

Section A. General Information About the Fully Developed Claim (FDC) Program

Overview

In this Section This section contains the following topics:

Topic	Topic Name	See Page
1	Overview of the FDC Program	3-A-2
2	Forms Claimants Must Use When Submitting an FDC	3-A-3
3	Regional Office (RO) Responsibilities	3-A-10

1. Overview of the FDC Program

Introduction	<p>This topic contains an overview of the FDC Program, including the</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• purpose of the FDC Program, and• benefits of and criteria for participation in the FDC Program.
Change Date	<p>November 27, 2013</p>
a. Purpose of the FDC Program	<p>The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) designed the FDC Program for the purpose of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• reducing its backlog of pending claims, and• improving claims-processing timeliness.
b. Benefits of and Criteria for Participation in the FDC Program	<p>Activities that result in delays at the beginning of the traditional claims process include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• providing claimants with the notice 38 U.S.C. 5103 requires regarding the evidence they must submit in order to establish entitlement to the specific benefit they are seeking• allowing claimants up to 30 days to respond to the notice, and• gathering the evidence that claimants assert supports their claim. <p>The FDC Program allows VA to eliminate these delays and divert the time and resources it normally devotes to the actions described above to other claims-processing activities. It does this by requiring claimants that choose to participate in this program to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• submit their claim on a specific form that contains language which satisfies the notice requirements of 38 U.S.C. 5103, and• simultaneously with their claim submit all private medical treatment records, identify any relevant treatment records at a Federal facility, and submit any additional forms or treatment records required under special circumstances that support their specific claim. <p>Reference: For information about the forms claimants must use when submitting an FDC, see M21-1MR, Part III, Subpart i, 3.A.2.a.</p>

2. Forms Claimants Must Use When Submitting an FDC

Introduction	<p>This topic contains information about the forms claimants must use when submitting a fully developed claim, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• list of forms claimants must use to participate in the FDC Program• use of EZ forms by claimants who do not want to participate in the FDC Program• recognition of EZ forms as formal applications• unique characteristics of the EZ forms• notice claimants receive in<ul style="list-style-type: none">– <i>VA Form 21-526EZ, Application for Disability Compensation and Related Compensation Benefits</i>– <i>VA Form 21-527EZ, Application for Pension, and</i>– <i>VA Form 21-534EZ, Application for DIC, Death Pension, and /or Accrued Benefits, and</i>• handling incomplete or unsigned EZ forms
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Change Date	November 27, 2013
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2. Forms Claimants Must Use When Submitting an FDC, Continued

a. List of Forms Claimants Must Use to Participate in the FDC Program

The table below lists the forms claimants **must** complete, sign, and return to VA in order to participate in the FDC Program.

Exception: VA does **not** require a “wet” signature on forms claimants submit through the Veterans Online Application (VONAPP) or VONAPP Direct Connect (VDC). The certification that a wet signature provides on paper versions of these forms is captured electronically when claimants submit forms through authorized web portals, such as eBenefits.

If the claimant is seeking ...	Then the claimant must use ...
disability compensation	<i>VA Form 21-526EZ, Application for Disability Compensation and Related Compensation Benefits.</i>
disability pension	<i>VA Form 21-527EZ, Application for Pension.</i>
death benefits	<i>VA Form 21-534EZ, Application for DIC, Death Pension, and /or Accrued Benefits.</i>

Notes:

- Follow the instructions in [M21-1MR, Part III, Subpart i, 3.B.5.c](#) for excluding a claim from the FDC Program if a claimant
 - requests processing of his/her claim under the FDC Program without filing the claim on the appropriate form, or
 - uses an outdated version of an EZ form to apply for benefits.
- A Veteran who simultaneously claims entitlement to both compensation **and** pension under the FDC Program must submit both
 - *VA Form 21-526EZ, and*
 - *VA Form 21-527EZ.*

b. Use of EZ Forms by Claimants Who Do Not Want to Participate in the FDC Program

Claimants who do **not** want VA to process their claim under the FDC Program may also use the EZ forms listed in [M21-1MR, Part III, Subpart i, 3.A.2.a](#) to apply for benefits. They notify VA of their choice by checking the box next to the statement near the end of each form that reads: *I DO NOT want my claim considered for rapid processing under the FDC Program because I plan to submit further evidence in support of my claim.*

Reference: For more information about excluding the types of claims described in this block from the FDC Program, see [M21-1MR, Part III, Subpart i, 3.B.5.c](#).

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2. Forms Claimants Must Use When Submitting an FDC,

Continued

c. Recognition of EZ Forms As Formal Applications

VA considers a completed EZ form “[a]n initial formal application on a form prescribed by the Secretary” under [38 CFR 3.160](#). This means that once a claimant has completed one of these forms, VA does **not** require him/her to subsequently complete another formal application.

Example: Examples of other formal applications include

- *VA Form 21-526, Veteran’s Application for Compensation and/or Pension, or*
- *VA Form 21-534, Application for DIC, Death Pension, and Accrued Benefits by a Surviving Spouse or Child.*

Exception: Claimants **must** use the appropriate EZ form from the list shown in [M21-1MR, Part III, Subpart i, 3.A.2.a](#) each time they file a claim they want VA to process under the FDC Program.

d. Unique Characteristics of the EZ Forms

[38 U.S.C. 5103](#) requires VA to notify claimants of the evidence they must submit in order to establish entitlement to the benefit(s) they are seeking. The forms listed in [M21-1MR, Part III, Subpart i, 3.A.2.a](#) are unique in that they provide this notice along with the application for benefits, thereby eliminating the need for VA to

- provide the notice *after* receiving the application, and
- allow time for claimants to respond to the notice.

The forms listed in [M21-1MR, Part III, Subpart i, 3.A.2.a](#) also contain an explanation of the general differences between the FDC process and the standard claim process, to include what the claimant needs to do and when the claimant should submit information and evidence.

References: For more information about the notice VA provides to claimants in

- *VA Form 21-526EZ*, see [M21-1MR, Part III, Subpart i, 3.A.2.e](#)
- *VA Form 21-527EZ*, see [M21-1MR, Part III, Subpart i, 3.A.2.f](#), and
- *VA Form 21-534EZ*, see [M21-1MR, Part III, Subpart i, 3.A.2.g](#).

Continued on next page

2. Forms Claimants Must Use When Submitting an FDC, Continued

**e. Notice
Claimants
Receive in VA
Form 21-526EZ**

VA Form 21-526EZ provides claimants with the notice [38 U.S.C. 5103](#) requires for the following types of disability compensation claims:

- service connection (original, new, secondary, or reopened) for disabilities related to the following types of service:
 - active duty
 - active duty for training, or
 - inactive duty training
- increased disability rating
- individual unemployability
- temporary total disability rating due to
 - hospitalization, or
 - surgical or other treatment
- compensation under [38 U.S.C. 1151](#)
- special monthly compensation (SMC) based on the
 - need for aid and attendance, or
 - status of being housebound
- additional benefits for a spouse who needs aid and attendance
- specially adapted housing or special home adaption
- automobile allowance or adaptive equipment, and
- additional compensation for a Veteran with a helpless/seriously disabled child.

**f. Notice
Claimants
Receive in VA
Form 21-527EZ**

VA Form 21-527EZ provides claimants with the notice [38 U.S.C. 5103](#) requires for the following types of disability pension claims:

- Improved Pension
- special monthly pension (SMP) based on the
 - need for aid and attendance, or
 - status of being housebound, and
- additional Improved Pension benefits for a Veteran with a helpless/seriously disabled child.

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2. Forms Claimants Must Use When Submitting an FDC, Continued

**g. Notice
Claimants
Receive in VA
Form 21-534EZ**

VA Form 21-534EZ provides claimants with the notice [38 U.S.C. 5103](#) requires for claims for the following types of death benefits:

- accrued benefits
- Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) for death related to the following types of service:
 - active duty
 - active duty for training, or
 - inactive duty training
- DIC under [38 U.S.C. 1318](#)
- DIC under [38 U.S.C. 1151](#)
- death pension and parents' DIC
- additional death benefits based on the
 - need for aid and attendance, or
 - status of being housebound, and
- benefits for a deceased Veteran's helpless/seriously disabled child.

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2. Forms Claimants Must Use When Submitting an FDC,

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h. Handling Incomplete or Unsigned EZ Forms

Follow the instructions in the table below if a claimant who requests processing of his/her claim under the FDC Program submits an EZ form that is incomplete or unsigned.

Important: VA does **not** require a signature on forms claimants submit through VONAPP or VDC.

If ...	Then ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the EZ form represents an original claim for benefits, and the claimant did not sign the form 	<p>follow the instructions in M21-1MR, Part III, Subpart ii, 2.D.15.b and c.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the EZ form does not represent an original claim for benefits, and the claimant did not sign the form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> establish the appropriate end product (EP) follow the instructions in M21-1MR, Part III, Subpart i, 3.B.5.c for excluding the claim from the FDC Program, and provide the claimant with the notice 38 U.S.C. 5103 requires. <p>Reference: For more information about</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the notice requirements of 38 U.S.C. 5103, see M21-1MR, Part I, Chapter 1 choosing an appropriate EP, see M21-4, Appendix C, and establishing an EP in Share, see the Share User's Guide.

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2. Forms Claimants Must Use When Submitting an FDC,

Continued

h. Handling Incomplete or Unsigned EZ Forms (continued)

If ...	Then ...
<p>the EZ form does not contain enough information to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify the claimant, or • determine the specific contentions of the claim 	<p>follow the instructions in M21-1MR, Part III, Subpart ii, 1.A.3.g.</p>

Notes:

- If it is possible to determine some but not all of the contentions associated with an FDC,
 - follow the instructions in [M21-1MR, Part III, Subpart i, 3.B.4.a.](#) and
 - attempt to obtain clarification from the claimant by telephone.
- If telephone contact with the claimant is unsuccessful or further attempts to obtain clarification would result in a delay of more than one business day, follow the instructions in [M21-1MR, Part III, Subpart i, 3.B.5.c](#) for excluding the claim from the FDC Program.

3. Regional Office (RO) Responsibilities

Introduction This topic contains information about the responsibilities regional offices (ROs) have with regard to the FDC Program, including

- designation and responsibilities of an FDC Program Coordinator
 - timeliness requirements for processing fully developed claims, and
 - designation of drop-off points.
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a. Designation and Responsibilities of an FDC Program Coordinator

The Veterans Service Center Manager (VSCM) at each regional office (RO) is responsible for designating an employee to serve as the FDC Program Coordinator. This employee is responsible for

- ensuring the integrity of the FDC Program
- reviewing Veterans Service Network (VETSNET) operations reports (VOR) to identify and monitor pending fully developed claims, and
- case managing any FDC that has been pending 90 days or more.

Case management of an FDC requires personal involvement of the FDC Program Coordinator in all steps of the claims process to ensure the RO completes the claim quickly and efficiently. As an FDC nears or reaches the 90-day mark referenced above, the FDC Program Coordinator must take the steps described in the table below:

Step	Action
1	Locate and retrieve the claims folder associated with the FDC.
2	Review development actions taken on the claim to ensure they were done timely and properly.
3	<p>Ensure compliance with the requirements in M21-1MR, Part III, Subpart i, 3.B.4.a to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attach an FDC folder flash to each claims folder associated with an FDC, and • identify each FDC in Modern Awards Processing – Development (MAP-D) by using the <i>Fully Developed Claim</i> special issue indicator.

Continued on next page

3. Regional Office (RO) Responsibilities, Continued

a. Designation and Responsibilities of an FDC Program Coordinator (continued)

Step	Action
4	<p>Hand-carry the claims folder to the drop-off point for the next phase in the claims process, if appropriate.</p> <p>Reference: See M21-1MR, Part III, Subpart i, 3.A.3.c for more information about</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • drop-off points for FDCs, and • the routing of FDCs in a paperless environment.
5	Continue monitoring the status of the claim, intervening, when necessary, to prevent any unnecessary delays in the claims process.

b. Timeliness Requirements for Processing Fully Developed Claims

The table below shows the timeliness requirements for the various activities involved in processing an FDC:

Activity	Timeliness Requirement
intake processing, as described in M21-1MR, Part III, Subpart i, 3.B.4.a	within one day of claim receipt
development, as described in M21-1MR, Part III, Subpart i, 3.B.6.a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • within ten days of receipt of a claim that requires scanning (conversion to an electronic format), or • within three days of receipt of a paperless claim that requires no scanning
rating	within ten days of designation as <i>Ready for Decision</i>
award promulgation/authorization	within five days of generation of the rating decision

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3. Regional Office (RO) Responsibilities, Continued

c. Designation of Drop-Off Points

The VSCM at each RO is responsible for designating drop-off points for FDCs that are awaiting action in the next phase of the claims process. This will ensure speedy identification and retrieval by personnel responsible for handling claims in that next phase.

The table below

- identifies the drop-off points the VSCM must designate, and
- explains how RO personnel must use the drop-off points.

As soon as ...	RO personnel must deliver the corresponding claims folder to a drop-off point for FDCs that are awaiting ...
intake processing is complete	the development described in M21-1MR, Part III, Subpart i, 3.B.6.a.
the claim is ready for a decision	a rating decision.
the rating decision is complete	award promulgation/authorization.

Note: Before processing FDCs in a *paperless environment*, VSCMs must establish electronic work queues

- that correspond to the physical drop-off points referenced above, and
- to which users may assign cases that are awaiting action in the next phase of the claims process.