

**VA**U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# Pension and Fiduciary (P&F) Service

## Pension Quality Call

Date: January 2022

TMS: # VA 4638634

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### AGENDA TOPICS

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[ITEM 1: STAR ERROR TRENDS](#)[ITEM 2: PACT ACT UPDATES](#)[ITEM 3: COD DECISIONS](#)[ITEM 4: SPECIAL FOCUS REVIEWS](#)[ITEM 5: SOCIAL SECURITY ADJUSTMENTS](#)[ITEM 6: EP 960 DISCUSSION](#)[CLOSING, QUESTIONS, NEXT QUALITY CALL](#)[PMC BURIAL QUICK TIPS](#)

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### AGENDA ITEMS

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**Agenda item:** STAR Error Trends**Presenter:** Jennifer Kunkel,  
Analyst**Target Audience:**  
QRT and Management**Discussion:**

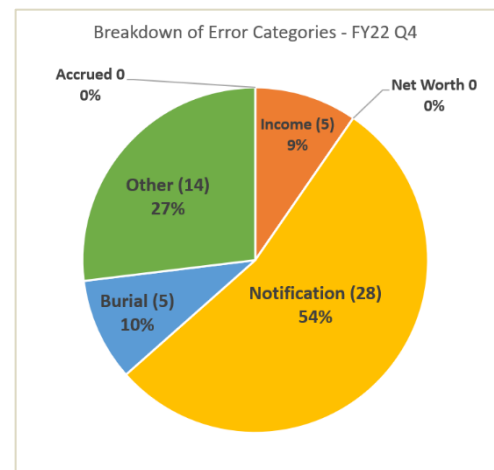
A trend analysis was conducted regarding errors cited on National Pension Quality Reviews completed during the 4th quarter of FY22. The charts below show a breakdown of the errors cited during the National STAR Quality Reviews completed between the months of August 2022, through October 2022 (transactions completed between **July 1, 2022, and September 30, 2022**). STAR reviews are performed the following month after a claim is completed.

We reviewed 93 Authorization (non-rating claims), and 57 rating claims for a total of **150** claims for this time period. **52** errors were cited.

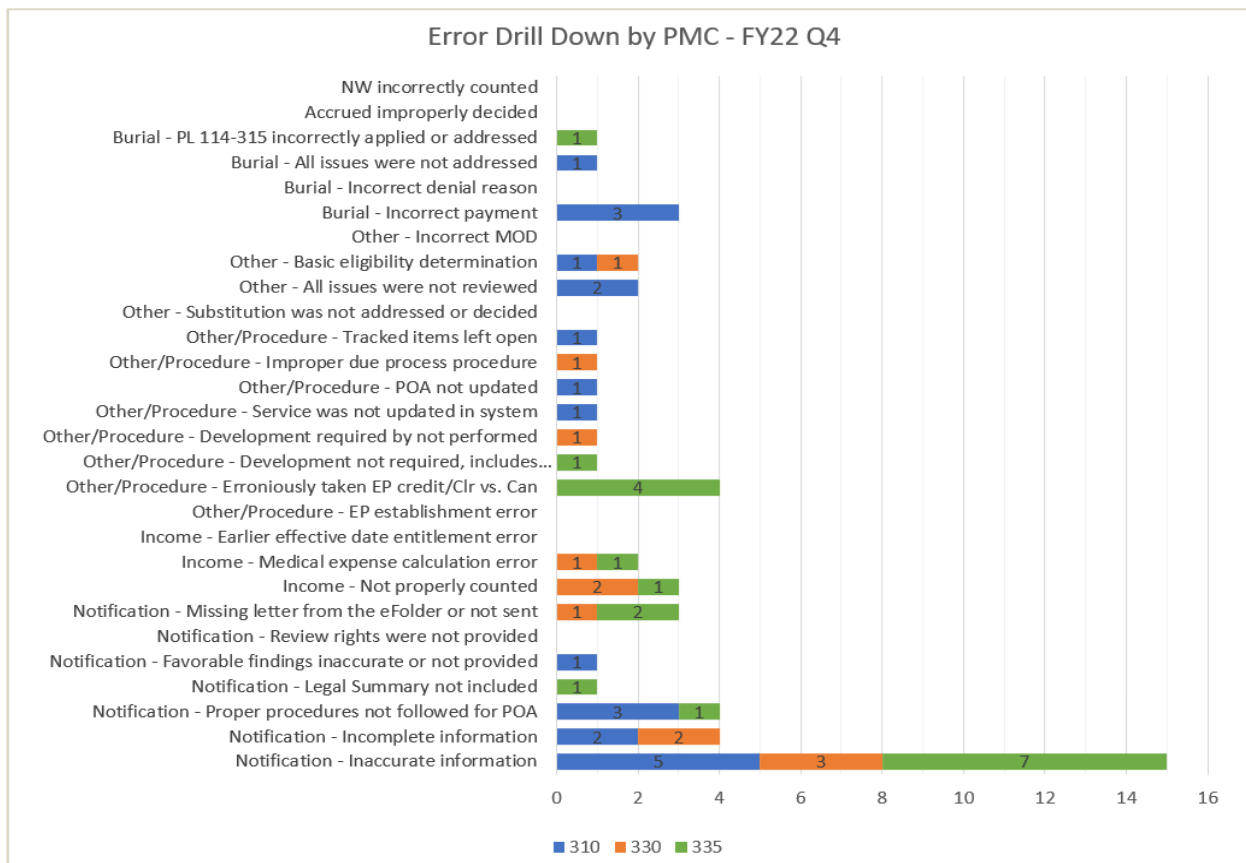
Of the **52** cited errors, 9 were BE errors, 43 were non-BE errors and, **3** recons were submitted: 2 errors were overturned and 1 error was upheld.

The 52 errors cited were noted within the following categories:

- Notification – 54%
- Other (procedural) – 27%
- Burial – 10%
- Income – 9%



The *Error Drill Down* graph below details the errors broken out by category/reasons and station.



**References/Contacts**

- ✓ STAR Reports [https://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/21/star/reports/star\\_rpts20.htm](https://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/21/star/reports/star_rpts20.htm)
- ✓ Pension STAR Dashboard [Pension STAR Dashboard | Salesforce](#)
- ✓ Error Trend Case Study

Agenda item: PACT Act Updates

Presenter: Jennifer Kunkel,  
Analyst

Target Audience:  
QRT and Management

**Discussion:**

The following is provided in preparation for the processing of PACT Act DIC, Burial & Accrued claims that began January 1, 2023:

- Training and Field Guidance

PACT Act Immediate Guidance	Released by Compensation Service (CS) August 10, 2022	Rescinded & replaced by <i>PACT Interim Guidance &amp; Attachment on <b>September 9, 2022</b></i>
<a href="#">TMS 4634424</a> <i>Overview of PACT Act</i>	Released by CS September 21, 2022	Completed by October 20 <sup>th</sup> , 2022
<a href="#">PACT Interim Guidance and attachment</a>	Released by CS on September 9, 2022	
<a href="#">PACT Act Interim Guidance FAQ</a>	Posted by CS October 3, 2022	
ILER Interim Guidance and <a href="#">TMS 4626459</a> <i>ILER (Individual Longitudinal Exposure Record)</i>	Notified October 20, 2022	Completed within 45 days after assignment.

- Recent Releases:
  - Procedures SOP scheduled release December 2022
  - P&F Service PACT Act TMS Trainings scheduled release for December 2022
    - *PACT Act Dependency and Indemnity Compensation--Original and Reevaluation DIC Claims*
    - *PACT Act Effect on Burial and Accrued Claims*
  - P&F Service FAQs
- 4 Secretary of VA Memorandums which are in the process of being linked on the [P&F PACT Act Information Page](#)
  - *Elimination of Phased-In Applicability Dates Memo Update*, released September 20, 2022
  - *Decision Memorandum: Pact Act Service Location Eligibility*
  - *Nehmer Memo Update*, released October 21, 2022

- *TERA Definition Memo*, released October 18, 2022
- CS PACT Act Intranet Page: [PACT Act Information Page \(va.gov\)](#)
  - [P&F Service PACT Act Intranet Page](#)
- ILER – What is it, and how is it related to PACT and the PMCs?
  - [Individual Longitudinal Exposure Record \(ILER\)](#) -- a web-based application that provides information to link an individual to exposures in service.
  - PACT Act has mandated use of this tool for disability compensation PACT claims reviewing toxic exposure risk activities (or TERA). At this time, it is expected that the mandatory use of ILER for service-connected death claims will be dependent upon when TERA is at issue and when evidence of record otherwise does not provide exposure related verification.
  - ILER does not have a complete registry for AO. Claims processors/raters can check ILER for AO, but the response from ILER may be incomplete.
  - In the event of negative responses from ILER, claims processors/raters are expected to review VBMS for exposure verification as usual.
- Special instructions for submitting PACT Act Questions/Inquiries to P&F Service
  - For all inquiries, identify your inquiry as being PACT related by putting “**PACT**” in the subject and submit through our Field Inquiry Tool (FIT).
- In March 2023, P&F Service will conduct a Special Focused Review (SFR) on PACT claims processed between January and February 2023.

## References

- ✓ CS PACT Act Information Intranet Page <https://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/21/pact.htm>
- ✓ P&FS PACT Act Information Intranet Page <https://vbaw.vba.va.gov/pensionandfiduciary/pact-act-pension-and-fiduciary-service.asp>

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**Agenda item:** COD Decisions

**Presenter:** Shannon Hunsicker,  
Analyst

**Target Audience:**  
QRT and Management

## Discussion:

Effective September 30, 2022, the pre-decisional review process for unfavorable character of discharge (COD) decisions ended as the process was scheduled to conclude in FY2022. Office of Field Operations (OFO) provided advance notification to P&F Service and the Office of Administrative Review to prepare for the conclusion of this project. Additionally, OFO is drafting guidance for distribution for the field regarding the end of the pre-decisional process.

**Target Audience:**  
QRT and Management

**Discussion:**

Between June and October 2022, P&F Service completed three Special Focus Reviews (SFRs). The SFRs for Upfront Verification of Income using Federal Tax Information, PIES O99 Requests, and Individual Quality Reviews are attached to the bulletin.

**Upfront Verification of Income using Federal Tax Information (FTI):**

The Pension Management Centers (PMCs) resumed the use of FTI for the purpose of upfront verification of income, effective November 1, 2021. P&F Service reviewed a random sample of 90 claims (ep 180s and 190s) completed by the PMCs from November 1, 2021, through January 31, 2022. On June 14, 2022, P&F Service completed an SFR to assess claim processing accuracy, ensure compliance with established procedures and identify error trends.

Results:

Eight errors were found, resulting in a 91.11 percent accuracy rate.

Eight errors were cited involving incorrect FTI compliance:

- 6 - Inaccurate counting of FTI income
- 1 - Failure to initiate development based on FTI income
- 1 - Failure to allow time for completion of the exchange of information between VA and IRS/SSA

P&F Service found no failures to secure and safeguard FTI within the PMCs.

The error trend analysis shows most errors were associated with the counting of FTI income. When FTI is higher than the income reported by the claimant on the application and the countable income is less than the maximum annual pension rate (MAPR), VA should count the higher reported income and notify the claimant that VA counted the higher reported income.

**PIES O99 Requests:**

P&F Service analyzed 50 PIES O99 requests from April 25, 2022 through July 25, 2022 that were initiated by the PMCs. On October 27, 2022, P&F Service completed an SFR to assess claims processing accuracy, ensure compliance with established procedures and identify error trends.

This review found 70 percent (35 claims) properly made a PIES 099 requests. The PIES 099 request was made in error in the remaining 30 percent (15 claims). This marked a significant improvement from the 26.4 percent accuracy shown in the March 1, 2022, PIES 099 SFR.

#### Error Breakdown:

- In 11 cases, a PIES 099 was requested in error when the required service treatment records (STRs) and personnel records were already uploaded to VBMS. In most cases, the STRs were embedded within the Personnel Records or vice versa.
- In 3 cases, evidence shows Fire-Related Records.
  - Users submitted PIES 099 requests in error. The procedures listed under M21-1 III.ii.2.F.1 should have been followed.
- In 1 case, the evidence shows the Veteran served in the Navy, and PIES requests were submitted under Army.

As shown, most errors occurred when a PIES 099 request was completed for service records already available in VBMS. Users failed to provide a complete review of available records in VBMS, resulting in an unneeded PIES 099 request which delayed claims processing.

#### **Individual Quality Reviews**

P&F Service reviewed 291 IQRs from February 1, 2022 to April 30, 2022 for the VSR, authorizer, AQRS, RQRS and RVSR positions. On August 23, 2022 P&F Service completed this SFR to focus on whether the PMCs performed accurate quality reviews, and to review the impact of upholding the errors cited.

A review of these 291 cases show that the PMCs have an accuracy rate of 96.21 percent.

Commonly cited errors include:

- Improper notification letters, specifically not including all three benefits (Survivor's Pension, DIC and Accrued) in Survivors Pension/DIC claims, or correct AMA information.
- Incorrect updates to tracked item suspense dates regarding GPO delays which led to delays in claims processing.

P&F Service also reviewed a total of 16 reconsideration grants. In all instances, P&F Service agreed with the overturning of the error. No specific error trends were found.

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**Agenda item:** Social Security Adjustments (SSA)

**Presenter:** Julieann Brantseg,  
Analyst

**Target Audience:**  
QRT and Management

#### **Discussion:**

Please ensure that SSA income adjustments are done on any income-based claim that is reviewed. This helps in reducing the overall number of SSA income match claims. For the SSA Income Match Adjustments, please verify that the correct special issues and claim labels are

used. As a reminder, the EP150s and 600's both use the special issue "Upfront Verification" and if an EP600 is established, it should be with the claim label "PMC-SSA Match". This impacts reporting and NWQ routing.

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**Agenda item:** EP 960 Discussion

**Presenter:** Julieann Brantseg,  
Analyst

**Target Audience:**  
QRT and Management

**Discussion:**

During the last PMC Site visit, an issue was raised regarding EP 960's quality. To assist in resolving this issue, each PMC was given a few minutes to state where they are still seeing issues or where the policy is unclear.

A recommendation was made for changing the claim labels to identify when there is an administrative decision. P&F Service is continuing to look into this recommendation to clear up any inconsistencies.

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***Closing Comments***

Please note we are still researching the issue that arose during the quality call regarding notification letters where we are granting DIC as the greater benefit. We will inform the field of the outcome once a final decision has been made.

We are also researching the COLA and SMIB decrease issue that was raised prior to the call. The field will be informed of the outcome once a final decision has been made.

**P&F Quality Mailbox:**

We will solicit for agenda topic(s) for each future Quality Call. If you have a specific topic suggestion, please feel free to email it to the Pension and Fiduciary (P&F) Quality mailbox at [PFTNGQUALOVRST.VBACO@va.gov](mailto:PFTNGQUALOVRST.VBACO@va.gov). For specific policy and procedures related topics, please email to the Policy and Procedures mailbox at [FPOLPROC.VBACO@va.gov](mailto:FPOLPROC.VBACO@va.gov).

**Quality Call Bulletins**

Quality Call Bulletins can be found in the following locations: [https://vbaw.vba.va.gov/PENSIONANDFIDUCIARY/Quality\\_Call\\_Bulletins.asp](https://vbaw.vba.va.gov/PENSIONANDFIDUCIARY/Quality_Call_Bulletins.asp). The next Quality Call is tentatively scheduled for January 2023.

**TMS Courses**

All Pension and Fiduciary Quality Calls and bulletins will be available in TMS. Once the monthly bulletin is finalized, information will be sent to the PMCs and Fiduciary Hubs which will include the TMS #.

## PMC Burial Quick Tips

### Compiled from FY22 Quality Burial Errors

- **Eligible Claimants**
  - **Surviving spouse** – If the spouse is of record, burial benefits are automatically paid to the eligible surviving spouse. If there is no spouse, then VA pays the first to file from the list of eligible claimants. See [M21-1 XI.iii.1.A.3.b](#) for additional information.
  - **Funeral homes/directors** –can only receive burial benefits for a Veteran whose remains are unclaimed; however, under Nehmer re-adjudication, if the funeral home director was the previous claimant and service connected (SC) burial is granted, the funeral home is the proper claimant and can received burial benefits. See [M21-1 VIII.i.2.B.1.d for more information](#).
  - **Third Party** –VBA may pay a third party, who bore the funeral expenses, burial benefits of Veterans whose remains are unclaimed per [38 U.S.C 2302](#).

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** If the responsible party for the Veteran’s burial expenses under question 23 is:

- “NO”, deny the benefit
  - “BLANK”, deny the benefit unless there’s evidence showing the claimant did incur the expense. See M21-1 XI.iii.1.A.4.b.
- **Death While Hospitalized Under VA Care**
    - If a Veteran dies in a VA hospital or while under VA care and the remains are unclaimed, VHA is responsible for the burial. Burial benefits should be denied by the PMC. See [M21-1 XI.iii.1.B.7.c](#).
  - **Transportation Benefit**
    - Allowable transportation expenses are noted in [M21-1 XI.iii.1.B.6 d](#). If the evidence does not indicate from where the remains were picked up and to where they were delivered, deny the transportation benefit but solicit this information in the decision notification letter as additional benefits may be payable.
    - If the name of the Veteran and the name of the claimant are not listed on the transportation statement listing expenses, this is not a valid statement for VA purposes. For a list of the required evidence to grant the transportation expenses, see [M21-1 XI.iii.1.B.6.c](#). If all elements are not met, this will be a quality error.
    - If the claimant applies for burial benefits and the claimant is eligible for transportation benefits, please ensure all evidence in the eFolder is reviewed before denying transportation benefits. Evidence may be stored with the *VA Form 21-534* or mislabeled in the eFolder.