

What Can I Do To Help?

- Be as thorough as possible in completing your claim application.
- Do NOT assume that VA has information on file already.
- ALWAYS sign your name on the application form.
- Respond as quickly and completely as possible when asked for information.
- If you are scheduled for a medical exam, please keep your appointment. If you are unable to keep your appointment (for whatever reason), please contact the VA medical Center where you were scheduled to report as soon as possible.
- If you have been treated for your disability by private doctors, please ask them to send a copy of your treatment record.
- Let it be known, as soon as possible, if you change your address or phone number.
- Any time you call about your claim, please have your VA file number available to give to the person who assists you.
- If you can't remember and can't find your VA file number, please have your Social Security number (or - if you are a survivor of a veteran - have the veteran's Social Security number) available since (starting in the mid-1970's) this is usually the number assigned as the VA file number.
- Any time that you write to VA, you should include your VA file number not only on your letter but also on any documents that you submit in support of your claim - in case they become detached from your letter.

Additional information may be found at:

LawHelp.org/SC
South Carolina's guide to free legal resources

Public Benefits Cases Handled

Food Stamps
Medicaid
Medicare
Social Security
Supplemental Security Income
TANF/FI
Unemployment Compensation
Veterans Benefits

Other Legal Representation

Consumer & Bankruptcy
Education
Employment
Family
Federal Income Tax
Housing
Migrant Farm Workers
Probate

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South Carolina
BAR FOUNDATION
Lawyers Sustaining Justice



Understanding the VA Claims Process



Our Mission

South Carolina Legal Services is a statewide law firm that provides civil legal services to protect the rights and represent the interests of low-income South Carolinians.

For Free Services

1 (888) 346-5592
contactus@sclegal.org
www.sclegal.org / www.lawhelp.org/sc
www.probono.net/sc

Step 1: File Your Claim

You must complete and submit a VA Form 21-526

(Veteran's Application for Compensation or Pension).

If you filed a claim in the past, you do not need to complete a VA Form 21-526 again. You will need a signed statement about what you want to claim, why, and where you were treated for the claimed condition.



Step 2: Obtain Evidence (this step takes 1-4 months)

Your disability evaluation will be based on all evidence sent to the VA.

You must verify your service dates and request your service medical records. If you send a signed medical release (attached to VA Form 21-526), your private medical records will also be requested.

If the VA office requests more information, please send it to them as soon as possible.

Step 3: Examination at VA Hospital (this step takes 1-3 months)

While waiting for other evidence to arrive, you may be asked to take a medical exam. The exams that are requested for you will depend on your claim and treatment history.

The VA Medical Center will schedule the exam. They will contact you by mail with when and what exams are scheduled for you. You can help by keeping your exam appointments and by asking your private doctors to send a copy of your records to our office. Remember to ask them to include your VA file number on the records that they submit.



Step 4: Record Evaluation (this step takes 2-3 months)

When all the evidence is gathered, your claim is ready to be rated. This may take about three months.

Your VA rating determines what disabilities VA can pay for and at what percent. If there is a change in your disability after you've filed your claim, please let your advocate know as soon as possible.



Step 5: A Decision is Made (this step takes 1-3 weeks)

After the rating is completed, you will be notified promptly of VA's decision. VA will provide you with the reasons for all decisions to grant or deny benefits. If you do not agree with VA's decision, you may seek to appeal the decision.