DISABILITY COMPENSATION VETERAN EXPERIENCE JOURNEY MAP



ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Veterans Experience Office (VEO) partnered with the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) to conduct human-centered design (HCD) activities to better understand the experiences of Veterans going through the disability compensation claims process.

The HCD activities intend to:

- Co-design improvements to the disability compensation claims process that are humancentered while still meeting business requirements.
- Establish measurement at the moments that matter, which will inform short- and longterm process improvements.
- Empower employees with the tools and capabilities to ensure they are successful in creating a positive customer experience for Veterans, their families, and caregivers.
- Define tangible outcomes for Veterans in need of further support.
- The design team applied HCD methodology to capture the Veteran experience with the disability compensation claims process from the Veteran's point of view. Using one-on-one interviews, the team captured stories, sentiments, and individual experiences of Veterans who recently filed a disability claim. Through analysis, synthesis, and discussion, the team then developed this journey map, a Disability Compensation Claim Service Blueprint, and a report of insights and findings, all of which represent the Veterans' and employees' experiences.

WHAT IS HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN?

Human-Centered Design (HCD) is a problem-solving approach that helps make systems and products more responsive to the people who use them. It requires rigorous qualitative research directed toward the goal of deeply understanding the needs, insights, emotions and lived experiences of people. HCD prioritizes customers' needs over system needs in solution development. VA uses HCD to learn from people in the Veteran ecosystem such as Veterans, their families, caregivers, survivors, VA employees, supporters and stakeholders.

HCD involves several key phases of sequential work: discovery, design, delivery and measurement. HCD is also cyclical. Once a design solution is launched, we measure its effectiveness against initial and intended aims, and then iterate based on feedback - thus improving the solution over time. HCD recognizes that people and their needs are dynamic and changing and so our solutions must also be dynamic and changing.

WHAT IS A JOURNEY MAP?

A Journey Map organizes customer feedback and helps provide a holistic understanding of the customer experience. Journey maps can feature customers' interaction points, motivations, attitudes, emotions, and more. Thus, a journey map represents the overall experience collated from a representative sample of customers, rather than a single customer's experience.

A journey map can be used to illustrate the Veteran perspective of an experience. The map highlights bright spots, paint points and moments that matter, which can inform improvements and measurement.

KEY PROJECT INSIGHTS

Insight 1: Transparency and Expectations

A perceived lack of transparency and poor communication results in a mismatch of Veteran expectations of the process and their actual experiences. This leaves Veterans feeling frustrated and lost during the process and ultimately disappointed when receiving their rating decision. Veterans often feel that the lack of transparency is intentional on the part of VA.

Insight 4: Apprehension and Motivation to File

Filing a claim can be an emotionally taxing decision, requiring Veterans to deeply consider how their past service impacts in their long-term future. Veterans cautiously consider filing a claim, forcing them to weigh their motivation to file against their apprehension regarding the claims process

Insight 7: Accessible but Incomplete Information

Veterans often find themselves navigating multiple means of communication from VA. Inconsistent and inconclusive messaging creates confusion for the Veteran in understanding where they are in the claims process.

Insight 2: Fellow Veterans as Influential Advocates and Critics

Veterans see fellow Veterans as their best source of information. A single Veteran experience impacts more than one Veteran; negative experiences may discourage others from filing, while good experiences may inspire more Veterans to submit claims.

Insight 6: Stressful Exam Process

from organizations and individuals.

Insight 3: Gambling for Help

While some Veterans fully trust and respect

Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) for their

knowledge of the process, reaching out to a VSO

can feel like a gamble of a Veteran's time and energy

because beneficial support is not guaranteed. While

many Veterans noted invaluable support from VSOs,

other Veterans struggle to find truly helpful support

Veterans' exam experiences dramatically shape their overall perspective of the claims process. Veterans tend to submit excessive documentation Negative experiences, such as frustrating issues with scheduling their appointment or examiners who are and get frustrated when the documentation they not thorough enough during the exam, can leave Veterans feeling disheartened about the outcome of their claim.

Insight 8: Doubting Decision Letters

submitted still is not enough.

Insight 5: Needle in a Haystack

Veterans are often uncertain what evidence is

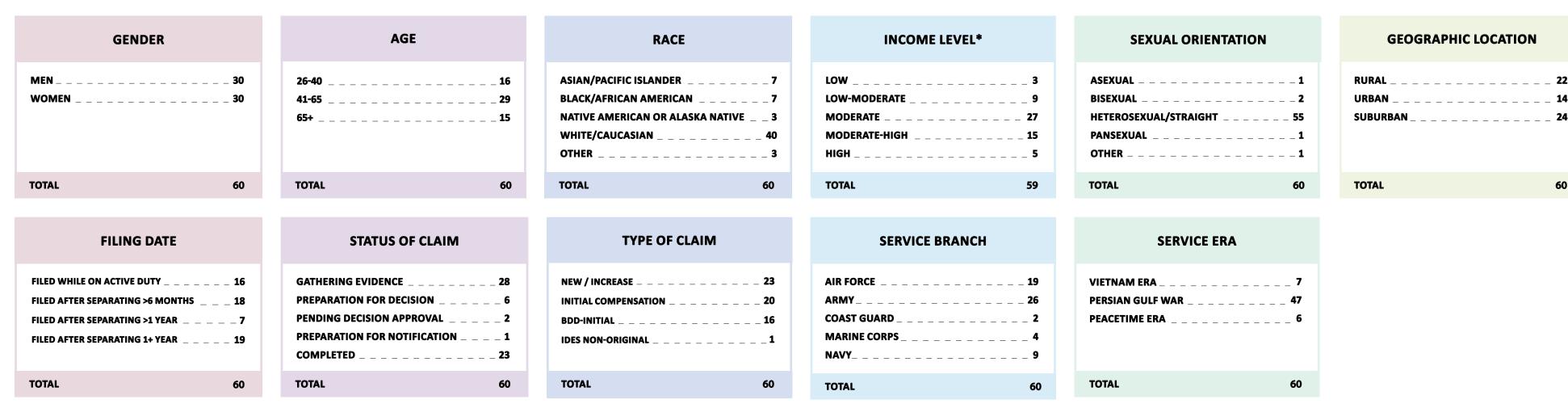
needed to substantiate their claim. As a result,

Receiving a decision letter can be a pleasant surprise or a source of frustration and confusion for Veterans, regardless of the actual decision. Decision letters often do not provide clarity for Veterans on any future steps or how their decision might change in the future.

Insight 9: Trust and Personal Connection

Veterans prefer one-on-one conversations with VA representatives over scripted responses. Veterans often hold on to prior notifications sent by VA because they don't always trust that the future communication with VA representatives will remain consistent with information they have already received.

VETERAN DEMOGRAPHICS INFORMING THIS STUDY



^{*} Data not shared by all Veteran participants



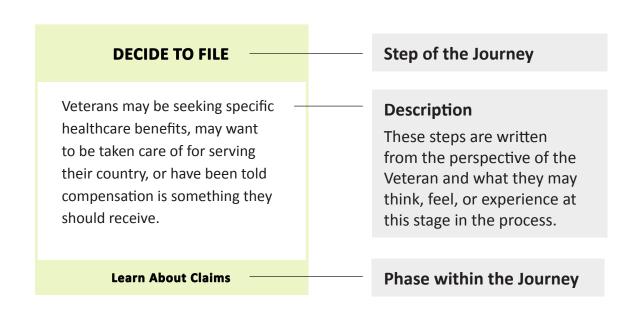
DISABILITY COMPENSATION VETERAN EXPERIENCE

Overall Journey Steps and Phases

This journey map depicts the experience of a Veteran navigating the disability compensation claims process. Acknowledging the disability compensation claims process widely varies for each Veteran, this journey highlights key phases and steps that many Veterans experience.

Phases, steps, and descriptions provide the perspective of the Veteran throughout the non-linear experience. Subsequent pages outline more detail, context, and emotion within each step of the Veteran journey.

HOW TO READ THE JOURNEY MAP



BDD
Benefits Delivery at Discharge

IDES
Integrated Disability Evaluation
System

IED
Improvised Explosive Device
PCP
Primary Care Physician

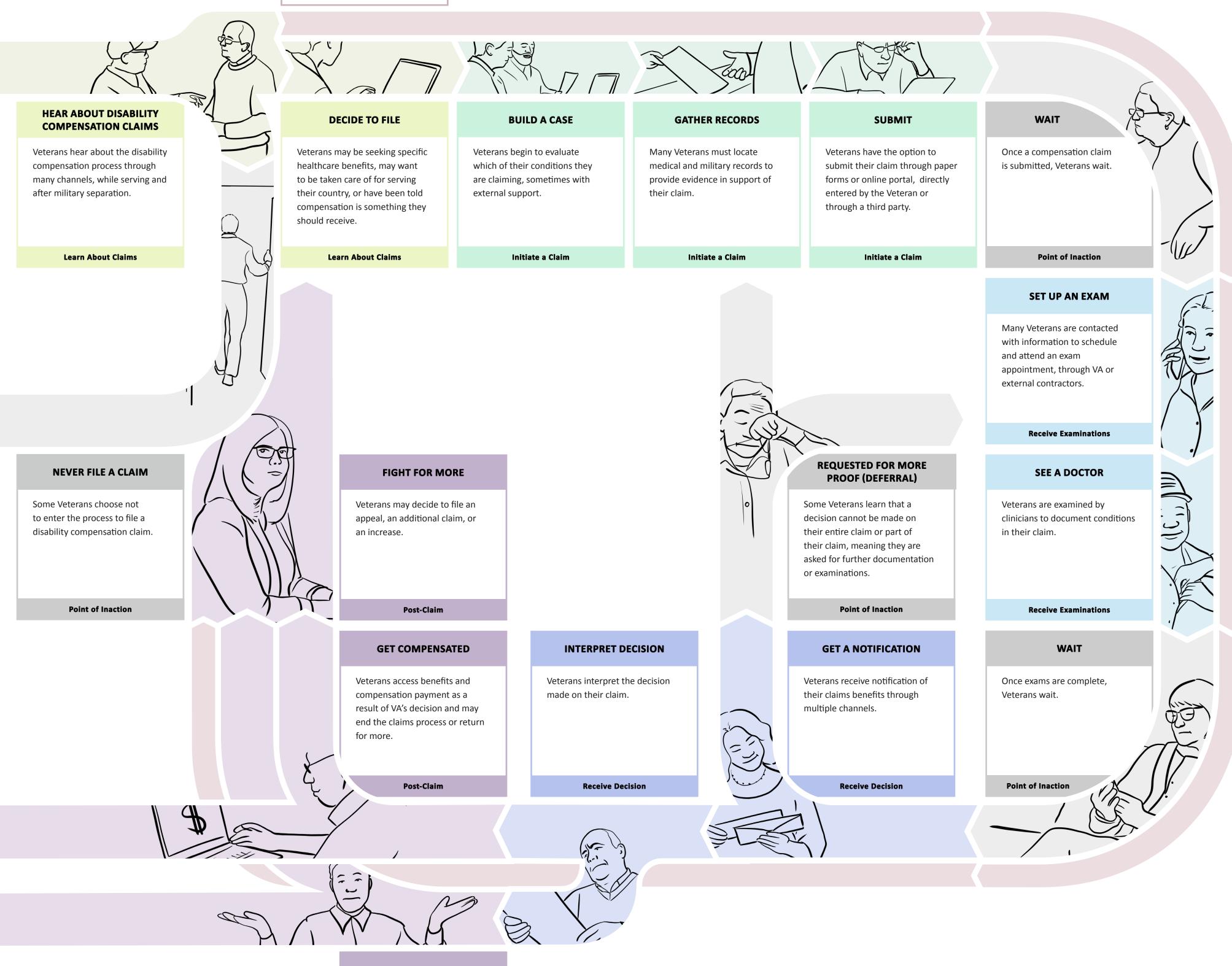
NBDD
Non-Benefits Delivery at Discharge

TAP
Transition Assistance Program
TBI
Traumatic Brain Injury

VA
Veterans Affairs

VSO
Veterans Service Organization

GET SUPPORT Some Veterans seek out support from VSOs, friends, family, or other Veterans once they decide to file a compensation claim.



FEEL DISAPPOINTED

Veterans may receive and accept a less-than-desired outcome.

Post-Claim

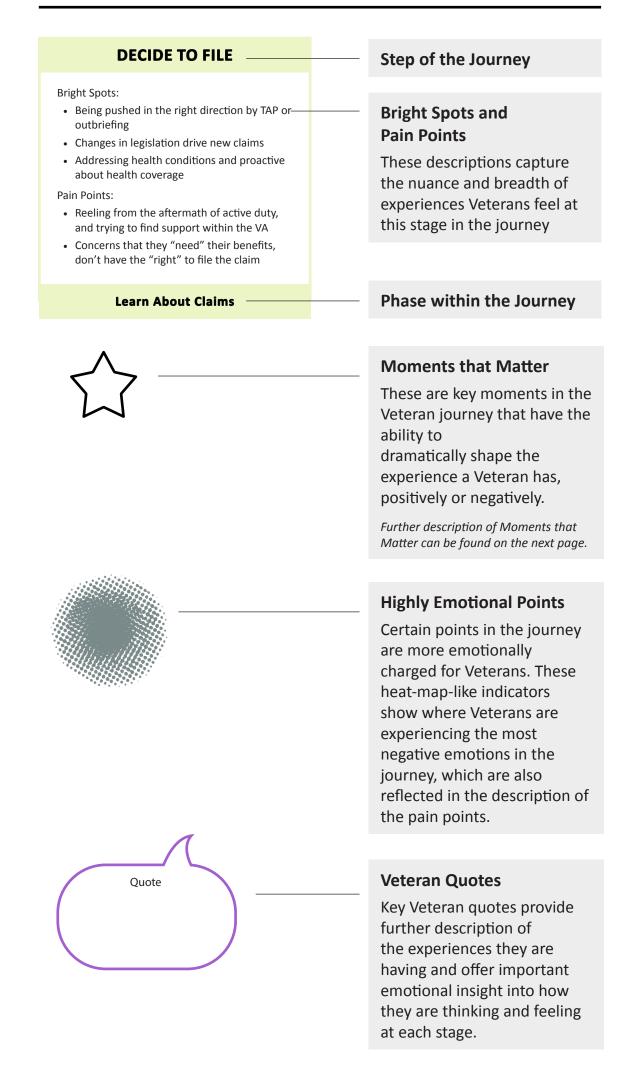


DISABILITY COMPENSATION VETERAN EXPERIENCE

Emotional Journey, Bright Spots and Pain Points

This journey map displays the non-linear nature of the experience in the disability compensation claims process and outlines bright spots (good experiences) and pain points (negative experiences) for each step in the Journey. Quotes also provide direct Veteran feedback and add context to particular experiences.

HOW TO READ THE JOURNEY MAP



ACRONYM KEY Benefits Delivery at Discharge Non-Benefits Delivery at Discharge **IDES TAP** Integrated Disability Evaluation **Transition Assistance Program** System Traumatic Brain Injury Improvised Explosive Device VA Veterans Affairs Primary Care Physician **Veterans Service Organization**

It's almost like folklore how you learn things [about the claims process]. That's not indicative of a good process or model. **HEAR ABOUT DISABILITY COMPENSATION CLAIMS Bright Spots:** Hearing good things from peers/family/friends · Feeling like they earned benefits peers/family/friends **Learn About Claims**

[Getting support] made a huge difference...Was very helpful for [the VSO] to help me where I needed it. [Otherwise] it was like everyone throws you in. 'You have to do this and that.' And that's not the process [because] over the years the process has changed.

 VSO provides valuable experience and expertise in the process Community advice and support help manage expectations Finding the right support can be difficult

 Veteran advocate detrimental to progress • Veteran advocate pushes in an undesired direction

GAIN SUPPORT FROM ADVOCATE

how to do my claim, and there was no one there to help me through it. Like if my feet hurt, I didn't know how to rticulate that. I had been hit by IEDs a few times, so I knew I had

every time I got a prescription that I had to turn in records to someone. I assumed Tricare took care of it. So when I went to submit my claims, there was nothing from my first 8 years in the [service], just a few [records] from combat doctors.

I did all of [my claim] online. I filled out [forms online] when starting process. Then someone called me, and we went from there. There were [also] emails. It was all online. I did get some mail from the VA and had to mail [them] a few pieces of paperwork.

[My experience] was horrendous because I felt like I was begging for communication. felt like I was getting BS responses as to why I don't have exams scheduled. Like, okay, gotcha, but if [the VA] was waiting on medical records in April why am I [still waiting] in August?

I can tell there are multiple people working on multiple things. I figure something will come when it's meant to come, but I don't know what the estimated wait time

already headed to the

appointment [when it got

canceled]...I missed work, and I

was frustrated. [Another time],

they canceled the day before,

so I went to work but had to

submit all this documentation

to get my PTO back.

feeling they want me to

hand them the highlighted documents and do the work

for them. If I don't have that or

don't have a blatant defect,

they don't do anything.

I put all

my procedures and

medications on one page

and gave that to the

doctors and that helped

quite a bit... But one doc

was like, 'That's very good,

but I can't use this.' ...Wish

I knew you can't introduce

new conditions during

your exams.

I don't know

why it takes so long

to get an answer. They say

too long a time...

45 days. Me it seems like

DECIDE TO FILE

• Hearing mixed reviews of the process from

It would be

great if I submitted all

my paperwork and then

spoke with someone who

explains all my ratings. That

way if they say I get 0% I

understand why and I know

how to appeal it.

Bright Spots:

· Learned about the process in TAP, another

I've heard the horror stories of not [filing

claims] or waiting too long. So

I continuously had in the back

of my head, this feeling, 'If I

don't do it now, it's not going

to get done.

FIGHT FOR MORE

• External resources provide support and

• Unaware of how rating could change

• Filing over and over until expiration

Post-Claim

GET COMPENSATED

- out-briefing, or from a peer Changes in legislation provide new
- eligibility opportunities Addressing health conditions and/or considering health coverage options
- Reeling from aftermath of military service,
- and trying to find support within VA • Concerns that they "need" their benefits, don't have the "right" to file the claim

Learn About Claims

I heard a Veteran

say, 'The VA got us; file

ıntil we die." And I'm thinking

and then we get nothing. It

doesn't make sense!

bring clarity

Unclear next steps

Wishing for a do-over

Relief and appreciation

Getting into VA Healthcare system

Fearing money will be taken away

• Unmet Expectations on payment timeline

Post-Claim

Pushed back into the cycle

that really is the [claims] process. File until you die

BUILD A CASE

Initiate a Claim

- Support from VSOs simplified the process
- Feeling confident flying solo
- Pain Points: Facing complicated forms
- Needing specific language
- Needing to prove conditions No response from VA

sourcing records

find what is being requested

Bright Spots:

Pain Points:

INTERPRET DECISION

Decision and rating information clearly noted in VA

Feeling vulnerable or broken because of a high rating

Feeling undervalued because of a low rating

• Decision does not reflect medical challenge

Mystery how percentage is calculated

Dealing with administrative errors

Unclear language and terms in the decision letter

• Frustrated with how compensation impacts other

Receive Decision

[When I got my

lecision] I just felt like [emotional

pause] holy crap there are a lot of

things wrong, and I never felt that

before. I felt like it took me a while

to adapt to it because I realized that

there were things I was ignoring for

a long time and I'm glad it was

• Validated and vindicated by decision

Clear understanding of decision

digital tools

Pain Points:

Records easily available

GATHER RECORDS

Military career provided consistent records

Bright Spots:

SUBMIT CLAIM

 Choice of preferred submission method • Ease of online process for tech savvy Veterans

I did receive letters

asking for additional information.

They give you a timeline of like two

weeks [to submit]. That's crazy! It

takes forever to get a referral

REQUESTED FOR MORE PROOF

[for an appointment].

- Unable to find records or unclear where to
 - Overwhelming array of options
- Huge Veteran lift to gather documentation Experiencing technical issues Unclear responsibilities while Lack of confidence when submitting claim

Initiate a Claim **Initiate a Claim**

SET UP AN EXAM

WAIT

Feeling like things are moving

Accepting and along for the ride

Need to follow up for updates

forward smoothly

Unclear expectations

Bright Spots:

Bright Spots: • Documentation from VA provides all

- preparation information Accommodating schedule and location
- Inconvenient and inconsiderate scheduling
- Stressful long distance travel
- · Forced to miss work or family obligations
- Punished for rescheduling Redundant exams

Receive Examinations

Feel the process is moving forward

Comfortable with practitioner and

sharing information

SEE A DOCTOR

- **Bright Spots:**
- Some closure Pain Points:
- Frustrated with more tasks from VA
- Caught in an unending cycle Unclear final outcome
- Examiners not diagnosing issues as expected or at all

Pain Points:

- Examiner poor bedside manner Feeling like the exam did not investigate the
- core issue • Unclear about which issue the exam is actually for
- Unable to introduce new issues in exams • Fear of different exam results leading to lower
- rating from existing benefits

GET A NOTIFICATION

- Receiving notification of benefits
- communication channels Ability to track case claims through
- digital tools
- Pain Points:
- Unsure what mode to expect their decision

multiple times through multiple

- Learning about their rating in a way other
- than the decision letter
- Receiving money before notice of decision

Receive Decision

WAIT

Receive Examinations

- Bright Spots: Sensing progress is better than expected
- Examinations feel like a waste of time
- No clear next steps after examination
- Need to check daily, without status updates
- Process and progress feel on pause Unknown status

Really, I didn't

I was expecting to get a letter or email or that when I log into the website, I'll see something that verifies my rating.

have the time to continue these claims. They take so much time. They want you to go to a lot of doctors and do a lot of things. But it's very hard when I have to work to survive, I don't have time for this.

FEEL DISAPPOINTED

[After getting

denied] I feel like the rusty

old wheel that got thrown in

the trunk. If you are no longer

active duty, you are trash.

- Getting into VA Healthcare system
- Pain Points:
- Defeated by the decision

Post-Claim

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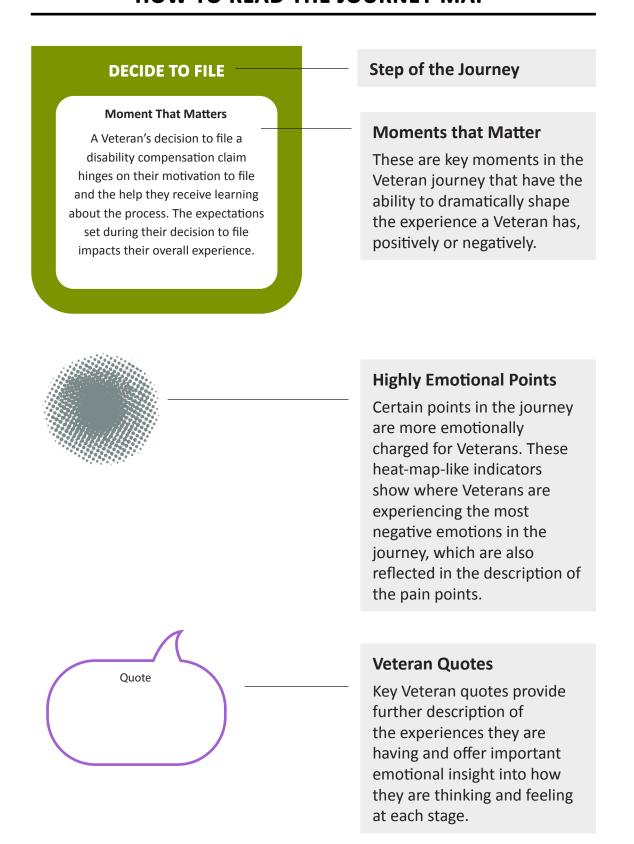


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Moments That Matter

This journey map displays the non-linear nature of the experience in the disability compensation claims process and outlines seven key moments that can make or break the experience for Veterans. The moments that matter within the Veteran journey are key intervention points with the potential for highest impact or influence on the overall experience.

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