

**STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DISABILITY ASSISTANCE AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON
IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR DISABLED VETERANS: OVERSIGHT OF VA'S
MEDICAL DISABILITY EXAMINATION OFFICE
NOVEMBER 20, 2025**

Chairman Luttrell, Ranking Member McGarvey, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the medical disability examinations (MDE) conducted by VA. Accompanying me today is Tara Flores, Director, Acquisition Service, Strategic Acquisition Center.

Today, I will provide updates on VBA's oversight of Compensation and Pension (C&P) examinations, including how we hold contract vendors accountable. I will also provide an update on implementing recommendations made by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO).

Medical Examination Production

Under a new Administration, VBA had a record-breaking year for disability compensation claims processed, with over 3 million claims completed in fiscal year (FY) 2025. To support this high volume of production, VBA also completed a historic number of medical exams. Notably, over 93% of exams are conducted by VBA contract medical disability examination vendors. We remain committed to ensuring Veterans and Service

members receive high quality and timely disability claim decisions, supported by high quality medical examinations. During FY 2025, VA completed over 3.3 million examination scheduling requests, a 5.5% increase from the same period in FY 2024. The average days to complete exams in FY 2025 was 26.4 days, an improvement from 35.7 days compared to the prior year.

Contractual Oversight

Vendors are evaluated on performance metrics such as timeliness, production, and quality. Vendors receive positive incentives for exceeding benchmarks and negative incentives for when performance targets are not met. The August 2025 GAO report, entitled VA Disability Benefits: Additional Oversight and Information Could Improve Quality of Contracted Exams for Veterans, identified two erroneous incentive payments in FY 2024. The erroneous payments have been recouped, and our methodology has been enhanced to prevent future errors.

Quality Compliance

VA conducts monthly quality audits using a statistically valid sample. In FY 2025, VBA's aggregate quality score for MDE Vendor Disability Benefits Questionnaire reviews was 97.2%, with positive performance incentives applied for scores above 96%.

Training Requirements

All contract medical examiners must undergo foundational training and certification equivalent to that of Veterans Health Administration examiners. Training includes general certification, specialty courses, and supplemental courses. Recertification training is required every five years or if the examiner has not conducted an exam in the past year. VBA MDEO is also developing training based on error trends, special focused reviews, and Disability Benefits Questionnaire changes to improve exam quality.

Vendors must submit an annual training plan covering examiners and support staff, ensuring compliance with VA standards and quality assurance. These plans are

reviewed by VBA to confirm they meet all contract requirements. VBA validates completion of training before examiners are permitted to perform exams. VBA also conducts monthly audits to ensure all active examiners adhere to training requirements, ensuring training standards are maintained by active examiners.

Initiatives and Improvements to the Veteran Experience:

We recognize that there are clear opportunities to strengthen and modernize portions of the disability examination process, and we are committed to addressing those areas. For example, we are evaluating advanced clinical and evidence-review tools designed to help identify when existing medical information is sufficient to support a claims decision. These capabilities have the potential to reduce in-person examinations, improve consistency, and accelerate outcomes for our Veterans, while ensuring that all decisions comply with VA regulations and clinical standards.

We are also prioritizing a more Veteran-centric approach to scheduling and overall exam coordination. VBA has begun integration between the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS) and VHA's External Provider Scheduling platform. This collaboration is expected to improve and streamline the Veteran experience, giving Veterans more options, while allowing VA to maximize utilization of the entire network of providers supporting C&P examinations nationwide. A centralized scheduling platform will make the process simpler to navigate, improve consistency in communication, and ensure that examinations are accessible to all Veterans.

In parallel, we are focused on identifying ways to streamline and modernize business processes, reducing administrative burden for both Veterans and the workforce. This includes assessing multiple avenues to leverage technology and refine workflows in order to reduce reliance on examinations where appropriate.

While some progress can be achieved within the exam space alone, the full benefit of these improvements will depend on close partnership across VBA and VA, as

well as stakeholders. We remain committed to these collaborative efforts to ensure a more efficient, Veteran-focused experience.

GAO Recommendations

In August 2025, GAO issued a report entitled VA Disability Benefits: Additional Oversight and Information Could Improve Quality of Contracted Exams for Veterans. To begin addressing these recommendations, VBA has formalized the standard operating procedures (SOP) for the financial incentive calculation process detailing roles, responsibilities, objectives, and reporting. This SOP is currently in use. In addition, VBA has recalculated all financial incentives since 2022 as requested by GAO and did not identify any errors that impacted the previously calculated percentages. Further, VBA has completed the FY 2025 Military Sexual Trauma (MST) Complex Case Review (CCR) and updated the CCR SOP to reflect the projected completion of CCRs. An MST Special Focused Review (SFR) was completed in FY 2025, a Gulf War SFR is planned for completion in FY 2026, and a Traumatic Brain Injury SFR will be completed in FY 2027, with the MST SFR cycle restarting in FY 2028. VBA is dedicated to conducting these SFRs to ensure oversight and improve the quality of these critical medical disability exams. Finally, VBA has created a form to collect feedback from examiners who conduct contract medical examinations, established a monitored email account to receive the forms, created SOPs to ensure feedback forms received are reviewed timely and maintained, with notice of the new feedback mechanism provided to all current contract exam providers and vendors.

Conclusion

I want to express my appreciation for your continued support of Veterans and their families, caregivers, and survivors. VBA appreciates the authority provided by Congress to obtain contract examinations for Veterans and transitioning Service members. VBA remains committed to providing timely and accurate disability examinations to Veterans and Service members, while improving their examination experience. Chairman Luttrell, and Ranking Member McGarvey, this concludes my

statement. We would be happy to answer any questions you or the other Members of the Subcommittee may have.