**781 Interview**

**Participant #1, 8/27/2018**

Female.

1.    Tell me a little about your military service. In which branch of the military did you serve and when?  
U.S. Air Force; 4/2003- 4/2013. Air National Guard; 2013 - 2016.

2.    What VA Benefits have you applied for in the past?   
Disability benefits; education benefits; VA Home Loan.

3.    Have you applied for PTSD disability benefits? Yes.

4.    How would you rate your comfort level and experience with technology? Comfortable.

5.    Which of the following three age brackets best categorizes your age:

\_\_\_ 18-30; \_\_\_ 31-50; \_\_\_ 50+. 31-50

6.    Where you live, if you are comfortable sharing (State, City optional)? Scottsdale, AZ

**Overall Experience**

1.    What did you think about the overall process of applying for PTSD benefits?   
It was ok. I didn't do it on my own. Went to VA Regional Office. Went in as a walk-in and was helped filling it out. It was a paper form. Completed it that day. Took maybe about 30 minutes.

2.    Do you remember whether you completed Form 0781 or 0781a?   
Don't remember which. Used whichever form you use when you're still active duty. It was the "a" version.

3.    Please walk me through the process you used to gather information and submit your claim.   
"Went in and I believe I had a copy of my health records. I went in and sat down with the guy. He looked through all my records and he told me what I could file disability for.

Must have called ahead of time [to figure out what to bring] - I was new to the area so I would have needed to get the address."

a.    What steps did you take?

b.    How did you go about getting all of the information you needed for the form?   
Had all of the information. I also applied for benefits online - one was for disability and one was to add my dependents to the disability compensation. It was a lot easier to do it online. It was really quick. I didn't need to upload any documents; I just said what the claim was for and the dates when it happened. It lets you know where everything is in the process. When you go to the appointments, it keeps track. They give you an estimate of how long it will take.

c.     What was it like to fill out the questions?

d.    How long did it take to fill out the form?

e.    Did you complete the form on paper or through eBenefits, or did a VSO submit it on your behalf?

4.    Did you include one or more buddy statements or lay statements   
It asked questions like whether I'd told anyone. There were things that they review, they look at your EPR [evaluation performance report] and see if your ratings are lower. They told me to put who I was friends with at the time and they can vouch for behavior changes.

a.    If yes, did you complete the form yourself, or was it completed by another on your behalf, or both?

b.    If no, were you aware that you had the option of submitting one?

Impressions

5.         What part of the claim submission process went smoothly?   
I can't really remember. There was an intial form that I filled out. That part was easy. [The Intent to File form]

6.         What challenges did you face as you completed the claim process?   
"I wasn't really sure about a lot of it. I didn't know a lot about it beforehand. I wasn't sure where to go and where to take the paperwork. Now that it's online, it will be easier. You can even ask questions online. That's a lot easier than filling the paper form.

The harder part, the Dr's appointments are hard. It can take so long to get appointments and they're so spread out.

When I went in with my forms, the guy told me I was lucky that I had the active duty forms. If I had waited, it could have taken up to 2 years with the backlog they have. "

7.         What thoughts did you have and what feelings did you experience as you went through each step of the claim process?   
I didn't like that I had to talk to someone about the trauma. I didn't like that, I wasn't expecting it. It was hard to have it come up that I had to write about it. With trauma, it's best to know ahead of time that you're going to have to write about it.

8.         Have you submitted other disability claim applications? If so, were there any differences between applying for other claims and applying for PTSD claims?

Opportunities for Improvement

9.         What recommendations do you have for improvements to either the PTSD claim process or the PTSD form?   
"Whenever I filled it out, it was unclear if they wanted you to write what happened or if you were supposed to write when it happened. Writing about it was the hardest part and I didn't know I was going to have to do it. The form should say what they're expecting you to write. It should explain more about exactly what they want you to write down.

And it would be helpful if they let you know ahead of time that was something you'd have to do. Maybe if they put it on the Intent to File - ""If you're filing for PTSD, be prepared to write something about the dates it happened."" "

10.     Do you remember feeling that there were any questions or sections on the form that needed more explanation or clarification?