Monthly Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) and

Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) Conference Call Read Ahead

Compensation Service

BDD/IDES/Mil Pay Staff (212A)

April 14, 2020—2 PM ET

**UPDATED: April 20, 2020**

This is an updated/corrected version of this document. This version supersedes the previous version that was distributed in advance of the conference call on April 14, 2020. Saved or printed copies of the previous version should be discarded.

Please see page 4 for further details concerning the correction.

The Compensation Service BDD/IDES/Mil Pay Staff hosts this call to announce updates and address issues and questions related to the BDD/IDES Programs. All Military Services Coordinators (MSCs), Disability Rating Activity Sites (DRAS), Regional Offices and other VA personnel supporting BDD/IDES are invited to participate.

This read-ahead is provided to facilitate discussion during the conference call.

**Change to Call Notes:** The Call Notes from the previous month’s call will be an appendix to the current month’s Read Ahead (there is no longer a separate Call Notes document). The Call Notes for the March Call are in this Read Ahead. The TMS # for this month’s call will be provided during the call and should be active with-in a week of the call’s completion. A Calendar Blast will notify the field when the TMS # is active.

Please sign–up for the [C&P Calendar Subscription Service](http://vbacodmoint1.vba.va.gov/bl/21/calendar/cal_Subscribe.asp) to receive notification that the read-ahead is available and for notification when the TMS number is active.

**Call-in Information and New Guidance**

**Call in info:**

[Join Skype Meeting](https://meet.RTC.VA.GOV/andrew.reese/JDC6LJZ6)

844-358-7954, 844-210-0201 or 844-894-0415. Code is 496808907#.

The IM/Chat session will be disabled during the call. Ask questions over the phone during the call or send an email to the appropriate staff corporate mailbox.

When the presenter unmutes the audience for questions, follow the guidance below to unmute yourself:

1. If you are dialed in through your computer (select Use Skype for Business when signing into Skype), you must find your name in the attendee list and unmute yourself by right clicking the microphone.
2. If you are dialed in through a phone (select “Call me at” or “Don’t Join Audio” when signing into Skype), unmute yourself using \*6.
3. Do not unmute yourself if you do not need to speak.

COVID-19 Topics for Discussion

**COVID-19**

This is a very difficult time, things are very fluid, and some changes/decisions are happening as we speak. We know you might have many questions and we hope the information in this Read Ahead answers most of them. Please read the topics/write-ups and ask any questions (at the appropriate time) as needed.

Requesting BDD and IDES Exams During the COVID-19 Pandemic Memo

Comp Service IDES/BDD Program Office published this [memo](https://vbaw.vba.va.gov/VBADOD/docs/predischarge/RequestingBDDandIDESExamsDuringtheCOVID19Pandemic.pdf) dated April 1 to provide BDD and IDES personnel information on exams as a result of COVID-19.

*Most recent information since the distribution of the memo*.

1. No new exam requests should be submitted to VHA. Point forward, all examination requests should be submitted in Exam Management System (EMS) to contract vendors.
2. Exams requests that were previously submitted to VHA will be cancelled by VHA except where the exam has been initiated, or where VHA determines the exams can be accomplished via Telehealth technology. Any examinations that are cancelled by VHA should be submitted to VBA vendors via EMS.Clarifications needed from VHA should still be requested in CAPRI.
3. Exams submitted to VBA vendors should NOT be cancelled due to reasons associated with COVID-19. Examiners should not cancel Exam Scheduling Requests (ESRs) for COVID-19 related issues. MSCs must not cancel any ESRs (neither in part or in full) at the request or direction of the exam provider.
4. Contract providers may cancel scheduled appointments for reasons relating to COVID-19, but they should not cancel the pending ESR. When appointments are cancelled, the status will be shown as OPEN in EMS. In these instances, the provider will contact the participant to reschedule the appointment at an appropriate time—no further action is required by the MSC.
* QTC is sending text messages to SMs about their exams being postponed, not cancelled. Exams will be re-scheduled ASAP. The text will read something like “Due to the Coronavirus pandemic in the US, and per the Department of Veterans Affairs order, QTC is postponing all in-clinic examinations until further notice. We are working with the VA for expansion of alternative methods for completing exams.”
1. If an ESR, or a specific contention is erroneously cancelled by the exam provider, the MSC must resubmit the ESR.
* If the entire ESR shows a CANCELLED status, the MSC must re-submit the entire request, to include the SHA DBQ
* If a contention is showing a CANCELLED status, the MSC must submit another ESR and request only the specific DBQ relating to that condition—**DO NOT** request another SHA DBQ unless the SHA DBQ was not completed
* If the ESR or contention exam is cancelled, contact Contract Exams and cc: the BDD or IDES mailbox with claim number and details

Example 1:

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| --- |
| ESR remains “OPEN”Bronchitis Contention was “CANCELED” the vendor canceled the contention on the ESR. The cancelation document is in the e-folder, and was “properly executed”. Therefore, the MSC should resubmit an ESR for that contention and request the DBQ for that contention only. The contention is available in EMS-the exam can be resubmitted. |

**Example 2:**

|  |
| --- |
| Onychomycosis/Tinea Pedis exam appointment was canceled. The status in EMS shows “SCHEDULED” for the contention but “CANCELED” under the EMS status. This means the vendor only canceled the appointment and will reschedule. No action needed by the MSC because the contention is no longer available in EMS. |

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the IDES Processing Memo

Comp Service IDES/BDD Program Office published this [memo](https://vbaw.vba.va.gov/VBADOD/docs/IDES/COVID19ImpactonIDESProcessing.pdf) dated March 27 information on IDES processing as a result of COVID-19.

General Topics for Discussion

MSC Conference

The MSC Conference scheduled for May 2020 has been postponed to August 2020. Information will be provided as it becomes available.

IDES Specific Topics

UPDATE: Please disregard references to the need for the Intake Analyst Role for MSCs discussed on the teleconference call and indicated on the earlier version of the Read-ahead.

IDES MSCs do not require the Intake Analyst Role (or any other special VBMS permissions) to utilize either of the eBenefits workarounds described below. Contrary to previous indications, it is not necessary for the MSC to have the ability to assign cases to themselves in VBMS in order to complete the required actions described under Method 2. These changes have been incorporated in the updated message/table below.

Important: It still remains critical that the MSC take timely action to cancel any system-generated EP that is established as a result of an IDES application that is submitted via eBenefits (as specified in Step 8 of the table below).

**Transmission of IDES Applications/Documents via eBenefits**

In accordance with social distancing requirements, MSCs are encouraged to complete IDES Initial Interviews telephonically (as described in [M21-1 III.i.2.D.4.d](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000033257/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-i-Chapter-2-Section-D-Overview-of-the-Integrated-Disability-Evaluation-System-IDES-and-Initial-Claims-Development?query=ides#4)) to the fullest extent possible during the pandemic. [M21-1 III.i.2.D.4.f](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000033257/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-i-Chapter-2-Section-D-Overview-of-the-Integrated-Disability-Evaluation-System-IDES-and-Initial-Claims-Development?query=ides" \l "4) discusses three means for participants to return documents to the MSC: SAFE, encrypted email, and secure fax. It is recognized that each of these means have limitations and present challenges which may complicate and/or delay document transmission. These challenges are now compounded by the fact that effectively all IDES interviews are completed telephonically. As such, an alternative procedure (using eBenefits) will now be allowed in limited circumstances to facilitate transmission of applications and supporting documents from IDES participants.

**Note:** The processes described below are temporary workarounds intended to mitigate complications associated with the COVID-19 Pandemic, and address challenges associated with telephone interviews. The guidance does not represent a permanent change to IDES application procedures; these workarounds will remain allowable until further notice.

**Method 1: Uploading Supporting Documents via eBenefits**

In addition to the means to return documents identified in [M21-1 III.i.2.D.4.f](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000033257/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-i-Chapter-2-Section-D-Overview-of-the-Integrated-Disability-Evaluation-System-IDES-and-Initial-Claims-Development?query=ides#4), MSCs may now advise IDES participants that they can return documents (including the completed VA Form 21-526EZ) using the *Upload Supporting Documents* functionality in eBenefits.

To upload documents in eBenefits, the participant must have a pending EP 689, (which should have been established by the MSC in advance of the initial interview per standard IDES procedure). Additionally, the MSC must advise the participant to:

* complete and sign the VA Form 21-526EZ in hard copy or via fillable PDF,
* log in (or register for) eBenefits,
* follow prompts to *Upload Supporting Documents*, and
* notify the MSC that the documents have been successfully uploaded

After the participant takes the actions described above, the MSC must:

* Review the documents in the participant’s eFolder.
* Ensure that the VA Form 21-526EZ is completed and signed.
* Enter the conditions indicated on the VA Form 21-526EZ as contentions under the EP 689, and
* Continue routine IDES processing

**Method 2. Completing and Submitting VA Compensation Applications via eBenefits**

***Important:***

Like the process described in Method 1, this method will also ensure documents submitted by the participant are automatically included in the participant’s eFolder, eliminating the need for the MSC to upload files to VBMS. Additionally, this method eliminates the need for MSC to manually enter claimed conditions as contentions in VBMS, which removes a time consuming MSC task and the potential for data entry errors. Further, this method also serves to resolve challenges associated the applicant affixing his or her electronic signature to PDF applications.

While this method provides significant efficiencies, it also involves some degree of complication and risk if the procedure is not executed carefully and correctly. Intake sites that elect to utilize this method must ensure that the actions are completed exactly as specified in the table below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Step** | **Action**  |
|  | Upon receipt of a complete referral, establish EP 689 in VBMS and enter the referred conditions as contentions, schedule the initial interview, and complete all required pre-interview actions in accordance with standard IDES procedures. |
|  | Conduct the initial interview in accordance with [M21-1 III.i.2.D.4.d](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000033257/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-i-Chapter-2-Section-D-Overview-of-the-Integrated-Disability-Evaluation-System-IDES-and-Initial-Claims-Development?query=ides#4) |
|  | Advise the participant to submit his or her application for VA Compensation (along with any additional documentation) via eBenefits; the MSC must explain that the participant will need to* visit <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/homepage>
* log on (or register for an account)
* click *Apply;* then *Compensation*
* follow system prompts to complete application
* when prompted for service dates, the participant should enter the current date as their release date from active duty (explain that this entry is necessary to execute the workaround; participants should **not** enter a future/projected/estimated separation date).
* upload any additional evidence (including dependency applications/information)
 |
|  | Advise the participant to contact the MSC immediately upon submission of the application/documents in eBenefits. (Alternatively, the MSC may remain on the phone with the participant throughout the eBenefits application process). ***Note:*** If the MSC does not remain in contact with the participant, it is critical that the participant notify the MSC immediately upon submission, so that the MSC can take the timely action on steps 5 through 9 below. MSCs **must** ensure that the steps below are completed on the same day the application was submitted via eBenefits.  |
|  | Identify the rating EP that was established as a result of the eBenefits application. ***Note:*** eBenefits will automatically establish a Rating End Product EP. |
|  | Open the rating EP in VBMS, and copy the contentions from the rating EP to the EP 689 per the instructions on page 211 of the [VBMS Users Guide](https://vbaw.vba.va.gov/VBMS/docs/VBMS_CoreUserGuide_Release17-0.pdf).**Notes**: * This action will eliminate the need for the MSC to manually enter claimed conditions under the EP 689
* To avoid duplication of contentions, MSCs must not copy any referred condition from the rating EP as this contention should have been previously entered under the 689 upon receipt of the referral (as indicated in step 1)
 |
|  | Review the EP 689 in VBMS to ensure it reflects all contentions the participant has claimed, as well as all referred conditions (indicated on the VA Form 21-0819).  |
|  | Cancel the Pending Rating EP associated with the application submitted via eBenefits (this action must be completed in SHARE).**Important:** it is absolutely critical that the MSC promptly cancel the rating EP. If this EP remains pending overnight, NWQ will route the claim to a VSC for processing, where it will likely create problems and confusion, resulting in unnecessary work for VSC employees and may complicate or delay IDES processing.  |
|  | Add a note in VBMS explaining the reason for the EP cancellation and that the claim is currently controlled under EP 689. **Note:** The IDES claim and all associated issues will remain controlled under the EP 689 as typical in routine IDES processing.  |

**IDES Examinations Must Address all Claimed and Referred Conditions**

IDES exams must not be considered complete until all examinations (claimed and referred conditions and the SHA DBQ) have been completed. These cases must remain in the Medical Evaluation Stage, and not pushed forward to the PEBLO or DRAS until examinations for all conditions have been completed. VA and DoD may consider some changes to IDES policy that may potentially allow for some cases to move forward before all exams can be accomplished; however, at this time no such change has been approved, and all standard IDES requirements (including the requirement for the SHA and exams for all claimed and referred conditions) remain in place.

Current IDES Program Timeliness

As outreach specialists and VA’s frontline contact with SMs and Veterans, it is vital that we are realistic in our communications regarding claims processing times. Below is the current program timeliness data (ADC) for March 2020.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Stage/Phase** | **IDES Goal (AD/NAD)** | **March 2020 (AD/NAD)** |
| **Claim Dev**  | **5/11** | **7/9** |
| **Medical Stage** | **32** | **42/36** |
| **Proposed Ratings** | **20** | **21/31** |
| **Recon Ratings**  | **4** | **8/7** |
| **Exit Interviews** | **14** | **8/7** |
| **Final Ratings** | **20/na** | **34/na** |

 **Source:** VTA Completed Reports April 7, 2020 (8am ET).

 **Note:** VA using the goals from the 230-day process.

VTA Reminders

VTA v.2.4.7

VTA v.2.4.7 was released on March 30, 2020. A Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) tab was added for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRCs) to update data fields in reference to a VR&E Interview and VR&E Plan. A VR&E Pending and Completed Report has also been added. The VRCs should be contacting the SMs after the MSC Interview. Please advise your SMs of this during your interviews, and that the VRC is not associated with the duties of the MSC and the info MSCs provide. VRC inputs have no bearing on the MSC or other tabs/goals. A complete list of the updates/changes in v.2.4.7 are [here](https://vta.va.gov/VTA/secured/DES/View/HomepagePKCFileManager.aspx?FolderId=207).

BDD Specific Topics

**BDD Promotional Fliers**

There are now two BDD promotional fliers on the [Pre-Discharge Intranet Site](https://vbaw.vba.va.gov/vbadod/predischarge.asp) under the heading, “Additional Pre-Discharge Links and Materials” and below are links to both of the fliers. A link to the [BDD Promotional YouTube Video](https://youtu.be/DTSujFDP-58) is also located under “Additional Pre-Discharge Links and Materials”.

The BDD program is the fastest way to receive VA benefits for transitioning Servicemembers. However, with an estimated over 200,000 Servicemembers transitioning each fiscal year (FY), the BDD program has been severely underutilized. In FY2019, VA received a total of 35,815 BDD claims, which only represents 18 percent of the estimated transitioning population. VA has received 16,465 BDD claims so far in FY2020 which only represents eight percent of the of the estimated transitioning Servicemember population. MSCs are encouraged to distribute these promotional materials and the [BDD Promotional YouTube Video](https://youtu.be/DTSujFDP-58) as much as possible. Once MSCs are back on military installations, MSCs should work with the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Benefit Advisors to provide BDD information and the MSCs information to Servicemembers including all TAP classes.

* [BDD Promotional Flier #1](https://vbaw.vba.va.gov/VBADOD/docs/predischarge/BDDFlier1.pdf)
* [BDD Promotional Flier #2](https://vbaw.vba.va.gov/VBADOD/docs/predischarge/BDDFlier2.pdf)

**Pre-Discharge Claim Type**

MSCs are reminded when establishing a BDD or BDD-Excluded claim in VBMS, the MSC must select “Pre-Discharge” as the claim type as shown below. Selecting “Pre-Discharge” as the claim type is the only way to establish the claim as a diary claim.



**Teleworking and Servicemember Assistance**

Recently, there have been reports of military installations incorrectly informing Servicemembers to wait until after discharge to submit a claim, because the MSC is not at the installation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When teleworking, MSCs should ensure their contact information is posted at their installation office to allow Servicemembers to contact the MSC.

Current BDD Program Timeliness

As outreach specialists and VA’s frontline contact with SMs and Veterans, it is vital that we are realistic in our communications regarding claims processing times. Below is the current program timeliness data as of April , 2020.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Data Points** | **Goal** | **April 13, 2020** |
| **Completed FYTD** |  | **17,536** |
| **Receipts FYTD** |  | **16,804** |
| **Pending** |  | **3,376** |
| **# Completed w/in 30 Days of Discharge** |  | **10,934** |
| **% Completed w/in 30 Days of Discharge** | **100%** | **62.3%** |
| **Avg. Days to Complete FYTD** | **30** | **44** |

**Source:** Tableau BDD History Report, April 13, 2020

Upcoming Teleconferences

The next BDD/IDES Call is scheduled for Tuesday, May 12, 2020 at 2PM ET. Please submit IDES questions and proposed topics for discussion to the IDES Mailbox, and BDD questions and proposed topics for discussion to the BDD Mailbox no later than close of business (COB), Wednesday April 29, 2020.

The next BDD/IDES Coaches Call is scheduled for June 4, 2020. Please submit IDES questions and proposed topics for discussion to the IDES Mailbox, and BDD questions and proposed topics for discussion to the BDD Mailbox no later than close of business (COB), Friday May 22, 2020.

Open Floor

**Appendix 1:** **Call Notes from the March 2020 Comp Service BDD/IDES Conference Call**

The following notes provide a summary of questions and discussion from the March BDD/IDES Conference Call. For a complete description of the topics discussed on the call please review the [March Read Ahead](https://vaww.infoshare.va.gov/sites/212Procedures/212D/VDPO%20Monthly%20IDES%20Call/2020/Mar%202020).

**Gulf War (GW) Examinations in Pre-discharge Cases**

MSCs should continue to follow the guidance in the March Read Ahead. The Medical Disability Exam Program Office (MDEPO) is working to resolve any conflicts. Please continue to submit questions to **VAVBAWAS/CO/Contract Examination Inquiries** and to the IDES Mailbox.

**Increasing Participation in the BDD program**

During the March Conference Call, MSCs expressed concerns that they are still not allowed to attend Benefits Briefings to promote BDD claims or introduce themselves to Servicemembers. The Pre-Discharge Team will continue to work with TED to get the most recent guidance regarding MSCs being able to attend Benefits Briefings. Please submit questions to the BDD Mailbox.