



ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON DISABILITY COMPENSATION

**Office of Disability and Medical Assessment (DMA)
Veterans Health Administration**

Dr. Gerald Cross, Chief Officer

October 20, 2014





Agenda

- 1. DMA overview**
- 2. Workload & Quality**
- 3. DBQ issues**
- 4. How DMA works with VBA**
- 5. How DMA works with DoD**
- 6. Strategic Issues & Discussion**





What is DMA anyway?

Organization created in 2011 by reorganizing existing staff

- Replaced the Compensation and Pension Examination Program and Disability Examination Management Office
- Multi-disciplinary expertise in disability exams and the benefits claims process
- One-stop shop for responding to clinical, operational, analytical, and policy and program related issues involving disability exams
- Establishment of the Office of Disability and Medical Assessment fulfills promises made to veterans and service members

The DMA Mission Is simple and clear:

- to support and to provide training for C&P field examiners
- support our colleagues in VBA and the Board
- and most *importantly* ... provide a better experience to the veteran and to the service member.



VHA Workload

Veterans Health Administration Disability Examination Program Statistics, FY11-FY14 (as of 3 Sep 14).

	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014
Total VBA 2507 Exam Requests Received by VHA	802,788	981,703	977,033	1,058,795
Total VHA Templates/DBQs completed by VHA to support VBA 2507 exam requests to VHA	1,132,850	1,932,134	2,318,006	2,494,132
# VHA Templates (DBQs) Completed by VHA Clinicians	1,132,850	1,932,134	2,139,430	2,172,977
# Templates (DBQs) Completed by VHA DEM Contractors	*	**	178,576	321,155
Total Veterans Served by VHA	688,823	784,995	816,227	845,909
# Veterans Served by VHA DEM Contractors (subset of above)	*	14,662	54,364	87,119



Timeliness and Quality



- Why be 'timely' if exams are questionable.
- DMA provides performance standard guidelines for VA, DoD; links performance and standards by location; provides assistance to low performers
- Timeliness (Historical Best for both C&P and IDES)
 - Jan. 2011, national average for C&P was 38 days and IDES exams exceeded 70 days
 - national standard: C&P exams is 30 days or less; 45 days or less for IDES.
 - Sept timeliness was 25 days.
 - FY14 (Oct 13 through Jul 14) timeliness was 25 days.
- Here are the monthly values

10/2013	11/2013	12/2013	1/2014	2/2014	3/2014	4/2014	5/2014	6/2014	7/2014	8/2014	9/2014	FYTD
26	23	24	24	21	22	24	26	27	25	23	24	24





Quality Assurance

- Site Visit Assessments
 - Assess effectiveness of current program practices and procedures, identify operation issues and best practices and make recommendations
- Audit Review
 - all exam types, **includes VHA contractor exams**
 - **~1,000** cases monthly
- Registration
 - **8,207** Registered **VHA** disability examiners
- Proposed Program of Clinical Review
 - Developing a C&P peer review program



Training Efforts

- DMA training initiatives strengthen and facilitate the disability examination process to support field C&P programs and the IDES.
 - Addresses Identified Training Needs
- Disability Examiner Certification & Training
- On-line training modules are under continuous revision and posted on the Talent Management System (TMS)

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Disability Benefits Questionnaires (DBQs)

With Disability Benefits Questionnaires (DBQs) Veterans now have more control over the disability claims process. Veterans have the option of visiting a private health care provider instead of a VA facility to complete their disability evaluation form.



Veterans can have their providers fill out any of the more than [70 DBQs](#) that are appropriate for their conditions and submit them to us. It's that easy!

See our instruction pages to help you with the process. I am a [Veteran](#) - [VSO](#) - [Health Care Provider](#).

Where can I see a listing of the Questionnaires?

Visit our [DBQ List by Form Name](#) or [DBQ List by Symptom](#) pages to see the available forms.

Who fills them out?

For VA exams, a VA clinician will fill out the DBQ. If being seen by a private provider, have them complete the DBQ and submit it to us either by [Regional Office Fax Numbers](#) or [mail](#).

Where can I get more information?

See our [DBQ Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more information. You can also call us at 1-800-827-1000 or [Ask us a Question](#).

DBQs also help support VA's Fully Developed Claims (FDC) Program. DBQs are valuable for claims processing because they provide medical information that is directly relevant to determining a disability rating. When submitted with a [fully developed claim](#), DBQs ensure VA's rating specialists have precisely the information they need to start processing the claim.

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RESOURCES

- Advisor Program
- Agent and Attorney Fee Coordinators
- Appeals
- Benefits A-Z
- Benefits Summary Materials



What is a DBQ? ★ ★ ★ ★

- Disability Benefit Questionnaires (DBQs): documentation tool to provide medical evidence for VA disability claims adjudication.
 - VHA's policies are set out in VHA Directive 2013-002, *Documentation of Medical Evidence for Disability Evaluation Purposes*, January 14, 2013.
- DBQs are completed by C&P disability examiners based on information gathered during a disability evaluation if requested by VBA to support a claim for VA disability benefits.
- Valuable for claims processing; provide medical information that is directly relevant to disability rating determination
- Veterans have option of using private provider to complete DBQ
- Support VA's Fully Developed Claims (FDC) Program



Origin of DBQs

- VBA contest— Pittsburgh proposed DBQs to improve documentation and ease of rating (Aug 2009)
- Designed for VBA raters, not for examiners
- Reduced amount of text
 - check-the-box approach
- More than 80 DBQs



Top 15 C&P DBQs Used

<u>Rank</u>	<u>DBQ Template</u>	<u># Completed</u>
1	DBQ MEDICAL OPINION	199,532
2	DBQ AUDIO HEARING LOSS AND TINNITUS	170,723
3	DBQ MUSC BACK (THORACOLUMBAR SPINE)	134,087
4	DBQ MUSC KNEE & LOWER LEG	119,090
5	DBQ PSYCH PTSD INITIAL	83,408
6	DBQ PSYCH MENTAL DISORDERS	62,572
7	DBQ MUSC SHOULDER & ARM	59,605
8	DBQ NEURO HEADACHES	54,584
9	DBQ PSYCH PTSD REVIEW	50,782
10	DBQ DERM SCARS	50,431
11	DBQ MUSC ANKLE	47,930
12	DBQ DERM SKIN	43,800
13	DBQ ENDO DIABETES MELLITUS	40,521
14	DBQ MUSC NECK (CERVICAL SPINE)	40,496
15	DBQ NEURO PERIPHERAL NERVES	36,447



Completing DBQs

- Certain VHA treating providers are encouraged to complete in full or in part any DBQs they can for diagnosed conditions their Veteran patients may have.
- Many DBQ questions refer to disabling effects rather than medical management; these questions can usually be adequately addressed by treating providers.
- Completion of a DBQ in full or in part for Veteran patients can assist them in getting the benefits they deserve as quickly as possible.



“No Wrong Door”

- Means that VA should do everything necessary to assist the Veteran. A “no wrong door” philosophy should be encouraged to accommodate Veterans bringing a DBQ to a VHA facility.
- A Veteran’s treating provider completing a DBQ in full or in part for the Veteran may support VA’s initiatives for a more timely disability benefits claims adjudication process.
- If a VHA treating provider does not feel confident in completing a DBQ, the provider should engage the Veteran in explaining why he or she cannot complete the DBQ.
- The provider or staff should provide the Veteran with a “warm hand-off” to the C&P clinic.



DBQ Referral Clinic

- **Why is VHA establishing “DBQ Referral Clinics”?**
 - Increased numbers of veterans bringing DBQs to VHA Primary Care Providers (PCPs) or Specially Providers (SPs)
 - **Don’t disadvantage other veterans also seeing their PCPs**
 - Efficient utilization of the PCPs or SPs time by allowing them to treat patients versus completing the DBQ forms
 - Ensure veterans are assisted with DBQs in a timely manner
 - No “wrong door” approach – if the VHA PCP can’t complete the DBQ, there is an alternate way to take care of the veteran’s needs
 - **Veteran’s time** is valuable also
 - Ensure the veterans DBQs are **completed correctly** by certified and trained practitioners to avoid potential delays
 - Supports VBA’s Fully Developed Claims (FDC) process

