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News Release

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New VA Initiatives to Improve Benefits Delivery to Veterans and Families *VA to Deploy New Operating Model for Disability Claims to 12 Additional Regional Offices in Fiscal Year 2012*

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs announced today the national deployment of claims transformation initiatives to 12 regional offices in the remaining months of fiscal year 2012 to improve benefits delivery to Veterans, families and their survivors.

"This is an important milestone in our transformation to achieve the goal we established in 2009 of processing all disability claims within 125 days at a 98 percent accuracy level in 2015," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki.

The 12 regional offices to begin the deployment of the transformation initiatives include: Huntington, W.Va.; Hartford, Conn.; Portland, Ore.; Houston, Texas; Cleveland, Ohio; Des Moines, Iowa; Boise, Idaho; Phoenix, Ariz.; New Orleans, La.; San Juan, Puerto Rico; Atlanta, Ga.; Newark, N.J. This deployment follows four pilot programs at Indianapolis, Ind., Wichita, Kan., Milwaukee, Wis., and Fort Harrison, Mont., in 2012.

VA's transformation plan is based on more than 40 measures that were selected, evaluated, tested and measured from over 600 stakeholder and employee innovation ideas.

"This national deployment, consisting of people, process and technology initiatives, follows comprehensive planning and testing to ensure we have the right recipe for success," added Under Secretary for Benefits Allison A. Hickey.

During the national deployment, VA will further track and gauge the integrated effects of the transformation plan to reduce the backlog of disability claims and provide Veterans, their families, and survivors with more timely and accurate claims decisions. VA expects to deploy the transformation plan to the remaining 40 regional offices throughout calendar 2013.

The major components of the transformation plan that will be nationally deployed include:

- The Intake Processing Center, which adds a formalized process for triaging claims documents and other mail, and drives faster and more accurate association of mail with Veterans' claims files;
- Segmented Processing Lanes, which allow claims that can be more easily rated to move quickly through the system and the more complex claims to be processed by VA's more experienced and skilled employees;
- Cross-Functional Teams, which support a case-management approach to claims processing that minimizes rework and reduces processing time; and
- The Veterans Benefits Management System, which is a new electronic claims processing system that employs rules-based technologies to improve decision speed and quality.

VA has already nationally implemented:

- Quality Review Teams, which are composed of dedicated local quality review specialists who will evaluate station and individual employee performance and conduct in-process reviews to eliminate errors at the earliest possible stage.
- Simplified and Standardized Rating Notification Letters, which give Veterans one simplified decision letter that provides notice of VA's decision, including a summary of the evidence considered and the reason for the decision.

VA provides compensation and pension benefits to more than four million Veterans, family members and survivors. Veterans filing claims may file online through eBenefits, a joint project between the Department of Defense and VA, at <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov>. They can check the status of their claim with a Premium eBenefits account, and use a growing number of online services or contact VA Call Centers for more information at 1-800-827-1000.

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