**WHITE PAPER**

**VETERAN DATA PROBLEM**

**ISSUE:** The is no single automated data repository in VA or DoD that includes all Veterans and their military service. Often times, VA creates a duplicate record, or enters data incorrectly, in one of the various data repositories that result in adverse downstream issues. The data issue impacts online claims processing, prevents Veterans from using eBenefits for online self-services or delays processing of requests for VA services and the receipt of benefits or compensation. The manual actions required to determine eligibility for VA services and benefits directly contribute to the backlog in workload experienced across the Administrations and Staff Offices. A significant amount of manhours and labor costs is wasted by VA staff in NCA, VBA and VHA accessing multiple data repositories to determine eligibility before processing Veteran’s requests for services and benefits.

**DISCUSSION**: Neither VA or DoD have complete data on Veterans that is online and accessible for use. There are approximately 3.2 million Veterans missing from the Department of Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) and approximately 10 million Veteran records missing character of service information needed by VA for processing requests for services and benefits. DMDC has data integrity issues, the date of birth is incorrect, and DMDC does not have information for

1. Veterans who served prior to 1980
2. Guard
3. Reserve

In an effort to resolve problems impacting ability to provide commissary services, HQ Army & Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) implemented a new system, Vet Verify, because DMDC had gaps in data as not all documents were transferred there and DMDC did not have old data especially for WWII Vets, Vietnam Vets and Korean Era Vets. DoDI 1336.01 mandates the services begin providing this data electronically to DMDC by January 2015. Army will begin January 2018. DMDC had 13.5 million records (excluding retirees) and only 7.8 million had a Character of Discharge (COD). Census Bureau says there are 21 million Vets so there are several layers of discrepancy of the official data base for the services. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) did not capture discharge status in their data base. So to verify a COD a request for a record is submitted and NARA pulls a record from the warehouse to provide to the user. AAFES worked out a MOU with NARA that they would pull down the service number and name of the entire data base so they had a start point knowing they would have to then begin researching COD. AAFES now has the DEERs (DMDC) and NPRC (NARA) feed available to use with Vet Verify. AAFES also requests DD-214, or other evidence, to manually update Veteran eligibility information.

There is no coordinated effort to address the issue between VA and DoD. Separate and disparate actions result in Veterans submitting DD-214, or other evidence, to both VA and DoD organizations for use with manually updating data repositories. This manual data entry has resulted in discrepancies, data mismatches, in Veteran military service information in the various data repositories. VA has publicly announced that electronic claims filing is the way of the future and how we will control the claims backlog. Since 2015, VBA staff has struggled to resolve the bad or missing data issue between different data repositories. The VBA staff surmised that there are millions of data elements to be fixed for an untold number of the 7 million eBenefits users. Currently, there is a backlog of 4,000 Veteran data duplicate related requests pending resolution that are impacting the use of eBenefits for online self-service actions.

Problems with data repositories:

1. Veteran Information Solution (VIS) has information for VADIR and BIRLS. Users have reported that this data source may have data if the Veteran has never filed a claim but the data is incorrect. VHA Enrollment staff use VIS.
2. Veteran Benefit Management System (VBMS) – has information if Veteran has filed a claim for compensation or pension. VHA staff updates VBMS with DD214 information for claims.
3. SHARE/Beneficiary Identification Record Locator System (BIRLS) – contains certified military information. VBA staff updates SHARE/BIRLS upon receipt of certified copy of military information from NPRC or DPRIS.
4. Veteran Affairs (VA)/Department of Defense (DoD) Identity Repository (VADIR) - intended to support a veteran focused service delivery environment that will enhance and improve benefit eligibility determination, administration and delivery across VA. Essential to enabling improvements in these benefit delivery areas is the need to improve data sharing between VA and other interested and authorized entities such as DoD. VADIR is the mechanism established to meet this need. VADIR consolidates data transfers between the DoD and the VA. DoD's Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) stages shared data as defined in a MOU and transmits data to VADIR. This data becomes available to VA orgs to assist in determining veterans' benefits eligibility.
5. Master Veteran Index (MVI) - is the primary vehicle for assigning and maintaining unique patient identifiers. MVI is the authoritative identity service within VA, establishing, maintaining and synchronizing identities for Veterans (the desired end-state is for MVI to also be authoritative for beneficiaries, dependents and employees). A gateway in VistA establishes connectivity between VA Medical Center (VAMC) systems and patient registration processes and links to the MVI for message processing and patient identification. The MVI has been created to support maintenance of a unique patient identifier and a single master index of all Veterans Health Administration (VHA) patients and to allow messaging of patient information among the institutional partners [i.e., VHA, Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA), National Cemetery Service (NCS), and Department of Defense (DoD).] MVI creates an index that uniquely identifies each active patient treated by the Veterans Administration, identifies the sites where a patient is receiving care, and supports crucial sharing of Veteran patient information across sites.
6. Defense Personnel Records Information Retrieval System (DPRIS) – provides electronic access to official military personnel files. Does not contain information prior to 1995. Users have reported it can take 30 minutes to one week to get information from DPRIS.
7. Defense Enrollment and Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) - automatically registers active duty and retired service members. It also contains information on their dependents. Veterans can update their information in DEERS or the military personnel office can update information which will be shown in DEERS.

DEERS sends updates to VADIR every 30 minutes, the records include Active Duty and retired members. There is not a two way feed/update between the two systems. DEERS has data integrity issues, the date of birth is incorrect, and DEERS does not have information for Veterans who served prior to 1980. DEERS does not have information for Guard and Reserve.

1. National Personnel Record Center (NPRC) – contains inactive military personnel records. Users have reported it can take 15 to 45 days to get information from NPRC.

Determining eligibility in VA is complicated and impacts the timely processing of requests for/delivery of services to Veterans by NCA, VBA, VHA and staff offices. Following is a high level summary of what happens today to determine eligibility:

1. NCA - Currently, Veterans mail or fax information to initiate the Pre-need process.  NCA staff enters the information manually into the EOAS/BOSS system, then manually checks various sources to determine whether the Veteran is eligible before sending a letter to the Veteran with the outcome of the determination for eligibility.

Veteran’s families and funeral homes contact the call center staff to initiate process to determine eligibility at the time of need. NCA call center staff capture information and enter data manually into BOSS.  Eligibility staff then manually checks various sources to determine whether the Veteran is eligible and provides a response back on the outcome of the determination for eligibility.

It is estimated that approximately 80% of the requests for eligibility can be determined automatically using available VA data sources.  This would leave 20% for manual verification.

1. VBA – Staff accesses several data sources, SHARE/BIRLS and VBMS to verify service information and often requests certified military information from the Veteran before initiating request to DPRIS or NPRC because VA and DoD records contain different information.
2. VHA – Staff accesses several data sources, VIS and VADIR, to verify service information and often requests certified military information from the Veteran before initiating request to DPRIS or NPRC because VA and DoD records contain different information.
3. VIC – Staff accesses several data sources, VIS, VBMS, SHARE/BIRLS to verify service information and often requests certified military information from the Veteran before initiating request to DPRIS or NPRC because VA and DoD records contain different information.

Example of discrepancy in data:

SHARE   Army 06/14/1973-06/11/1976 E-4

                Army 03/16/1984-03/01/1989 O-3

VIS         Army 03/18/1981-03/02/1989

               Army Reserve 03/03/1989-08/31/1995

VA staff routinely access three to five different data repositories looking for information to determine eligibility. Annually, the manual review of data repositories results in 150,000 to 450,000 wasted work hours and $2,250,000 to $6,750,000 in wasted labor dollars. Put another way, anywhere from 72 to 216 fulltime equivalent staff hours are wasted.

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| 60 wasted secs per data search | 180 wasted secs/3 data base searches |
| 9,000 wasted minutes per year | 27,000 wasted minutes per year |
| 150 wasted hours per year | 450 wasted hours per year |
| $15 hourly rate | $15 hourly rate |
| 1,000 number of hours | 1,000 number of hours |
| 150,000 total hours wasted | 450,000 total hours wasted |
| $2,250,000 total labor dollars wasted | $6,750,000 total labor dollars wasted |
| 72 FTE (150,000/2080) | 216 FTE (450,000/2080) |

**ACTIONS:** An immediate solution is needed to resolve the issue with Veterans being able to submit claims or perform other online self-service action. Potential solutions might include:

1. Enabling Veterans to use their DS Logon credentials from AccessVA to submit actions successfully.
2. Enabling Veterans to view and verify personal information after successfully logging into AccessVA and using the verified information to update MVI, DEERS, BIRLS and other databases.

Long term solution would involve all Veteran data repositories used to determine eligibility for VA services and benefits being aligned under a single organization such as Veteran Experience Office and a single OIT product line. VEO Business Sponsor and OIT product line manager would work together to implement a single data repository solution that consolidates Veteran eligibility data into MVI for use by VA systems, DoD and other federal agencies. VEO Business Sponsor and the OIT product line manager would work together to reduce the number of VA data repositories used to determine eligibility and create web services for use by other VA systems and product lines.

**IMPLICATIONS:** Support electronic claims process, improve efficiency for NCA, VBA and VHA to determine eligibility, improve ability for Veteran perform online self-service actions, eliminate backlog/issues with erroneous, missing and duplicate data, reduce IT footprint and reduce administrative cost associated with FTE manual processes.