

**TDVS Benefits Bulletin**  
**23-1**

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*This month's bulletin will take just over 4 minutes of your time.*

**1 big thing: TDVS Annual Conference will be held October 23 - 25, 2023 in Knoxville.**

Mark your calendars now! TDVS Annual Conference 2023 will be held October 23 - 25, 2023 in Knoxville, Tennessee.



**TDVS Updates**

TDVS Training Updates

- February Lunch and Learn, February 8<sup>th</sup>, 11:30 to 12:30 p.m. CST
  - Suicide Prevention and TN Dept. of Health County Health Councils
- March Lunch and Learn, March 8<sup>th</sup>, 11:30 to 12:30 p.m. CST
  - TBD
- April Regional Quarterly Training (Mandatory Training)
- May Lunch and Learn, May 10<sup>th</sup>, 11:30 to 12:30 p.m. CST
  - TN State Parks and TN Dept. of Transportation Veteran Programs
- [2023 Training Schedule Published](#)

PACT Act Toolbox – Updates

**TDVS has created a [PACT Act Toolbox](#) to help you serve Tennessee Veterans and their families. It's an advocate's one-stop shop for --**

- VA Fact Sheets
- VA Web Resources
- TDVS Fact Sheet
- TDVS FAQs
- Bill Text, Summaries, and More
- Training Resources

#### **What's new:**

- [PACT Act VA Policy Letter, December 12, 2022](#) – Guidance to claims processors when processing disability compensation claims and appeals for Veterans and survivors impacted by the PACT Act.
- [NVLSP Self-Help Guide](#) for Filing an Initial VA Claim for Disability Benefits for Burn Pit-Related Conditions, November 2022
- [NVLSP Camp Lejeune Justice Act of 2022 FAQ](#), December 2022
- [NVLSP Self-Help Guide: How to Obtain VA Disability Benefits for a Burn Pit-Related Medical Condition When VA Previously Denied You Service Connection for the Condition](#), November 2022
- [Attendees Questions & VA Responses](#) from VBA's Office of Women's Health Virtual PACT Act Session

### **VA and Veteran Benefit Updates**

#### **Wellness Wednesday Financial Educational Series**

**Save-the-Date – 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of each month.** Register for the January 18<sup>th</sup> and future sessions here – [Prudential Pathways Seminars](#).

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Prudential Financial, Outreach, Transition and Economic Development (OTED) offers transitioning Service members (TSMs), Veterans, spouses, their family members, and caregivers the opportunity to participate in the **Wellness Wednesday Financial Educational series**.

The series was cultivated to address financial literacy gaps across the military and Veteran community and is comprised of two programs –

- An online website portal which contains a roster of financial literacy information and resources available at [www.prudential.com/Veteran](http://www.prudential.com/Veteran), and,

- the Wellness Wednesday Financial education series, offered the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of every month that focuses on a variety of topics such as: 1) purchasing a home; 2) paying for college; 3) planning for retirement; and 4) learning the building blocks of how to save, budget, and make a return on investments.

### Automated Decision Support

**VA is rolling out automated decision support** for some administrative tasks and workflow.

**Why it matters:** You will start to see some of these documents, like the Automated Review Summary Document, in Veterans' eFolders in VBMS. You may also see claim notes transferring claims to RO 398 – Automated Benefits Delivery.

- **Automated Review Summary Document or ASDR** is a tool to help identify documents in the Veteran's eFolder and support claim processors.

**I want more:** There are several [additional resources](#) in VSO Tools – Tools - VSO Automated Decision Support Toolkit.

### Practice Like a Pro

**Developing medical evidence to support a claim** is a key advocacy skill. Service-connected disability compensation requires three requirements –

- Competent evidence of a current disability.
- Medical or lay evidence of an in-service incurrence or aggravation of disease or injury.
- Link or nexus between in-service occurrence or aggravation and current disability.

Let's focus on competence evidence of a current disability.

**Why it matters:** You will need [competent medical evidence](#) to establish a current disability. Competent medical evidence may include –

- Private or VA medical records from recent treatment or examinations.
- Letters from medical providers.
- Service treatment records if recently discharged from service.

You'll need to submit competent medical evidence of a current disability [or lay evidence about symptoms](#) of a disability sufficient to trigger VA's Duty to Assist in obtaining a medical examination or opinion.

**What's next:** We'll continue to build upon this discussion –

- Look at January's 2023 NVLSP Battle of the [Medical Experts Presentation](#)
- Next Benefit Bulletin – More About Private Medical Opinions – Here's a preview of [NVLSP's sample letter](#) to a medical professional requesting a medical opinion.
- More Advocacy Tips
- Hands On Practical Exercises
- Contact your Regional Director or the Appeals & Accreditation Division [Training Team](#) for Small Group Training

### **Advocate Spotlight**

#### Your Advocacy Supports Timely Appeals Resolution

**BVA is holding more hearings than ever.** Last year BVA held over 30,000 hearings. TDVS provided appellate advocacy in nearly 700 of 1000 scheduled hearings. TDVS is laser focused on doing our part to provide more timely appellate decisions.

**Why it matters:** BVA is holding more hearings than ever to provide more [timely decisions](#). As a result, it's applying more scrutiny to the legal requirements necessary for postponement, representation, and no shows that impact BVA's ability to conduct hearings.

**Reality check:** Here's what you can do to advocate for your Veterans and help TDVS provide appellate advocacy before BVA –

- Ensure Veteran or claimant address and phone number(s) are validated in VetraSpec every time you engage with a Veteran.
- Ask Veterans and claimants whether they have a pending appeal at the BVA before accepting POA.
  - An appellant can submit a request for change in representation within 90 days following the mailing of notice that an appeal has been certified to the Board.
    - Although BVA does not have to accept a change in representation after this 90-day period, the [Appeals Division](#) can help you draft a motion showing good cause for change in representation.
- Contact the [Appeals Division](#) if there's a possible need to postpone or reschedule a hearing.

**What else can I do:** Here are additional actions you can take to support your Veterans –

- If you're not already, hold virtual hearings from your office. Contact Liza Quinn at [liza.quinn@tn.gov](mailto:liza.quinn@tn.gov) for more information about joining this growing network of CSO partners.
- Ensure you have Caseflow access. Connect with your Regional Director to gain access or request familiarization training. Here are tools to enhance your advocacy –
  - [December 2021 Monthly Training](#) – Recorded Presentation, Slide Deck, VSO Quick Reference Guide and BVA Virtual Hearing Fact Sheet

*If you have an example of teamwork between Veteran service offices/organizations across the state making a difference in the lives of Tennessee veterans, please share with your Regional Director for possible inclusion in an upcoming "Advocate Spotlight."*

*TDVS Benefits Bulletins Can Be Found on the [VSO Tools](#) Portion of TDVS's Website*

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