessions of the United States, the District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico because of medical licensing restrictions.

All Veterans are entitled to free mental health support from [inTransition](#). inTransition is a free, confidential program that offers specialized coaching and assistance for active duty servicemembers, National Guard members, reservists, Veterans and retirees who need access to mental health care. inTransition coaches are licensed mental health care providers who understand military culture.

**Q:** Is there a direct contact number for a Veteran to speak with an FMP representative other than the customer service number?

**A:** There is not a direct contact number for an FMP representative. You can send your questions to [Ask VA](#). You will be connected to an escalation team program analyst who can provide you with more detailed assistance and if necessary, a phone call to address unique or complex program concerns.

**Q:** Is there medical care for disabled Veterans that live in Japan?

**A:** There are no VA-sponsored medical facilities in Japan. However, we may cover the cost of your care in Japan to treat conditions related to your VA-rated, service-connected disabilities.

**Q:** Are there any plans to increase the FMP customer service hours to better accommodate Veterans overseas in different time zones? Are there measures in place to improve wait time when calling the FMP customer service number?

**A:** The FMP customer service team is experiencing ongoing staff shortages because of budgetary constraints. The best way to make inquiries after hours in CONUS is to email [hac.fmp@va.gov](mailto:hac.fmp@va.gov) or send your questions to [Ask VA](#).

**Q:** Are claims for hearing aids purchased in Germany reimbursable through FMP or the VA?

**A:** Yes, if the hearing aids are required for a service-connected disability. If your hearing aids were issued from a CONUS VA facility, replacement hearing aids, batteries, and accessories can be ordered through the Denver Logistics Center. Additional information about the Denver Logistics Center and how to request hearing aid supplies can be found here: [Hearing Aid Batteries & Accessories | VA](#).

**Q:** Why does a Veteran have to submit decision letters and full medical reports with every FMP claim for treatment reimbursement when the processors are not medically qualified?

**A:** We may need additional information to answer this question completely. Not all claims are the same and this question appears to address a specific or unique case. Sometimes claims do not have enough information to confirm that the treatment received, or the medication prescribed is connected to service-connected conditions. If the claims examiner cannot clearly determine a connection, they will route the claim to a team of certified nurses for review.

**Q:** Why is treatment reimbursement through FMP only available for rated service-connected disabilities when many ailments are secondary and get rejected by the VA?



**A:** The statutory authority that governs FMP only allows reimbursements for services that treat service-connected disabilities. Expanded authorities require new legislation and additional appropriations. Conditions associated with and held to be aggravating a service-connected disability must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. The best way to make service-connected condition pre-determination inquiries is by submitting a request to [Ask VA](#).

**Q:** What is the staffing of the FMP office in Denver? Are there plans to increase staffing to meet demand?

**A:** Our FMP staffing authorizations grew from 25 to 38 people in April 2023. Under this new organizational structure, we were authorized to recruit three lead claims examiners and 10 claims examiners. We are waiting for permission to announce our 11 remaining claims examiners because of a temporary VHA hiring pause.

**Q:** If a Veteran makes a mistake on their cover sheet and the FMP rejects their claim, the Veteran has to resubmit their corrected claim. Why does it start back at the end of the line? Why doesn't the FMP not offer an expedited service on rejected claims that have already sat waiting for many months?

**A:** We recently refined how we process claims. Clarifications and requests for information due to minor omissions or mistakes are now sent to the Veteran email address on the FMP claim cover sheet. Manual send-back letters will only be used if a valid email address is not on file or listed on the FMP claim cover sheet. The best way to make inquiries or minor update requests for pending claims is to submit a request to [Ask VA](#).

**Q:** Why does the average time to process an FMP claim takes seven months?

**A:** We are experiencing ongoing staff shortages because of budgetary constraints. However, the time it takes to process claims will improve after we are authorized to hire and train the claims examiner positions affected by the temporary VHA hiring pause.

**Q:** What oversight exists for the FMP to ensure appropriate service to American Veterans?

**A:** FMP is a claims reimbursement program that allows Veterans to request payment for health care services they receive from any overseas provider they choose to see. There are no networks or internal oversight programs.

## **Resources shared by the Department of State Federal Benefits Unit (FBU) Representative**

[Expedited Processing of Veteran's 100% Disability Claims](#)

[Survivors Benefits | SSA](#)

[U.S. International SSA Agreements | International Programs | SSA](#)

The FBU can be contacted via email at [FBU.Frankfurt@ssa.gov](mailto:FBU.Frankfurt@ssa.gov)

Phone hours are Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9am-12pm to speak to an FBU representative.

**Resources Shared by the Internal Revenue Service Representative**

[U.S. Servicemembers Overseas: Don't Miss the IRS's "Marching Orders" Regarding Filing Your Tax Returns - Taxpayer Advocate Service](#)

[Your Online Account | Internal Revenue Service \(irs.gov\)](#)

[MilTax: Free Tax Filing Software & Support | Military OneSource](#)

[DOD SkillBridge Program \(osd.mil\)](#)