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AGENT ORANGE “FAST TRACK”  
FACT SHEET

VA is committed to Advocating for Veterans.

Providing benefits to Veterans who served in Vietnam and are suffering from ischemic heart disease, Parkinson's disease and B-cell leukemias is the right thing to do. Secretary Shinseki has stated that he intends to advocate for Veterans, and his decision to add these disabilities to the list of those subject to the presumption of service connection as a result of exposure to Agent Orange demonstrates that commitment.

Overview of Issue(s)

Three new diseases are being added to the list of diseases subject to the presumption of service connection as a result of exposure to Agent Orange for Veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam or who can document exposure elsewhere. VA estimates that this decision will result in a 22 percent increase in claims for disability compensation benefits during fiscal year (FY) 2010. Meeting this new demand while continuing VA's commitment to improvement in the time it takes VA to decide a claim requires new solutions.

Proposed program solution.

VA is developing internal process changes to meet the challenge and will explore a “fast-track” option to automate the processing of the newly submitted Agent Orange claims. VA will seek input from industry and stakeholders for the “fast-track” option.

Input from Stakeholders.

VA will release a Performance Work Statement (PWS) to engage multiple subject matter experts to identify key issues and concerns with the proposed automated solution. In fact, we will actively solicit feedback from our employees, Congress, Veterans Service Organizations, labor unions, and other subject matter experts during the comment period of the PWS, which we intend to release very soon. The purpose of this meeting/phone call/message is to let you know in advance that the request for submissions is coming.

VA is committed to reducing the backlog and improving decision time even in the face of the projected workload increase.

This effort will provide valuable insight as to how VA and its dedicated employees can tackle issues related to surges in claims for benefits, and will result in a long term benefit to veterans and survivors, the VA, and its employees. When implemented and in combination with other initiatives such as Veterans Relations Management (VRM) and

the Veteran Benefit Management System (VBMS), VA will be able to provide world class service and eliminate the backlog of claims.

Fast-Track of AO claims will be good for veterans.

The goal is to minimize processing times for this group of claims and alleviate the impact to VA's inventory of claims. This is good for veterans who are currently waiting for their claims to be processed as well as veterans who may have been waiting years for these diseases to be associated with Agent Orange exposure. VA seeks input for a system that will allow us to do the right thing while minimizing the negative impact that the increase in claims may have on veterans.

This proposed solution is good for our employees.

The final decision regarding entitlement to benefits will continue to be made by a VA employee. This system is being designed as a tool to assist employees in doing their jobs, it is not a system designed to replace them. By providing a streamlined process and an electronic packet for decision-maker review, VA will empower its employees responsible for adjudicating these increasingly complex claims.

This system will be designed to work with existing VA systems. No jobs will be lost.

How will this be different than previous efforts with outside contracting?

First and foremost, we start by engaging our stakeholders. Improving service delivery and reducing claim wait times to the lowest level possible cannot be solved by VA alone. That is why the labor unions, VSOs, Congress, and others are being asked to participate prior to release of the request for information and comment from industry.

Second, this effort does not seek to reinvent the wheel. We look to augment the existing system for a relatively small percentage of claims.

Off-the-shelf systems, with relatively minor customization, can potentially serve as the model to process claims more quickly than we do currently, at lower cost, and with much better tools for our dedicated employees.

How are we funding?

This will be funded from current appropriations. If needed, VA will request additional resources from Congress. Most important, this process will be cost effective.