

Supporting Statement for VA Form 21-0985,
Decision Ready Claims (DRC) Exam Review

2900-NEW

A.JUSTIFICATION:

- 1. Explain the circumstances that make the collection of information necessary. Identify legal or administrative requirements that necessitate the collection of information.**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), through its Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), administers an integrated program of benefits and services, established by law, for veterans, service personnel and their survivors. As part of VA's continued efforts to improve veterans' experience with the disability claims process, VA has developed the Decision Ready Claims (DRC) initiative – designed to accelerate the processing of disability compensation claims. Information is requested by this form in order to support the pre-claim evidence gathering process, which will include requesting a contract examination when a private-use disability benefits questionnaire (DBQ) or sufficient medical evidence cannot be obtained to substantiate the claim.

The adjudicative components of the DRC initiative are governed by 38 U.S.C. 501 which provides the Secretary authority to prescribe all rules and regulations which are necessary or appropriate to carry out the laws administered by the Department and are consistent with those laws.

- 2. Indicate how, by whom, and for what purposes the information is to be used; indicate actual use the agency has made of the information received from current collection.**

VA Form 21-0985 will be used to identify the condition(s) that a veteran would like VA to schedule a contract examination for in support of his/her Decision Ready Claim.

- 3. Describe whether, and to what extent, the collection of information involves the use of automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology, e.g. permitting electronic submission of responses, and the basis for the decision for adopting this means of collection. Also describe any consideration of using information technology to reduce burden.**

VA Form 21-0985 will be available on the One-VA web site in a fillable electronic format. VBA will host this form on a secure server and does not currently have the technology in place to allow for the complete submission of the form. Validation edits will be performed to assure data integrity. There currently is no utility process in place that will allow the data submitted on the form to be incorporated with an existing centralized legacy database.

- 4. Describe efforts to identify duplication. Show specifically why any similar information already available cannot be used or modified for use for the purposes described in Item 2 above.**

Program reviews were conducted to identify potential areas of duplication; however, none were found to exist. There is no known Department or Agency which maintains the necessary information, nor is it available from other sources within our Department.

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5. If the collection of information impacts small businesses or other small entities, describe any methods used to minimize burden.

The collection of information does not involve small businesses or entities.

6. Describe the consequences to Federal program or policy activities if the collection is not conducted or is conducted less frequently as well as any technical or legal obstacles to reducing burden.

Without the information solicited by this form, VA is unable to identify the condition(s) the veteran would like to have an examination scheduled for in support of the Decision Ready Claim. This will ultimately result in the need for additional evidence gathering upon receipt of the claim and VA will be unable to rate upon receipt.

7. Explain any special circumstances that would cause an information collection to be conducted more often than quarterly or require respondents to prepare written responses to a collection of information in fewer than 30 days after receipt of it; submit more than an original and two copies of any document; retain records, other than health, medical, government contract, grant-in-aid, or tax records for more than three years; in connection with a statistical survey that is not designed to produce valid and reliable results that can be generalized to the universe of study and require the use of a statistical data classification that has not been reviewed and approved by OMB.

There is no special circumstance requiring collection in a manner inconsistent with 5 CFR 1320.6 guidelines.

8. A. If applicable, provide a copy and identify the date and page number of publication in the Federal Register of the sponsor's notice, required by 5 CFR 1320.8(d), soliciting comments on the information collection prior to submission to OMB. Summarize public comments received in response to that notice and describe actions taken by the sponsor in responses to these comments. Specifically address comments received on cost and hour burden.

The Department notice was published in the Federal Register on July 26, 2017, Volume 82, No. 142, page 34748. One comment was received in response to this notice.

Comment:

A comment was received from Mr. William Rosenau from County Veterans Service Officers Association of WI. My only comment would be there may be some confusion on which dates to reflect in block 8, "APPROXIMATE DATE DISABILITY(IES) BEGAN OR WORSENERD". In the event of a presumptive condition or other exposure related contentions, the disability may appear years, event decades after the exposure. The examples given seem to support the VA is looking for the approximate date of the exposure itself, rather than the date of the manifestation of symptoms or the diagnosis. If there are

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instructions for the form or in the accompanying legislation, this point may need clarification. (or of course, that point could well be ironed out in the VA's implementation policy in the M21-1)

Response:

Block 8 of VA Form 21-0985 reads "APPROXIMATE DATE DISABILITY(IES) BEGAN OR WORSENERD." It is medically understood that presumptive conditions often manifest long after the exposure event. VA understands the Veteran, in most cases, will not know the date of exposure. If the Veteran is claiming service connection for a presumptive condition, he or she should include, in block 8, the date the disability or manifestation of symptoms began, not the date of the exposure. It is important to know when the condition began as this does impact adjudicative determinations.

9. Explain any decision to provide any payment or gift to respondents, other than remuneration of contractors or grantees.

No payments or gifts to respondents have been made under this collection of information.

10. Describe any assurance of privacy to the extent permitted by law provided to respondents and the basis for the assurance in statute, regulation, or agency policy.

The records are maintained in the appropriate Privacy Act System of Records identified as "Compensation, Pension, Education, and Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Records-VA (58VA21/22/28)," published at 74 FR 29275 on June 19, 2009, and last amended at 77 FR 42593 (July 19, 2012).

11. Provide additional justification for any questions of a sensitive nature (Information that, with a reasonable degree of medical certainty, is likely to have a serious adverse effect on an individual's mental or physical health if revealed to him or her), such as sexual behavior and attitudes, religious beliefs, and other matters that are commonly considered private; include specific uses to be made of the information, the explanation to be given to persons from whom the information is requested, and any steps to be taken to obtain their consent.

There are no questions of a sensitive nature.

12. Estimate of the hour burden of the collection of information:

a. Number of Respondents is estimated at 10,000 per year.

b. Frequency of Response is one time.

c. Annual burden hours are 2,500 hours.

d. The estimated completion time for each form is as follows with an average of 15 minutes.

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e. The respondent population for VA Form 21-0985 is composed of individuals who are applying for disability compensation benefits through the Decision Ready Claim initiative. VA cannot make further assumptions about the population of respondents because of the variability of factors such as the educational background and wage potential of respondents. Therefore, VBA used general wage data to estimate the respondents' costs associated with completing the information collection.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) gathers information on full-time wage and salary workers. According to the latest available BLS data, the mean weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers are \$954.40. Assuming a forty (40) hour work week, the mean hourly wage is \$23.86 based on the BLS wage code – “00-0000 All Occupations.” This information was taken from the following website:
(http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm#00-0000, May 2016).

Legally, respondents may not pay a person or business for assistance in completing the information collection. Therefore, there are no expected overhead costs for completing the information collection. VBA estimates the total cost to all respondents to be \$59,650 (2,500 burden hours x \$23.86 per hour).

13. Provide an estimate of the total annual cost burden to respondents or record-keepers resulting from the collection of information. (Do not include the cost of any hour burden shown in Items 12 and 14).

This submission does not involve any recordkeeping costs.

14. Provide estimates of annual cost to the Federal Government. Also, provide a description of the method used to estimate cost, which should include quantification of hours, operation expenses (such as equipment, overhead, printing, and support staff), and any other expense that would not have been incurred without this collection of information. Agencies also may aggregate cost estimates from Items 12, 13, and 14 in a single table.

Estimated Costs to the Federal Government:

Grade	Step	Burden Time	Fraction of Hour	Hourly Rate	Cost Per Response	Total Responses	Total
5	3	5	0.08	\$14.59	1.216	1,552	\$ 1,886.97
Overhead at 100% Salary							\$ 1,886.97
7	3	30	0.50	\$18.07	9.035	1,552	\$ 14,022.32
Overhead at 100% Salary							\$ 14,022.32
9	3	30	0.50	\$22.11	11.055	1,552	\$ 17,157.36
Overhead at 100% Salary							\$ 17,157.36

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Processing / Analyzing Costs	\$ 66,133.31
Printing and Production Cost	\$ 734.81
Total Cost to Government	\$ 66,868.12

Overhead costs are 100% of salary and are same as the wage listed above and the amounts are included in the total.

Note: The hourly wage information above is based on the hourly 2017 General Schedule (Base) Pay (https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/salaries-wages/salary-tables/pdf/2017/GS_h.pdf). This rate does not include any locality adjustment as applicable.

The processing time estimates above are based on the actual amount of time employees of each grade level spend to process to completion a claim received on this form. The within-grade step (3) of each employee represents the average experience of employees within each grade.

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15. Explain the reason for any burden hour changes since the last submission.

This is a new information collection.

16. For collections of information whose results will be published, outline plans for tabulation and publication. Address any complex analytical techniques that will be used. Provide the time schedule for the entire project, including beginning and ending dates of the collection of information, completion of report, publication dates, and other actions.

The information collection is not for publication or tabulation use.

17. If seeking approval to omit the expiration date for OMB approval of the information collection, explain the reasons that display would be inappropriate.

We are not seeking approval to omit the expiration date for OMB approval.

18. Explain each exception to the certification statement identified in Item 19, "Certification for Paperwork Reduction Act Submissions," of OMB 83-I.

This submission does not contain any exceptions to the certification statement.

B. Collection of Information Employing Statistical Methods

No statistical methods are used in this data collection.