



CATHOLIC WAR VETERANS

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National Service Report May 2018

Your Excellency Bishop Higgins, National Chaplain Rev Msgr Edward Coyle, National Commander Frank Kowalski., National Board of Officers, Department Commanders, Past National Commanders, and Past National Chaplains and membership present.

Greetings as your National Service Officer our duties are always never ending. We have been pretty busy with the new VA updated claims system(Public Law 115-55 August 2017); they have two new systems that have just been started. The first one is Decision Ready Claim (DRC) which they claim they will process your claim in 30 day or less. As part of VA's ongoing efforts to modernize and improve Veterans' experience with the disability claims process, VA unveiled its latest enhancements to the Decision Ready Claims program, which will expand the pool of Veterans, surviving spouses and service members eligible to participate in the program. In addition to claims for increased disability compensation (commonly known as claims for increase), Veterans will now be able to file certain claims for direct service connection, presumptive service connection and secondary service connection. Additionally, surviving spouses will be able to file certain claims for [Dependency and Indemnity Compensation](#), and transitioning service members will be able to file [pre-discharge claims](#) less than 90 days from leaving the military. Veterans who choose to submit their claim under the program can expect to receive a decision within 30 days from the time VA receives the claim.

To file under DRC, Veterans must work with an accredited Veteran Service Organization representative, who will ensure all supporting evidence — such as medical exams, military service records, etc. — is included with the claim submission. This advance preparation by the VSOs allows claims to be assigned immediately to claims processors for a quick decision.

Second System: On November 2, 2017, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) rolled out RAMP, the first opportunity for veterans to enter the [new appeals process](#) outlined in the [Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017](#).

The Act, signed into law on August 23, 2017, will not take full effect until February 2019. But the new program – RAMP, which stands for Rapid Appeals Modernization Program – will allow veterans currently appealing their claims to participate in *some, but (importantly) not all* parts of the new appeals system.

After the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017 became law, VA immediately began the 18-month implementation of the new process. The new system is intended to streamline the VA's current appeals process (now referred to by VA as the "legacy" appeals process), which has received ample criticism for its inefficiency and excessive wait-times. By February 2019, all appeals should be processed under the new system. For now, though, veterans who want to appeal a VA decision can choose to remain in the legacy appeals process or participate in RAMP.

- Legacy appeals process: the current VA appeals process
- All veterans who have already filed appeals are participating in this process. Veterans who are about to submit an appeal (up until February 2019) will be placed in this process *unless* they choose to participate in RAMP.
- The new appeals process (a.k.a. the new law, the Act, the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017): the new, three-lane appeals process that will not take full effect until February 2019 at the earliest.
- [You can read all about how the new process will work and see it in visual form on this webpage.](#)

- RAMP (a.k.a. Rapid Appeals Modernization Program): the in-between, *optional* appeals process that allows veterans filing their *first* appeal to participate in two out of three of the “lanes” that will make up the new appeals system

HOW DOES RAMP WORK?

Participation in RAMP is voluntary. But veterans who participate in RAMP will not be able to return to the legacy appeals process. In other words, you can opt in to the new appeals process but you cannot opt out.

Veterans who submitted a claim and have been denied (for the first time) by VA can choose participate in RAMP. The program allows participants to have their decisions reviewed in the Higher-Level or Supplemental Claim review lanes outlined in the law.

The Higher-Level review lane allows a higher-up VA official to review and potentially overturn previous decisions based on a difference of opinion, or return it for correction. But veterans cannot submit new evidence to be reviewed.

The Supplemental Claim Lane allows veterans to submit new evidence in support of their claim. This is the only lane in which VA has a duty to assist veterans in finding or obtaining evidence.

Veterans participating in RAMP will NOT be able to use the third lane in the new appeals process, meaning they cannot submit their claims directly to the Board of Veterans Appeals (The Board or BVA).

IMPORTANT: If a veteran's claim is again denied during their participation in RAMP (by the Higher-Level review or Supplemental Claim lane), **they will only be able to appeal to the Board of Veterans' Appeals after February 2019, once the new appeals process is in full effect.**

SHOULD I PARTICIPATE IN RAMP?

According to VA, veterans can expect to receive a review of VA's initial decision on their claim faster in RAMP than in the legacy appeals process.

However, veterans should fully consider that participating in RAMP means:

- not being able to appeal to the Board until at least February 2019.
- not being able to take their claim directly to the Board of Veterans Appeals.
- never going back to the legacy appeals process.

On another note we have been busy also with just working on claims and our service officers training. Present VA regulations require that we train our service officers ever 5year as a minimum in order for them to keep their accreditation.

God Bless


Jose M. Garcia
National Service Officer

Catholic War Veterans of USA Inc.