Claims Folder Maintenance and Claims Jurisdiction

Trainee Handout

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Objectives

* Understand the importance of claims folder maintenance.
* Locate the references for claims folder maintenance.
* Understand the general policy for claims jurisdiction of living Veterans claims.
* Understand how and when to update jurisdiction of a Veteran’s award or claim.
* Understand how and when to transfer a claims folder or send it to scanning.

References

All M21-1 references are found in the [Compensation.Pension (CPKM) Portal](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034)

* [M21-1, Part III, Subpart i, Chapter 2, Section B - ROJ And Intake Site Responsibilities](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014101/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-i-Chapter-2-Section-B-Division-of-Responsibilities-for-Processing-Benefits-Delivery-at-Discharge-BDD-and-BDD-Excluded-Claims)
* [M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, Chapter 3, Section B - Paper and Electronic Claims Folders](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014123/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-3-Section-B-Paper-and-Electronic-Claims-Folders)
* [M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, Chapter 4, Section A - Paper Claims Folders Storage and Control](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014126/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-4-Section-A-Paper-Claims-Folders-Storage-and-Control?query=Paper%20Claims%20Folder%20Storage%20and%20Controlhttps://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014126/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-4-Section-A-Paper-Claims-Folders-Storage-and-Control?query=Paper%20Claims%20Folder%20Storage%20and%20Control)
* [M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, Chapter 5, Section D - Permanent Transfer of Claims Folders](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014139/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-5-Section-D-Permanent-Transfer-of-Claims-Folders?query=Permanent%20Transfer%20of%20Claims%20Folders)
* [M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, Chapter 4, Section G - Folder Maintenance](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014132/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-4-Section-G-Folder-Maintenance)
* [M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, Chapter 5, Section G - Transferring Electronic Claims and Electronic Claims Folders (eFolders)](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014142/M21-1,-Part-III,-Subpart-ii,-Chapter-5,-Section-G---Transferring-Electronic-Claims-and-Electronic-Claims--Folders-(eFolders))
* [M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, Chapter 5, Section A - Jurisdiction Over Claims](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014136/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-5-Section-A-Jurisdiction-Over-Claims)
* [M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, Chapter 5, Section B - Jurisdiction Over Deceased Veterans’ Claims Folders](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014137/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-5-Section-B-Jurisdiction-Over-Deceased-Veterans-Claims-Folders)
* [NWQ Phase 1 & 2 Playbook (most current version)](https://vaww.vashare.vba.va.gov/sites/OFOPlaybooks/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx)
* [VBMS Home Page – VA Intranet](https://vbaw.vba.va.gov/VBMS/)
* [NWQ Phase 1 & 2 Playbook Revised May 12, 2017](https://vaww.vashare.vba.va.gov/sites/OFOPlaybooks/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx)
* [VBMS Home Page – VA Intranet](https://vbaw.vba.va.gov/VBMS/)
  + User Guide
  + VBMS Job Aid, Working with Annotations
  + VBMS Job Aid, Editing Document Properties
  + VBMS Job Aid, eFolder Fundamentals: Associating Documents to Claims (Tagging Documents) & Bookmarking Documents

Topic 1: Claims Folder Maintenance

**Claims Folders**

Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) uses two formats of claims folders:

* Paper claims folders, and
* Electronic claims folders (eFolders)

VBA not only maintains compensation claims folders but also education, vocational rehabilitation and employment, and other benefit folders.

VBA stated transitioning into paperless environment in 2012 through 2014 as part of the transformation initiative into the VBMS system. During 2017 and 2018, VBA is continuing the paperless transition with the File Bank Extraction (FBE) project which removes Claims Folders and CER Folders from the regional offices for storage by the vendor and eventual upload into VBMS.

**Claims Folder Maintenance**

Proper claim folder maintenance is required for proper development. It maintains the integrity of the claim and is a great measure to protect the Veteran’s Personal Identifiable Information (PII). By maintaining proper maintenance from the start, it allows claims processors the ability to perform a quick review, as well as ensures more timely processing of the Veteran’s claim.

**Paper Claims Folder**

VBA maintains two types of paper claims folders:

* Claims folders, and
* Notice of death (NOD) folders

The paper claims folder is the original repository for paper documents related to a single Veteran and is associated with a claims folder number. The claim folder is typically a red-rope, three-flap folder, with fasteners on the inside. Documents are placed in receipt order and on certain sides. See Attachment A for diagram of a paper claim folder.

A NOD folder is a lightweight, two-flap folder with fasteners on the inside is used for a first notice of death (FNOD).

Paper claims folders are to be stored in designated cabinets and are not to be stored in unauthorized places. Paper claims folders are tracked using the Control of Veterans Records Systems (COVERS).

Certain End Products (EPs) require paper claims folder to be sent for conversion into electronic format. The manual (M21-1 III.ii.3.B) lists the claims to be sent for conversion.

**Paper Claims Folder Maintenance**

The Regional Office is responsible for maintaining Veterans claims folders and providing protection of their contents by:

* Avoiding overcrowded claims folders in the file cabinets
* Replacing folders and envelopes that become damaged, and
* Taking appropriate action to address any misfiled document and folders

Follow procedures in the manual for proper storage and organization of paper claims folders (M21-1 III.ii.4.A), as applicable.

**Handling Original Documents**

VBA does not require return of original documents to the claimant per M21-1, Part III, Subpart, ii, Chapter 1, Section C.

**Note**: There is **no** mechanism in place to retrieve original documents once shipped to the scanning vendor.

**Electronic Claims Folder (eFolder)**

An eFolder is an electronic repository for scanned documents related to a single Veteran and associated with a claims folder number. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) maintains eFolders in two systems:

* Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS), and
* Legacy Content Manager (LCM), formerly Virtual VA

LCM records are accessible through the LCM tab in the documents of VBMS.

All newly created claims folders will be established in an electronic format except for the exceptions listed below:

* all sensitive level 8 claims including
* witness protection, and
* classified claims, and
* Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) claims requiring Military Services Coordinators (MSC) to build a physical claims folder for original disability compensation claims. Original IDES claims require creation of a paper claims folder only when service treatment records (STRs) provided to the MSC are
  + hard copies, or
  + a combination of hard copies and electronic.

**eFolder Maintenance in VBMS**

The manual provides comprehensive procedures for eFolder maintenance in VBMS:

* [VBMS new mail indicator](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014132/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-4-Section-G-Folder-Maintenance?query=VBMS%20new%20mail%20indicator)
* [converting and uploading a document into portable document format (PDF)](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014132/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-4-Section-G-Folder-Maintenance?query=VBMS%20new%20mail%20indicator)
* [handling misfiled documents that belong to paper claims folders](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014132/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-4-Section-G-Folder-Maintenance?query=VBMS%20new%20mail%20indicator)
* [requesting a document deletion in VBMS](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014132/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-4-Section-G-Folder-Maintenance?query=VBMS%20new%20mail%20indicator)
* [validate the request for document deletion](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014132/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-4-Section-G-Folder-Maintenance?query=VBMS%20new%20mail%20indicator)
* [preparing a document for deletion by the VBMS Office of Information Technology (OIT)](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014132/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-4-Section-G-Folder-Maintenance?query=VBMS%20new%20mail%20indicator)
* [establishing a local mailbox for document error report submissions](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014132/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-4-Section-G-Folder-Maintenance?query=VBMS%20new%20mail%20indicator)
* [eFolder document amendment](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014132/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-4-Section-G-Folder-Maintenance?query=VBMS%20new%20mail%20indicator)
* [removing an incorrectly scanned document](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014132/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-4-Section-G-Folder-Maintenance?query=VBMS%20new%20mail%20indicator)
* [merging documents in VBMS](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014132/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-4-Section-G-Folder-Maintenance?query=VBMS%20new%20mail%20indicator)
* [splitting documents in VBMS](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014132/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-4-Section-G-Folder-Maintenance?query=VBMS%20new%20mail%20indicator)
* [associating an eFolder document to a claim](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014132/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-4-Section-G-Folder-Maintenance?query=VBMS%20new%20mail%20indicator)
* [associating an eFolder note](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014132/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-4-Section-G-Folder-Maintenance?query=VBMS%20new%20mail%20indicator)
* [bookmarking an eFolder document](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014132/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-4-Section-G-Folder-Maintenance?query=VBMS%20new%20mail%20indicator)
* [annotating documents in VBMS](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014132/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-4-Section-G-Folder-Maintenance?query=VBMS%20new%20mail%20indicator)
* [designating a document as no evidentiary value](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014132/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-4-Section-G-Folder-Maintenance?query=VBMS%20new%20mail%20indicator)
* [managing a duplicate eFolder document](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014132/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-4-Section-G-Folder-Maintenance?query=VBMS%20new%20mail%20indicator)
* [indexing a document in VBMS](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014132/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-4-Section-G-Folder-Maintenance?query=VBMS%20new%20mail%20indicator)
* [using the document’s subject as a note](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014132/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-4-Section-G-Folder-Maintenance?query=VBMS%20new%20mail%20indicator), and
* [manually removing the pending scanning banner](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014132/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-4-Section-G-Folder-Maintenance?query=VBMS%20new%20mail%20indicator).

Proper procedures should be followed to ensure timely processing of Veterans claims.

**eFolder Claim Maintenance Issues**

The previous section provides procedures on dealing with eFolder maintenance. Below are some of the most common eFolder maintenance issues to which resolutions are noted in the previous section:

* Failure to complete **bottom-to-top review**. This could result in missing claimed issues, missing pertinent evidence, and could delay the Veteran’s claim. The bottom-to-top review allows the claims processor to become familiar with the claim history which helps ensure accurate processing.
* Lack of **proper indexing of document types**. Although most indexing is completed by contracted scanners, there will be times claims processors must upload and index documents (for example VA Form 27-0820, emails, etc.). Familiarity with document types is important as documents should be indexed appropriately. This helps claims processors easily identify evidence in the claims file. Update index of document through document properties.
* Lack of **“Tabbing” of documents.** This allows more detailed information about the document to be viewed in the documents screen. “Tabbing” of documents can be done through bookmarking or through use of the subject line. Bookmarking is most useful to identify medical references, appeal documents, or for working notes. Use of the subject line is most useful to identify more information of the document type, for example, Non-Federal Medical Records could be further identified by the doctor’s name in the subject line.
* **Documents with multiple PII** that is not redacted. Requests for personnel records is common with certain types of claims. Some of the records contain other Veterans information, to which it must be redacted. Follow procedures in the manual for proper redaction of records.
* **Misfiled documents and documents requiring split process.** During review of a claims file, you may find another Veteran’s document in the process. Procedures for dealing with such issue are detailed in the manual. It is important proper procedures are followed as failure to do so could result in delay in the Veteran’s claim, and potentially result in a claim for the other affected Veteran. Please note: AdobePro is a required application to complete a document split function and individual users (such as claims assistants) may not have this access.

Topic 2: Award/Claim Jurisdiction

**General Policy for Award/Claim Jurisdiction**

VBA manages claims folders for living and deceased Veterans. These claims are worked in what is called jurisdictions. The general policy for **award jurisdiction** is as follows:

* Living Veteran – generally assigned to the geographical area to which the Veteran maintains a permanent address and is under the jurisdiction of a Regional Office (RO) or Pension Maintenance Center (PMC)
* Deceased Veteran – generally, unless otherwise specified, assigned to RO or PMC in the same geographical area as the location of the primary claimant

Generally, **claim jurisdiction** for living Veterans are controlled by National Work Queue. NWQ encompasses all existing and future rating claims, and certain non-rating claims established in VBMS, and distributes the claims to each RO’s VBMS work queue. NWQ operates on routing rules which rely, in part, on claim and Veteran-level attributes. Attributes include corporate flashes, claim labels, and special issues.

**Exceptions to General Policy for Award/Claim Jurisdiction**

Though VBA typically adheres to the general policy in regards to claims jurisdiction, there are some exceptions to the rule, to which cases that involve special issues or circumstances fall under temporary or permanent jurisdiction of certain ROs or centers.

* Review M21-1 III.ii.5.A offer an extensive list of exceptions which involve a special mission or circumstance

NWQ removes the requirement to update claims folder jurisdiction in many cases because veteran’s claims are automatically routed based on claim attributes, regional office capacity, and zip code. The Playbook does include instructions for routing some claims including: RACC, special issues, and foreign claims.

**Procedures for Award/Claim Jurisdictional Update**

Effective October 19, 2015 COVERS no longer automatically updates station of jurisdiction awards or pending claims when a folder is transferred. IMPORTANT: Award jurisdiction is updated only when a user completes a manual update in COVERS using the Corporate/BDN tab

The broker function in VBMS is the best practice for updating temporary claim jurisdiction. Claims transfers to other offices should be approved by a supervisor. Follow the steps in III.ii.5.G to transfer electronic claims.

**Station of Jurisdiction Update Process Beginning October 19, 2015:**

Award Jurisdiction:

• The Regional Office of Jurisdiction for a Veteran’s award record

• Generally, the station closest to the Veteran’s residence

• Traditionally, the station where the Veteran’s paper claims file was located

• The station receives automated work items

• Set at the time the original claim is established by the station creating the claim

• Updated only when a user completes a manual update in COVERS using the Corporate/BDN tab

Claim Jurisdiction:

• The office responsible for working the claim

• Isolates access to the claim for development and award processing to a single station

• Initially set to match the location of the person establishing the claim

• Updated, for selected categories, by the National Work Queue

• Updated, as required, when a regional office user completes a manual update in COVERS using the Corporate/BDN tab

• Does not have to match Award jurisdiction

Temporary Claim Jurisdiction:

• No functionality to set or update temporary claim jurisdiction in COVERS

• Users may use VBMS to broker claims not controlled by the NWQ

**Permanent Transfer of Claims Folders**

Regional Offices (RO) should not transfer claims of any type, including but not limited to, rating, non-rating, appeals, work items, and claims received in Centralized Mail (CM) to another RO’s jurisdiction based solely on where the Veteran resides unless directed by the Office of Field Operations (OFO).

Exceptions: Permanent transfer claim folders under any of the conditions listed in M21-1.III.ii.5.D, including:

* special issues or special missions,
* a claimant moves to or resides at a location with an Army Post Office (APO) or Fleet Post Office (FPO) indicating that the Veteran resides outside of the U.S. and its territories,
* the beneficiary resides outside of the U.S. and its territories, and the necessary action involves a pension or survivors benefit determination,
* the Veteran resides in the Philippines or the Veteran’s claim is based on service with the Commonwealth Army of the Philippines, Special Philippines Scouts, or alleged or recognized guerillas,
* a pending claim or appeal that requires a personal hearing
* claims or appeals for homeless Veterans
* another office requires the claims folder for litigation involving insurance benefits, or
* Central Office (CO) reassigns jurisdiction.

***Important****:*

Do **not** routinely permanently transfer claims folders from the station of jurisdiction (SOJ) when the claim has been redistributed from the station of origination (SOO) as part of a national workload redistribution strategy.

**Sending Paper Claims Folders to Authorized Scanning Facilities**

Paper claims folders should not be sent to any location other than an authorized scanning facility, unless otherwise directed by OFO.

**Exceptions**: Paper claims folders may be shipped to other locations, with a reason and applicable tracking number documented in VBMS notes, in the following scenarios listed in M21-1.III.ii.5.D.

The use of the Control of Veterans Records System (COVERS) application is required for controlling the physical location of a paper claims folder within an RO.

**References**: For more information on

* shipping folders and related documents to the scanning vendor, see the [Veterans Claims Intake Program (VCIP) Shipping Standard Operating Procedure](http://vbacodmoint1.vba.va.gov/bl/21/Transformation/docs/VCIP%20Shipping%20SOP.docx), and
* transferring claims folders using VBMS, see [M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 5.G](https://vaww.compensation.pension.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ka/#!agent/portal/554400000001034/article/554400000014142/M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, Chapter 5, Section G - Transferring Electronic Claims and Electronic Claims  Folders (eFolders)).

*Permanent Transfer of Employee-Veteran Claims Folders to RACCs*

In most cases, Restricted Access Claims Centers (RACCs) have jurisdiction for active employee-Veteran claims folders and related VA records.

Refer to manual reference M21-1.III.ii.4.Ato ensure proper sensitization of employee, employee family, and other claims folders, to ensure limited access to such claims. Follow the instruction in M21-1 III.ii.5.D to determine when to transfer a claims folder to RACC.

**Permanent Transfer of Claims Folders Continued**

Requests for the permanent transfer-in of paper claims folders can be made to

* other ROs
* the Records Management Center (RMC), or
* Federal Records Centers (FRCs).

***Important:***Paper claims folders must not be transferred between ROs unless there is an authorized exception from scanning requirements. For more information regarding the guidance for sending paper claims folders to scanning facilities, to include exceptions, see M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 5.D.1.

***Note:*** RMC will use the VBMS corporate flash as an indicator to ship the claims folder for scanning and ensure the claims folder is uploaded into the VBMS electronic claims folder (eFolder).

***Important:*** In addition to the actions taken in COVERS, the request must be documented by creation of a “Physical Claims File Requested” (III.ii.5.E) or “Requested Claims Folder” (III.ii.5.D) tracked item in VBMS.

Requests for transfer of a paper claims folder from an FRC are submitted through the National Archives and Records Administration’s (NARA’s) Archives and Records Centers Information System (ARCIS). Additional information on requesting records from FRC locations is available in the manual.

**Temporary Transfer of Claims Folders**

National Work Queue and increased paperless processing has eliminated the need for temporary transfer of claims folder in most cases. Temporary claim jurisdiction is automatically assigned by NWQ based on workload management and can be updated through the “broker”function in VBMS.

In a temporary transfer, a regional office (RO) lends an electronic claim or a paper claims folder to another Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facility for a limited length of time.

* In a temporary transfer, the transferring office retains jurisdiction of the electronic claim or paper claims folder as the station of origination (SOO), and
* receiving office accepts jurisdiction of the electronic claim or paper claims folder as the station of jurisdiction (SOJ).

Attachment A: Paper Claims Folder Diagram

