

Field Guidance – VHA VBA Acceptable Clinical Evidence (ACE) Proof-of-Concept

Beginning March 1, 2022, and continuing for 60 days, VHA and VBA will be conducting a proof-of-concept project focused on routing potentially ACE eligible work to the Wade Park, OH routing location in CAPRI. Wade Park has been designated as the ACE hub for this proof-of-concept.

ACE proof-of-concept eligible disability benefits questionnaires (DBQ)s are listed in the chart below.

Beginning March 1, 2022, when reviewing the Examination Request Routing Assistant (ERRA) tool, based on the zip code entered (not all zip codes are included in this proof-of-concept), claims processors may be presented with the following chart:

Exam (DBQ)	Send Request To...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DBQ CARDIO Hypertension • DBQ GI Intestines (other than surgical or infectious) • DBQ GI Liver hepatitis, cirrhosis & other liver conditions • DBQ GU Kidney (nephrology) • DBQ GU Male reproductive system • DBQ GU Urinary tract (bladder and urethra) • DBQ HEM Hematologic & lymphatic conditions, including leukemia • DBQ NEURO Headaches (including migraine headaches) • DBQ RESP Sleep apnea 	<p>Wade Park (541) 10701 East Blvd Cleveland, OH 44106-1702</p> <p><u>CAPRI-Remote Site:</u> (541) Cleveland, OH</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DBQ Medical Opinion - If associated with a DBQ shown above 	<p>Wade Park (541) 10701 East Blvd Cleveland, OH 44106-1702</p> <p><u>CAPRI-Remote Site:</u> (541) Cleveland, OH</p>
All other contract exam eligible DBQs	vendor (use VBMS)
All contract exam excluded requests (see M21-1 IV.i.2.A.1.i)	Closest VA facility shown in the table below

ACE Proof-of-Concept Examination Request Procedures

If an examination requires one or more of the DBQs shown in the table above:

- Request the VHA examination at the Wade Park, OH facility.
 - Wade Park can be found under the Cleveland, OH routing location in CAPRI.
 - If the examination cannot be completed via ACE, it will be canceled by VHA (see the guidance entitled *ACE Proof-of-concept - DBQ Tracked Items and Claim Level Suspense* below).

If an additional examination for the same claimant is required, but appears on the contract exclusion list:

- Submit a second, separate examination request in CAPRI for the facility shown closest to the Veteran's home of record (see ERRA screen shot below).

If a contention requires the completion of more than one DBQ to fully evaluate that condition, and one of the DBQs is shown above but the second DBQ is not shown above:

- Send the entire request to a vendor.

If the ACE DBQ chart is displayed, but none of the needed DBQ's are shown, all eligible DBQ's should be sent to a vendor.

ERRA Screen shot showing a zip code covered by the ACE Proof-of-Concept project:

ZIP Code: 90022 Submit Display Maps? No Yes BDD/IDES Claim? No Yes Exam Request Date: 3/21/2022

The following results were accurate for March 21, 2022.
 Please route examination requests based on the following guidance.
 ZIP code 90022 is participating in a pilot program focused on routing work that can be completed without a physical examination to an Acceptable Clinical Evidence (ACE) hub. For more information on this pilot, please read [VHA VBA Acceptable Clinical Evidence \(ACE\) Proof-of-Concept](#). Please route examination requests based on the following guidance.

Exam (DBQ)	Send Request To...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DBQ CARDIO Hypertension DBQ GI Intestines (other than surgical or infectious) DBQ GI Liver hepatitis, cirrhosis & other liver conditions DBQ GU Kidney (nephrology) DBQ GU Male reproductive system DBQ GU Urinary tract (bladder and urethra) DBQ HEM Hematologic & lymphatic conditions, including leukemia DBQ NEURO Headaches (including migraine headaches) DBQ RESP Sleep apnea 	Wade Park (541) 10701 East Blvd Cleveland, OH 44106-1702 CAPRI-Remote Site: (541) Cleveland, OH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DBQ Medical Opinion - If associated with a DBQ shown above 	Wade Park (541) 10701 East Blvd Cleveland, OH 44106-1702 CAPRI-Remote Site: (541) Cleveland, OH
All other contract exam eligible DBQs	vendor (use VBMS)
All contract exam excluded requests (see M21-1.IV.1.2.A.1.i)	Closest VA facility shown in the table below

Historical information on the nearest VA C&P examination routing locations to ZIP code 90022, in ascending order by travel time, are shown below.
Locations, location comments, and exam list comments displayed were accurate for March 21, 2022.

Routing Location	Routing Location Comments	Exam Type Comments	Orthodromic Distance	Drive Distance & Time
LONG BEACH (600)	This facility is only conducting examinations for those on the contract exclusion list.	Disabled:	14.9 mi	19.1 mi

ACE Proof-of-Concept Project Scenarios

Scenario 1: Claimant requires examinations with the GI Intestinal DBQ, GU Urinary Tract DBQ and PSYCH PTSD Initial/Review DBQ. Review of the claims folder reveals that the claimant is a former POW (FPOW).

1. An examination request for GI Intestinal and GU Urinary Tract must be submitted in CAPRI to Wade Park for ACE completion.
2. A second, separate examination request must be submitted in CAPRI to the facility shown directly under the chart for the PTSD Initial/Review DBQ, in this scenario, Coatesville is the facility nearest to the Veterans home of record, as FPOW is a contract exclusion.

Scenario 2: Claimant requires examinations with the RESP Sleep Apnea DBQ and MUSC Knee and Lower Leg Conditions DBQ.

1. An examination request for RESP Sleep Apnea must be submitted in CAPRI to Wade Park for ACE completion.
2. A second, separate examination scheduling request must be submitted in EMS, to the recommended vendor, for the MUSC Knee and Lower Leg Conditions DBQ.

Scenario 3: Claimant requires an examination with the NEURO Headaches DBQ and NEURO TBI Initial or Review DBQ. Both are potentially required to fully evaluate the same contention.

1. Headaches are a disability that may be intertwined with TBI.
2. This request must be submitted in EMS, to the recommended vendor, as the TBI DBQ cannot be completed via ACE, and the Headache Neuro DBQ may need to be completed in conjunction with TBI (therefore ineligible for the proof-of-concept).
ACE Proof-of-Concept - DBQ Tracked Items and Claim Level Suspense

The VHA examination request should be built, uploaded to CAPRI, and a copy of the examination request (2507) downloaded to the VBMS eFolder per current procedures.

A tracked item with a 10-day suspense date should be established for each DBQ sent to VHA under the ACE proof-of-concept. The same tracked item naming convention currently used for a VHA DBQ should be used.

The claim level suspense date must be adjusted to reflect the date of the VHA tracked items for the ACE proof-of-concept DBQ's (10 days).

Upon expiration of the 10-day tracked item suspense, the claims processor should review the VBMS eFolder for the completed VHA ACE DBQ.

- If the completed ACE DBQ is present, take all other necessary development actions and review the evidence to determine if a rating can be completed:
 - If yes, follow normal procedures to complete promulgation of the claim.
 - If a partial rating is possible, follow normal procedures to complete the partial rating.
 - Following promulgation of a partial rating, update the suspense in accordance with **M21-1, Part III, Subpart i, 2.F.3.c** and **M21-1, Part III, Subpart i.2.F.5.a**.
 - If no, update the claim level suspense in accordance with **M21-1, Part III, Subpart i, 2.F.4.b**.
- If the completed ACE DBQ is not found in VBMS, review CAPRI for the completed DBQ, upload it to the VBMS eFolder, and then follow the process outlined above.
- If review of CAPRI shows a cancelation message for an ACE DBQ, create and route a new examination scheduling request to the appropriate Vendor. Do not re-request with the Wade Park ACE hub. Update the VHA DBQ tracked item per established procedures.

Reminders: Claims processors are reminded that use of the ERRA tool is mandatory and splitting of examinations requests between VHA and an MDE Vendor for a single claimant is required as described above. This guidance temporarily supersedes procedures outlined in **M21-1 IV.i.2.A.2.c**.

Exceptions for mandatory use of the ERRA tool are examination request involving:

- examination clarification
- examination addendums
- corrections to insufficient/inadequate examinations
- medical opinions in support of claims filed under [38 U.S.C. 1151](#)

Per **M21-1 IV.i.2.A.4.b**, the ACE process is not available in the following categories of examinations:

- Examinations when necessary electronic medical records are not available for examiner review
- Separation Health Assessments (SHA) in support of IDES/BDD
- General Medical Examinations
- Initial and Review TBI examinations
- Mental Health Examinations

Additionally, the ERRRA tool's use is **not** required at Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) or Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) intake sites where existing agreements specify the provider(s) responsible for local IDES or BDD examinations.