



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Pension and Fiduciary (P&F) Service

Pension Quality Call

Date: March 29, 2023

TMS: # VA 4642036

AGENDA TOPICS

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AGENDA ITEMS

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 STAR Pension Quality Reviews completed between the months of **January 2023 and February 2023** (transactions completed between December 1, 2022 through January 31, 2023). STAR reviews are performed the following month after a claim is completed.

Review Month	Review Category	Total Reviewed	Total Claims in Error	BE Errors Cited	Non-BE Errors Cited	Number of Errors Cited	BE Accuracy %	Recons Received
Jan	Authorization	31	4	0	4	4	100%	0
	Rating	19	3	0	3	3	100%	0
	Total	50	7	0	7	7		0
Feb	Authorization	31	3	0	3	3	100%	0
	Rating	19	6	0	8	8	100%	0
	Total	50	9	0	11	11		0

Out of a total of **100** claims reviewed for quality, **16** claims had a total of **18** errors cited; **0** of those claims had BE errors. No reconsiderations (recons) were submitted from any of the 18 errors cited. The 18 errors were within the following categories:

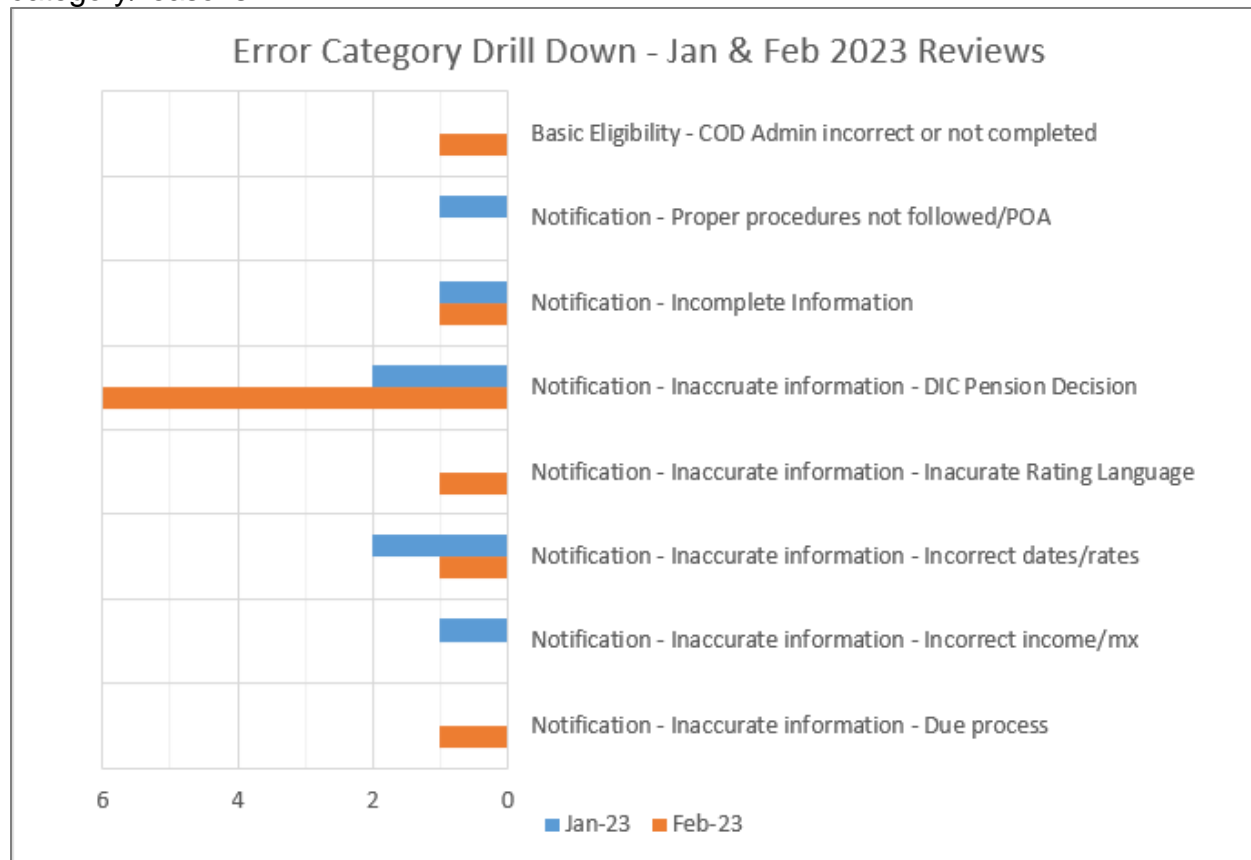
January:

BE	Non-BE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 – Notification

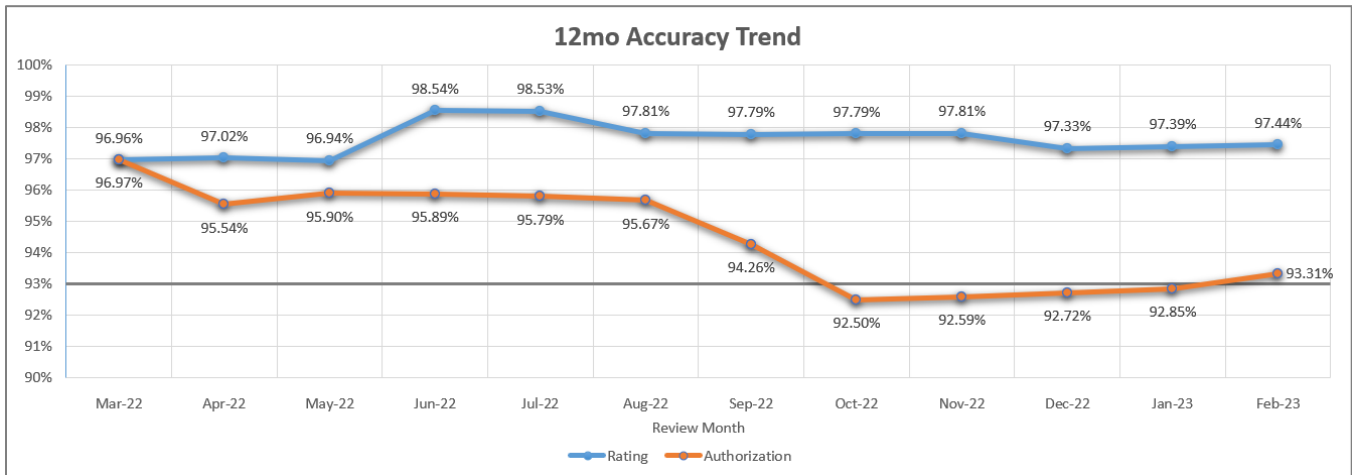
February:

BE	Non-BE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 – Basic Eligibility • 10 – Notification

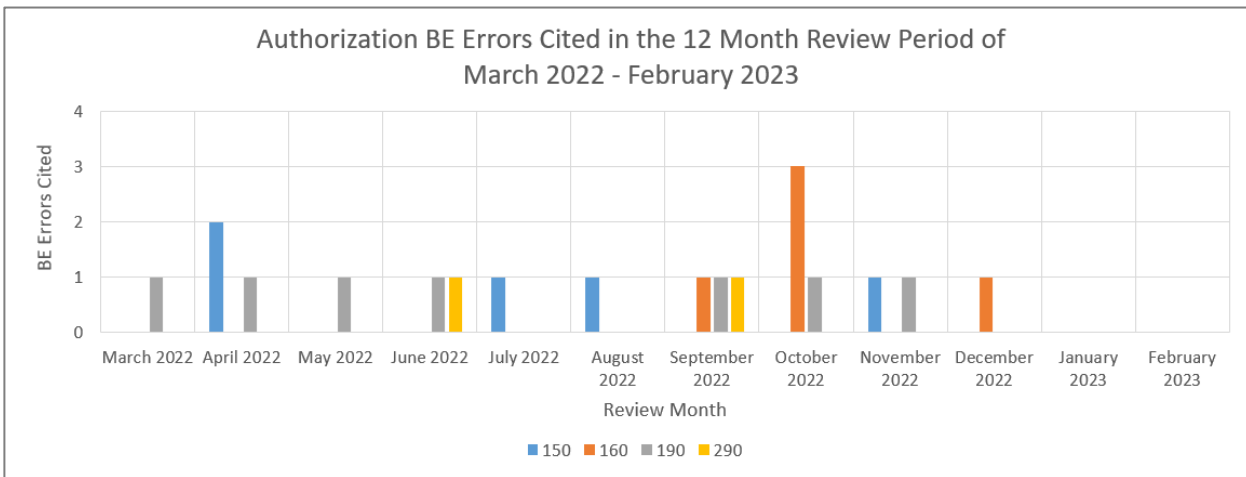
The *Error Drill Down* graph below (next page) details the errors broken out by category/reasons:



During the latest 12-month review period of March 2022 through February 2023 (transactions between February 1, 2022, through January 31, 2023) Authorization errors have increased and brought down accuracy from 96.97%. However, there has been steady improvement in this current fiscal year since November 2022.



During this 12-month review period, 7 BE errors were cited on EP 190s, 5 BE errors were cited on EPs 150 and 160, and 2 BE errors were cited on EP 290. The chart below shows a breakdown of the Authorization BE errors by EP and when they were cited.



Missed claimed issues, income and medical expense calculations were the most common BE errors on the EP 190 and 150s. A spike in burial errors also occurred at the end of last fiscal year. Those errors mainly involved incorrect rates due to transportation errors. This fiscal year has seen an improvement in these types of errors.

While the BE errors have improved, non-BE errors are still an issue such as the examples highlighted in the authorization EP 190 case study; which demonstrated errors that involved incomplete development which can create subsequent avoidable piecemeal development; incorrectly calculating asset and IVAP for net worth; and incorrect information in a notification letter.

Remember to review the letter for accuracy before release and double check calculations in VBMS-A. For burials in particular, please remember to enter decision information accurately in VBMS-A; as the selected decision option determines the verbiage in the notification PADL.

References/Contacts

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

Agenda item: FIT Tool Reminder

Presenter: Amy Hamma, Analyst

Target Audience:
QRT and Management

Discussion:

As a reminder, please ensure no PII is entered in the [FIT Tool](#). Any questions that contain PII should be sent to the appropriate mailbox.

Note: In [FIT](#), questions concerning

- training, will be routed to the Training Team
- case-specific inquiries not containing personally identifiable information (PII), or questions related to quality reviews will be routed to the Quality and Oversight Team
- systems and letters will be routed to the Business Management Team
- pension automation or VA forms will be routed to the Pension Automation Teams
- performance measures, dashboards, and other data topics will be routed to the Data Analytics and Project Management Team, and
- policy or procedures, including questions about the intended meaning of a particular block in the Fiduciary Program Manual (FPM) or M21-1, Adjudication Procedures Manual, will be routed to the Policy and Procedures Team.

Important:

- “All inquiries containing PII, to include questions regarding administrative decisions and claim-specific inquiries, must be emailed with encryption to the Quality and Oversight Team mailbox at [VAVBAWAS/CO/P&F TNG QUAL OVRST](#).”
- When submitting an inquiry on a policy or procedure
 - clearly identify exact question(s) being raised
 - provide specific manual reference(s) that are relevant to the inquiry
 - include your station’s suggested response to the question(s) if a possible solution has been identified to the issue, and submit a completed VA Form 21-0965, Manual Change Request, if, as part of the inquiry, your office is recommending a change to the M21-1 or FPM.

Agenda item: Special Focus Reviews (SFRs)

Presenter: Michael Domzalski,
Analyst

Target Audience:
QRT and Management

Discussion:

Incarceration Adjustments:

P&F Service conducted a Special Focused Review (SFR) during Quarter (Q) 2 (January) of fiscal year (FY) 2023 of claims involving incarceration adjustments. P&F Service reviewed a sample of claims to ascertain whether users are properly processing claims involving incarceration adjustments at various stages.

Results:

BE Accuracy Findings:

- The BE accuracy of the entire sample is 100% with no BE errors cited.

Non-BE Accuracy Findings:

- The Non-BE accuracy of the entire sample is 88% with 6 non-BE errors cited, and no impact or potential impact to payments.

Error Breakdown:

- P&F Service Q&O identified the following areas requiring corrective action, which do not affect the outcome of the claim:
 - Five (10%) require corrective action resulting from notification errors.
 - One error (2%) identified the PMC failed to follow accurate steps for development of a separate incarceration period.

Agenda item: Field Inquiries

Presenter: Shannon Hunsicker,
Analyst

Target Audience:
QRT and Management

Discussion:

Philadelphia PMC Inquiries:

- 1)** We would like to follow up on the status of the inquiries made with respect to Pension decisions where DIC is paid as the greater benefit (I believe Milwaukee also asked a series of questions regarding this topic as part of a prior call). For details, January 10, 2023, outlined our questions and thoughts regarding this issue. Additionally, Milwaukee PMC's inquiry was submitted as part of FIT Item 238, submitted November 28, 2022.

P&F Service Response: We are currently working on this issue and will provide a response once it is finalized.

- 2)** We wanted to follow up on the January 2023 call to confirm that there is no change with respect to the rebuttal process being followed at PMCs.

P&F Service Response: In November 2022, OFO released information regarding changes that standardized individual quality review (IQR) recon process that went into effect December 5, 2022. Currently, this does not affect PMCs. The January 2023 Post Call Bulletin also reflects this.

Milwaukee PMC Inquiry:

- 1) The forms for VBMS dev and also in Package Manager are outdated. Request an update on a timeline for updating those applications.

P&F Service Response: P&F Service is aware of the outdated form versions being released through VBMS, and we are pursuing the next steps to update these forms. Through efforts by VBA business lines, a comprehensive list of forms requiring an update within the system is being compiled including all P&F Service owned forms. An effort to update the forms is being pursued as a FY23 Q4 priority with the goal to update all VBMS released forms to the current version by the end of Q4. These efforts also include an update to various Compensation Service owned forms which are regularly used for pension purposes.

- 2) Regarding the email “Updates to Alternate Signer Procedures” dated 01/06/2023:

- a) Will there need to be evidence to show that the claimant cannot sign on their own?
Example: If a claimant cannot sign on their own due to physical limitation or mental incapacity, will there be a need to have supporting evidence to show that? It would seem that with the alternate signer certification section taken from the July 2022 version of the [VA Form 21P-534EZ, Application for DIC, Survivors Pension, and/or Accrued Benefits](#) (shown in the email from 01/06/2023) that supporting evidence would not be required. However, we would like confirmation.
- b) Our current understanding of the VA Form 21-0972, Alternate Signer Certification, is that the 0972 does not allow VSRs to call the alternate signer directly to obtain missing information, i.e., we still need to obtain the claimant’s verbal permission after performing the ID protocol. Is this understanding correct? Will there be any changes to procedures allowing for us to call the alternate signer directly? We ask this due to the change mentioned in the email: “An alternate signer may now submit subsequent evidence in support of a **pending** claim.”
- c) Will there be any updates with guidance on which forms alternate signers may or may not sign? With the amount of forms listed on the 0972, it may be beneficial to have guidance on which forms the alternate signer cannot sign. For example, there have been questions on whether the alternate signer can sign the VA Form 21-22/and VA Form 21-0845.

P&F Service Response:

- a) Additional evidence is not necessarily required. As provided within the M21-1 guidance, when an alternate signer certifies or represents that he or she is an appropriate signer under the criteria set forth in [38 U.S.C. 5101](#), VA will generally accept the alternate signature in the absence of discrepant information.

- b) Yes, that understanding is correct that telephone contact may not be used for an alternate signer. In order to ensure the security of claimants' information and to comply with release of information laws and regulations, the alternate signer certification is limited to written correspondence. At this time, there is no anticipated change in procedure to allow for telephone development without a valid [VA Form 21-0845, Authorization to Disclose Personal Information to a Third Party](#).
- c) Certain forms have special legal or regulatory requirements which specify who may sign on behalf of a beneficiary. As it would not be feasible to specify every single form which has unique requirements, the updated M21-1 provides general instructions on this issue while including an example involving the VA Form 21-22a.

Agenda item: PACT Act Updates

Presenter: Shannon Hunsicker,
Analyst

Target Audience:
QRT and Management

Discussion:

The following PACT Act Updates were made since our last call in January:

- SOP version 2 was released on February 6, 2023
- [Service Connected Death FAQs](#) were updated on February 6, 2023
- The PMC live chat Q&A and additional PAC PACT Act Q&A were uploaded to the [P&F Service Intranet Site](#) on March 7, 2023
- There was a change in the PACT ACT Q&A #2, which is updated guidance from the live chat session in January (#39)
- Special Focused Reviews (SFRs) were started at the beginning of March
- P&F Service completed spot checks of completed claims on March 3, 2023
- P&F Service began validating three IPRs per PMC weekly from February 6 and will continue through May 8, 2023
- Reminder – The grace period for IQRs ended April 1, 2023, however P&F Service is waiting for further guidance from OFO regarding an extension.

Agenda item: PACT Act IPRs

Presenter: Jennifer Kunkel,
Analyst

Target Audience:
QRT and Management

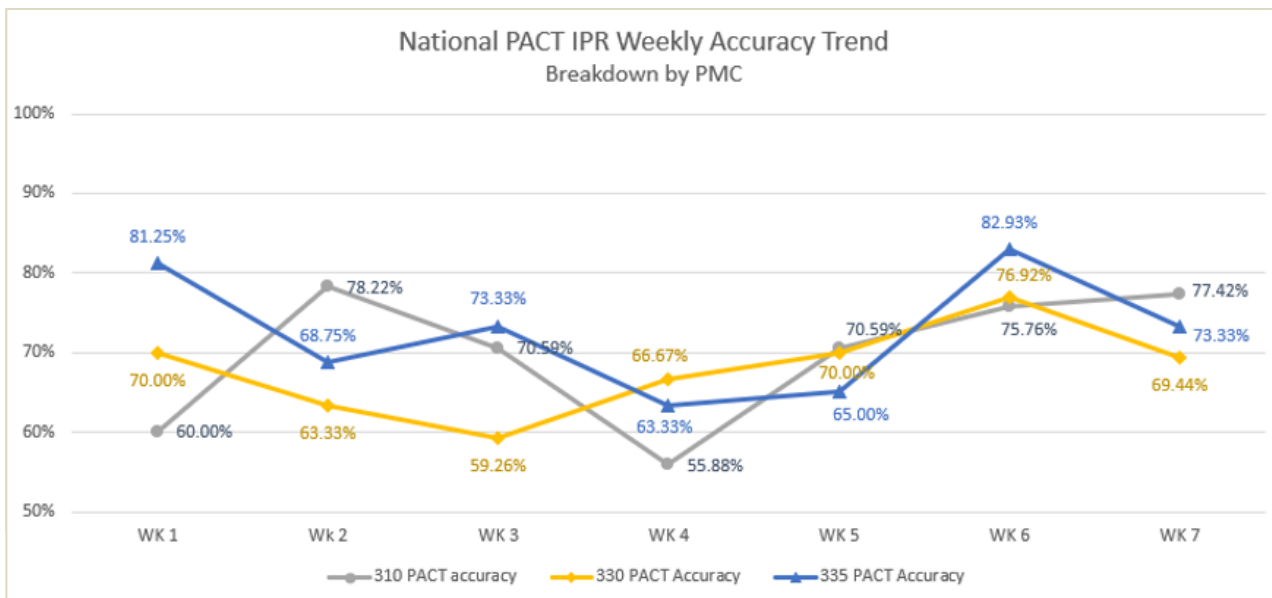
Discussion:

IPRs began the week of February 3, 2023. Reviewers are currently in the 8th week of conducting these reviews. As of the end of Week 7:

IPRs through Week 7: Review Period: 02/03/2023 -- 03/25/2023			
# Transactions Reviewed:	754		
PACT Transaction Accuracy:	70.29%		
PMC Breakdown			
	310	330	335
# Transactions reviewed:	237	302	215
# Transactions with no PACT errors:	163	209	158
Overall Accuracy:	55.27%	63.25%	56.58%
PACT Transaction Accuracy:	68.78%	69.21%	73.49%

The noted top trends show challenges with development (to include when and how to complete the TERA memo), effective dates and systems issues like proper application of the PACT special issues. P&F Service is looking into ways to help improve these areas.

As illustrated on the below graph, after the field call on the 2nd of March in week four, and the publishing of the additional Q&As in week five on the 7th of March, weekly accuracies improved.



References/Contacts

✓ IPR SharePoint [P&F Service - PMC PACT IPRs](#)

Agenda item: PACT Act Case Study

Presenter: Garrett Schmidt,
Analyst

Target Audience:
QRT and Management

Discussion:

The PACT Act case review for this quality call was an authorization EP 190 processed in January 2023. This case addressed PACT issues on a non-service connected claim.

The PACT Act does not change the current process of pursuing a claim for service-connected death under a non-service connected EP, but rather introduces new presumptive conditions and locations of toxic exposure that may infer a claim for service connection.

Closing Comments

P&F Quality Call Topics:

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. For specific policy and procedures related topics, please send inquiries through the [P&F Service Field Inquiry Tool \(FIT\)](#).

Quality Call Bulletins

Quality Call Bulletins can be found within TMS along with call recordings. Once the monthly bulletin is finalized, information will be sent to the PMCs and Fiduciary Hubs which will include the TMS #.

The next Quality Call is tentatively scheduled for May 2023.