

Solano Veterans Office helps vets file benefit claims

As of March 24, 2015 the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) requires veterans and their survivors to use new standardized forms when filing claims and appeals. The Solano County office of Veteran's Services is fully equipped to assist veterans navigate the claims process, should they need assistance.

The new law brings the VA in line with other government agencies, including the Social Security Administration and Internal Revenue Service. The new process has been deemed necessary and long overdue, and will help to eliminate claim processing delays, inaccuracy and frustration among claimants.

VA form 21-0966, the *Intent to File a Claim for Compensation* has three major components, including:

- It standardizes the traditional informal claims process by employing a new standardized form, which an individual or his or her representative can submit in order to establish a potential effective date for benefits while they take up to a year to gather evidence to support the claim.
- It mandates use of specified forms designed to capture information necessary to identify and support compensation, pension and other benefit claims.
- It mandates use of a standardized notice of disagreement form in most cases when a claimant wishes to initiate an appeal of a VA decision.

Regardless of the disability, the new law requires all benefit claims to the VA be filed on the new standardized forms; ensuring they are processed in a timely and accurate manner.

By requiring claims on a standardized form – as other public agencies do – the VA will be able to quickly identify and initiate the claims process.

The VA encourages veterans to file compensation claims online through the eBenefits web portal at www.ebenefits.va.gov. eBenefits guides claimants through the application process with a series of questions that elicit information captured on the standardized paper forms.

Veterans who cannot or choose not to file online may download VA form 21-0966 from www.va.gov/vaforms or call (800) 827-1000 to have the form sent to their home. Completed forms may be mailed or faxed back to the VA.

Veterans seeking assistance with accessing or completing the new forms are encouraged to visit the Solano County Veteran's Services Office. Designed as a one-stop-shop, the Solano Veteran's Services Office provides counseling and assistance to veterans, their dependents and survivors relative to federal, state and local benefit programs based on military service.

Ted Puntillo is director of Veteran Services for Solano County. Reach him at 784-6590 or TEPuntillo@SolanoCounty.com. The Solano County Veteran Services Office, 675 Texas St. in Fairfield, is open from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.

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