DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Congressionally Mandated Report
Disability Benefits Questionnaire (DBQ) Portal Implementation Plan
Elizabeth Dole Act Section 306(b)

August 2025

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1 Executive Summary

On January 2, 2025, the President signed into law the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act, or the Dole Act, incorporating and enacting legislation focused on improving health care benefits and services for Veterans and their caregivers.

Section 306 of the Dole Act, Modernization of Department of Veterans Affairs Disability Benefit Questionnaires, levies the requirement that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) enables the seamless transmission of Disability Benefits Questionnaire (DBQ) data from authorized non-VA healthcare providers using machine-readable formats.

This plan, VA's Implementation Plan for Section 306(b) of the Elizabeth Dole Act, submitted in compliance with the Dole Act, fulfills VA's mandate to present its strategy to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives by July 1, 2025. This plan outlines a phased strategy to modernize information technology (IT) systems, processes, and policies to enable covered non-VA healthcare or non-VA contracted providers to submit DBQ data in a machine-readable format, enhancing efficiency and interoperability.

Since the enactment of the Dole Act, VA has completed research related to the feasibility of a technology, web-based submission, and the necessary validation and compliance reviews needed to make DBQs machine readable for non-VA providers.

This plan identifies the steps necessary to implement the seamless transmission of DBQ data from authorized non-VA healthcare providers using machine-readable formats, broken down across the following steps:

- Funding
- Requirements Development and Assessment
- Development
- Testing
- Prototyping
- Piloting
- Implementation

For each step we have additionally considered non-technological factors such as processes, policies, communications, and change management. These factors are captured in additional considerations.

Through this plan, VA seeks to achieve the following outcomes:

- A single web portal for non-VA providers to complete and submit DBQs
- VA ingests DBQs provided by private examiners into VA information systems as data, allowing for application of automation processes.

- Increased access for Veterans to have their private physician submit DBQs directly to VA as evidence in support of disability claims.
- A reduction in procedurally non-compliant submissions, which delay Veteran claims.
- A reduction in the volume of examinations conducted by VA and VA-contracted examiners.

2 Background

To streamline Veterans' disability claims, section 306(b) mandates VA to modernize DBQ submissions by enabling authorized non-VA healthcare providers to submit machine-readable DBQ data. This transformation improves disability claim processing times, enhances data accuracy, and expands provider accessibility, ensuring Veterans receive timely, high-quality benefits decisions while reducing administrative burdens.

2.1 Situation Analysis

DBQs are standardized forms completed by VA and non-VA providers to gather medical evidence. Evidence provided on the forms directly correspond with 38 U.S.C. 1155 and 38 C.F.R. Part 4 – Schedule for Rating Disabilities requirements, which VA uses to determine disability levels for Veterans. VA relies on statutory requirements to determine whether a VA-provided examination is required to support a claim. The results of such examinations are captured as data in machine-readable DBQs. Currently, DBQs submitted by private health care providers, referred to as Private DBQs (PDBQs), are often handwritten or typed, and then provided to the Veteran for submission in support of their claim. The current process can delay claims decisions with additional steps required to ingest the PDBQ data into VA information systems. The form version of the DBQ also allows for potential inaccuracies and discrepancies due to lack of training on VA terminology and requirements within the form. The current process also limits VA's ability to verify the provider's identity, qualifications, or specialty to ensure they are authorized to complete the assessment as required by VA regulations, which also increases potential for fraudulent submissions.

3 DBQ Portal Implementation

VA will develop a web-based DBQ portal leveraging multi-factor authentication, third party credentialling for portal access, and integration with existing information systems to both receive and store DBQ artifacts. It will also allow for ingestion of computable data driving claims process automation.

3.1 Funding

Securing dedicated funding is a critical initial step to support modernization activities. Investment in both technology infrastructure and program management resources enables the successful development, deployment, and sustainment of the DBQ Portal.

Funding actions support multi-year development, hosting environments, cybersecurity measures, stakeholder engagement, and provider outreach.

As the VA works through the steps to implement the portal, VA will conduct funding assessments to ensure availability of funding in time to advance this initiative.

3.2 Requirements Assessment

VA will refine, validate, and prioritize functional and technical requirements to align with the statutory mandate. This involves convening stakeholders across program offices, policy units, and IT domains to ensure all user, compliance, and system integration needs are documented and traceable. Requirements will include multi-factor authentication, credential validation, and compatibility with existing VA information systems.

As VA identifies and assesses requirements, VA will develop user paths, complexity maps, and strategic documentation to support each step of this initiative. Additionally, VA will identify potential processes, policies, and people-impacts of technological requirements.

3.3 Development

Using validated requirements, VA will initiate development of a web-based DBQ submission portal. Core features will include a dynamic, interview-style interface, integration with credential verification services and support for machine-readable outputs compatible with VA information systems.

To move development forward, VA will assess the use of minimal viable product (MVP) prototyping to further validate requirements and funding needs as well as gather user feedback on usability, workflows, and overall functionality.

3.4 Testing

Comprehensive system testing will verify security, functionality, interoperability, and compliance with federal standards. User acceptance testing will incorporate feedback from non-VA providers and internal claims processors.

Testing will include operation testing and compliance reviews as well as workflow and user interface-user experience assessment and optimization. A notional user workflow is provided in Appendix A.

3.5 Prototyping

A functional prototype will be released to a controlled group of non-VA providers for real-world testing. This environment will simulate the full submission process, including

credential validation, DBQ completion, and data transmission to VA information systems.

VA will incorporate end-user (non-VA providers) and Veteran insights into initial portal design and iterative portal improvements, using human-centered design to enhance the user experience and drive use. VA will also implement metrics dashboards to monitor and report the progress and health of portal progress toward implementation.

3.6 Implementation (Launch)

The national rollout of the DBQ Portal will make secure, standardized submissions available to all authorized non-VA providers. Implementation includes final validation of DBQ types, onboarding support, and operational monitoring. This step will unite all work from other steps in an incremental process to deliver a fully operational DBQ portal for improved Veteran access. This process will leverage standard best practices in technology initiatives such as small group "real life" prototyping and solution pilots.

4 Communications Considerations

Communications throughout each step of creating and implementing the DBQ portal can increase VA's likelihood of success.

- Strategic engagement with non-VA providers and Veterans Service Organizations ensures input on user needs and expectations. Transparent updates foster trust and promote shared understanding of the portals purpose and value.
- Internal development teams coordinating closely with external stakeholders help to ensure features align with user needs. Communication materials that preview features and explain system benefits help to build anticipation and support adoption.
- Collecting and analyzing user feedback supports refinement of the portal design. Targeted communication and training materials distributed during prototyping and support assessment of potential user understanding and ability to use the portal.
- A coordinated communication strategy will support implementation, including provider registration guidance, live help desk support, training materials, frequently asked questions, and outreach campaigns. To support continuous improvement, VA will institutionalize feedback loops with providers and Veterans.

5 Conclusion

VA's implementation plan for section 306(b) of the Dole Act sets a clear path to modernize DBQ submissions from non-VA providers. By establishing a secure, web-based portal for machine-readable DBQ data, VA aims to streamline claims processing, reduce delays, and improve service delivery for Veterans. This effort reflects a strategic investment in technology, policy alignment, and stakeholder engagement—reinforcing

VA's commitment to delivering timely, accurate benefits decisions. Through continued collaboration, thoughtful communication, and responsible resource stewardship, this initiative will help ensure that Veterans receive the care and benefits they have earned with greater speed, consistency, and confidence.

Department of Veterans Affairs
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6 Appendix A: Notional Top Level Portal User Path
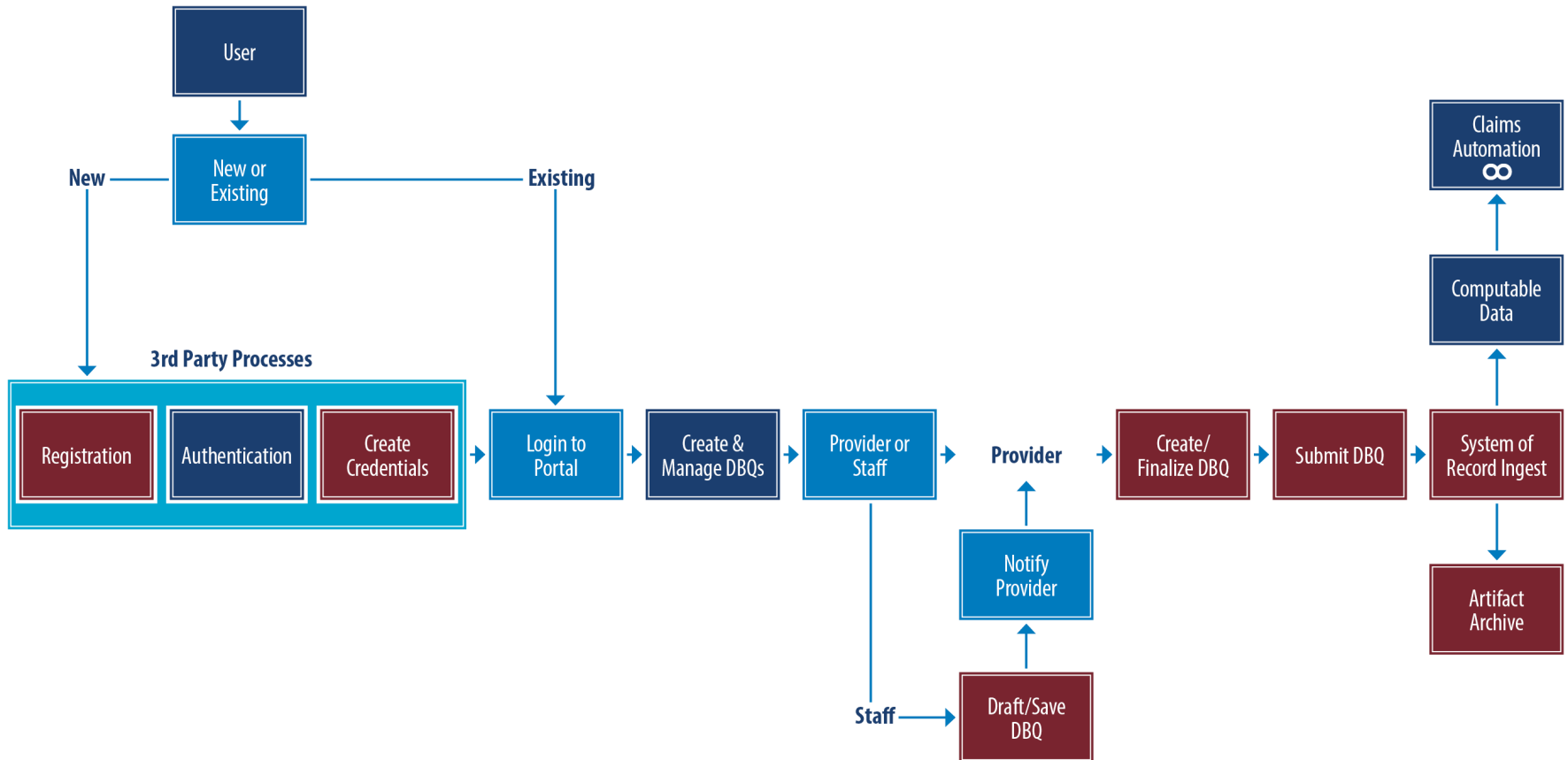
1. **User -** The DBQ Portal workflow begins with user registration for new users or login and verification for existing users.

   a) **New User – 3rd Party Processes**

      i) If the user is **New**, they proceed through **3rd Party Processes** including:

         (1) **Registration** – User provides identifying information and agrees to terms of use.

         (2) **Authentication** – System verifies the user's identity

         (3) This may be best achieved through external 3rd party providers

         (4) **Create Credentials** – User creates secure login credentials for portal access.

   b) **Existing User**

      i) An **Existing User** proceeds directly to portal login.

      ii) 3rd party verifies user access authority and any attribute-linked permissions

2. **Login to Portal** – The user enters the portal using their credentials.

3. **Create & Manage DBQs**

   a) Within the portal, users can **Create & Manage DBQs.**

      i) **Role Assignment**

      ii) Either a **Provider** or **Staff** can work on DBQs.

      iii) **Staff** can **Draft/Save DBQ**.

         (1) Once drafted, the system **Notifies the Provider** DBQ is ready for review.

         (2) **Provider Review and Finalization**

      iv) The **Provider** logs in and proceeds to **Create/Finalize the DBQ**.

4. **Submit DBQ**

      i) Once finalized, the Provider **Submits the DBQ** to the system.

5. **Information System Ingest**

   a) The **Information System** receives the submitted DBQ, which:

      i) **Archives the Artifact** (stores the official version)

      ii) Extracts **Computable Data** for further processing

6. **Claims Automation**

   a) **Computable Data** is then used in automated claims processes.

7 Appendix B: Acronyms

Acronym	Description
ABD	Office of Automated Benefits Delivery
API	Application Programming Interface
ATO	Authority To Operate
DBQ	Disability Benefit Questionnaire
FY	Fiscal Year
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
MDEO	Medical Disability Examination Office
MVP	Minimally Viable Product
OIT	Office of Information and Technology
PDF	Portable Document Format
Q	Quarter
SLA	Service Level Agreements
TBD	To Be Determined
UAT	User Acceptance Testing
UI/UX	User Interface and User Experience
VA	Department of Veterans Affairs
VA	Veterans Benefits Administration
VBMS	Veterans Benefits Management System
VSO	Veterans Service Organization
WBS	Work Breakdown Structure