

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-107510](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, Committee on Veterans' Affairs, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

In fiscal year 2023, VBA processed over 2.2 million claims for disability compensation and provided about \$136 billion in benefits to veterans with service-connected disabilities.

VBA provides training each year to thousands of claims processors. Training is particularly important as VBA hires more staff and implements new initiatives. VA has been on GAO's High-Risk List since 2003 due in part to challenges with managing disability claims workloads.

This statement discusses the status of recommendations from GAO's June 2021 report ([GAO-21-348](#)) that compared VBA's training program for claims processors with leading practices for training in the federal government.

What GAO Recommends

GAO's June 2021 report made 10 recommendations to incorporate leading practices for training. VA agreed with these recommendations and has addressed six, but four have not yet been fully implemented.

Continued efforts by VBA to plan and evaluate its training program, in line with GAO's recommendations, and sustained attention to designing and implementing training would help claims processors better serve veterans with disabilities. Additionally, VBA would have greater assurance that its workforce has the necessary skills to process disability claims efficiently and effectively.

View [GAO-24-107510](#). For more information, contact Elizabeth H. Curda at (202) 512-7215 or curdae@gao.gov.

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VA DISABILITY BENEFITS

Training for Claims Processors Needs to Be Enhanced

What GAO Found

In a June 2021 report, GAO found that the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) had not applied many leading practices for federal training efforts for its program to train new and experienced disability claims processors. Training is a key strategy to help ensure claims processors have the needed skills to make quality decisions on veterans' claims. GAO made 10 recommendations related to design, implementation, planning, and evaluation of VBA's training program. VBA has addressed six recommendations as of June 2024, but work remains to fully address those related to planning and evaluation.

- **Design.** VBA has taken steps to fully implement GAO's recommendation on design. In 2021, GAO reported that VBA used a variety of training delivery mechanisms, including computer-based and classroom training, consistent with leading practices. However, VBA had not established criteria to determine the most appropriate delivery mechanism. In December 2021, VBA reported creating a tool for VBA training staff to use in determining the delivery mechanism. VBA identified about a dozen courses for which staff applied this tool to develop or modify the delivery mechanism.
- **Implementation.** VBA has taken steps to fully implement all recommendations GAO made related to implementing its training program. Specifically, GAO previously found that VBA had taken steps to enhance available training for instructors, but according to VBA officials, it had not developed minimum training requirements. In 2023, VBA established training requirements for all instructors. In May 2024, VBA established a procedure to monitor instructors' training completion. In addition, GAO previously found that VBA had no requirement to monitor claims processors' completion of all required training. In December 2021, VBA established a standard operating procedure and set up a process to monitor training completion, in line with GAO's recommendation.
- **Planning.** VBA has taken some steps to develop a strategic approach to its training efforts but has not yet fully implemented two of three related GAO recommendations. In March 2024, VBA established a governance structure to coordinate training activities across three key VBA offices that help administer training. However, a fiscal year 2025 plan for the training program did not have comprehensive goals and other elements, including how program activities will be prioritized to meet goals, as called for in GAO's recommendations.
- **Evaluation.** VBA has not fully implemented two of three recommendations on evaluation. In 2021, GAO found that VBA collected and incorporated some stakeholder feedback about training and finalized plans to evaluate certain training, but these efforts were not comprehensive or systematic. The agency also had not completed an evaluation of its training program in recent years. Later in 2021, VBA established a policy for evaluating VBA training and created a process to review and incorporate feedback, as called for by GAO's recommendations. However, VBA has not yet demonstrated how it incorporates feedback from relevant stakeholders, as GAO recommended, or completed a plan to evaluate training for experienced claims processors.

GAO is continuing to monitor VBA's implementation of these recommendations.