



Highlights of [GAO-03-282](#), a report to the Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Veterans' Affairs, United States Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, asked GAO to assist the Committee in its oversight of the Veterans Benefits Administration's (VBA) efforts to improve compensation and pension claims processing. As part of this effort, GAO assessed (1) whether VBA's key timeliness measure clearly reflects its performance and (2) whether it has adequate data to measure the timeliness of its newly created specialized claims processing teams.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Veterans Benefits Administration establish claims processing timeliness goals for its three main disability programs, incorporate these goals into VA's strategic plan and annual performance plan, and report its progress in meeting these goals in its annual performance report.

VA concurred in principle with GAO's recommendation. VA provided additional information to clarify the possible timeframe for implementing timeliness measures and goals by program.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-282.

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Cynthia Bascetta at (202) 512-7101 or bascetta@gao.gov.

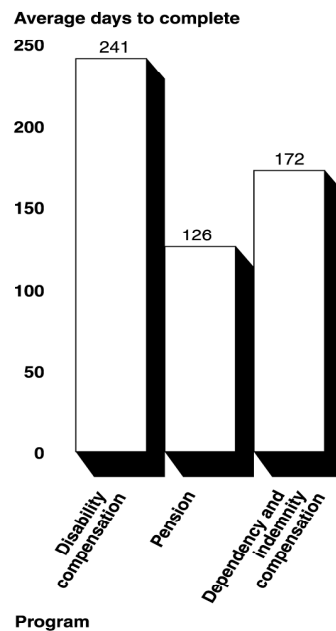
VETERANS' BENEFITS

Claims Processing Timeliness Performance Measures Could Be Improved

What GAO Found

VBA's key claims processing timeliness measure does not clearly reflect how quickly it decides claims by veterans and their families for disability compensation, pension, and dependency and indemnity compensation benefits. Although each program has its own purpose and eligibility requirements, VBA does not set a separate timeliness goal for each in its annual performance plan. This obscures the significant differences in the time required to complete decisions under each program. Fiscal year 2002 timeliness, using VBA's measure, was 223 days; however, disability compensation decisions took significantly longer than decisions under the other two programs. A disability compensation decision requires more evidence, in part because VBA must determine that each claimed disability is related to the veteran's military service.

Time to Complete VBA Compensation and Pension Claims, Fiscal Year 2002, by Program



Source: Veterans Benefits Administration.

VBA does not yet have adequate data to measure the timeliness of its new specialized regional office claims processing teams but is working to improve its data. VBA's inventory management system, which allows it to report and analyze teams' timeliness, relies on an existing information system that does not provide timeliness data on all cases. VBA is acting to improve the completeness of the data in the existing system. Meanwhile, VBA is deploying new software that it expects should enable it to capture more complete and accurate data. VBA expects to deploy this new software at all regional offices by October 2003.