

TEXAS VETERANS COMMISSION
Claims Representation on
Staffing and Outcome Data Analysis
FY 2018

Introduction

In March 2018, the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) received the Sunset Advisory Commission Staff Report (SSR) which included recommendations to TVC's Claims Department to improve data analysis and staffing strategies to better assist veterans filing benefit claims with the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) to compensate for hardships resulting from military service.

Specifically, it was recommended that TVC's Claims Department "track, evaluate, and strategically adjust claims staffing and special teams" and "track and analyze claims outcome data to better guide program success."

This report identifies the steps that TVC has taken to implement the Sunset Advisory Commissions' recommendations since March 2018, as well as TVC's strategies going forward to utilize the data and tracking recommendations of the SSR.

Staff Action

The TVC Claims Department Director assessed the TVC Claims Benefit Advisors staffing and presented the results to the TVC Commissioners at the Commission's February 6, 2019 public meeting including the recommended adjustments to the staffing locations. The data-driven factors below were considered to identify the best locations for placement of rural claims counselors and to meet the greatest need:

- the current veteran population in a county and its surrounding counties;
- the location of VA offices in which TVC counselors could be placed; and
- the absence of current TVC and Veteran County Service Officer (VCSO) personnel in a county and its surrounding counties.

Additionally, to meet the reporting requirements as set forth in 2.4 of the SSR, the Claims Department has created a "Policy and Performance Program Specialist" position, which is dedicated primarily to analyzing claims staffing levels and effectiveness of the agency's special projects as well as tracking and analyzing claims outcome data to guide the claims department's success. TVC will also conduct a comprehensive overall assessment of claims performance, lessons learned, and needed improvements.

Data and Analysis

1. Workload

Figure 1: Increased Demand for TVC Claim Services

Year	New Claims Filed	New Appeals Filed	Total Cases Maintained	Disability Awards received by Texas Veterans due to TVC assistance
2013	102,160	19,133	201,423	\$2,286,324,339
2014	112,142	23,874	220,103	\$2,630,124,429
2015	124,615	22,180	234,393	\$3,072,341,001
2016	142,872	22,999	247,295	\$3,399,673,323
2017	133,126	19,225	260,482	\$3,704,534,404
2018	142,357	19,284	251,624	\$4,348,492,161

“Figure 1: Increased Demand for TVC Claim Services” shows the growing demand for TVC’s services. The total number of new claims filed each year increased from 102,160 in 2013 to 142,357 in 2018. This is an increase of 40,197 claims (39.3%) in only six years.

Despite the increasing number of new claims filed each year, new appeals remained constant during the same duration with a yearly total of 19,133 in 2013 to 19,284 in 2018. There were a couple of years that showed minor increases in new appeals filed such as 23,874 in 2014 and 22,999 in 2016. However, data shows a continuous need for new appeals assistance.

TVC is authorized 157.5 Claims Benefit Advisors but could only fill 132 of these positions due to a lack of funding. The resulting 25 vacancies, if funded, will be placed at existing TVC offices or at new office locations in rural areas where there is a high demand for services.

The adjustments to staffing locations and recommended new office locations was provided to the TVC Commissioners.

2. Veterans Unseen at each TVC Claims Office

Figure 2: Seen/Not-Seen Data by District for FY 2018

NORTHWEST DISTRICT				
OFFICE LOCATION	# OF OFFICE STAFF	TOTAL SEEN	TOTAL LEFT NOT SEEN	% NOT SEEN
Amarillo	1	463	27	6%
Big Spring	1	147	0	0%
El Paso**	4	6026	737	12%
Fort Bliss	1	912	0	0%
Ft Worth**	4	5578	1050	19%
Lubbock	1	3942	178	5%
Midland	1	1199	7	1%
San Angelo	1	1310	50	4%
Waco RO**	21.8	2111	21	1%
Sheppard AFB		3527	29	1%
TOTAL:		25215	2099	8%

NORTHEAST DISTRICT				
OFFICE LOCATION	# OF OFFICE STAFF	TOTAL SEEN	TOTAL LEFT NOT SEEN	% NOT SEEN
Austin**	5	13195	2182	17%
Chase Bld Austin	1	6	0	0%
College Station	1	1548	273	18%
Dallas**	5	7202	538	7%
Marshall	1	4182	24	1%
Temple**	6	13072	1333	10%
Tyler	1	514	35	7%
TOTAL:		39719	4385	11%

SOUTHWEST DISTRICT				
OFFICE LOCATION	# OF OFFICE STAFF	TOTAL SEEN	TOTAL LEFT NOT SEEN	% NOT SEEN
Audie Murphy VAMC**	4	7530	890	12%
BAMC	1	641	0	0%
Corpus Christi NAS	1	991	0	0%
Corpus Christi OPC**	2	4244	60	1%
Ft Sam Houston**	1	2334	110	5%
Frank Tejada**	7.8	9541	2418	25%
Harlingen	2	3698	505	14%
Kerrville	1	857	148	17%
Laredo	1	4177	64	2%
McAllen	2	4396	413	9%
TOTAL:		38409	4608	12%

SOUTHEAST DISTRICT				
OFFICE LOCATION	# OF OFFICE STAFF	TOTAL SEEN	TOTAL LEFT NOT SEEN	% NOT SEEN
Beaumont	1	2950	117	4%
Conroe	1	1487	92	6%
Galveston	1	665	22	3%
Houston RO**	25.4	9288	826	9%
Houston VAMC**	5	5547	381	7%
Katy	1	2040	242	12%
Lake Jackson	1	1160	15	1%
Lufkin	2	4078	158	4%
Tomball	1	2760	161	6%
Victoria	1	1618	0	0%
TOTAL:		31593	2014	6%

** Locations where veterans may schedule an appointment

The TVC staffing at the Waco and Houston Regional Offices (RO) locations include the Strike Force Teams and administrative support to process claims and appeals with the VA.

“Figure 2: Seen/Not-Seen Data by District for FY 2018” outlines the veteran customers who were assisted and those who were unable to be assisted by TVC claims staff in FY2018. The data is categorized by TVC Claims district and further broken down by each TVC Claims office. TVC Claims Benefit Advisors provided claims services to as many veterans as possible each day during the fiscal year, but were unable to meet the increasing demand of veterans who needed to be seen. This is primarily due to two reasons. First, TVC Claims offices are located in either VA facilities (hospitals, outpatient clinics, Vet centers, and Regional Offices) or military installations throughout Texas and are subject to those facilities’ hours of operation. Second, TVC does not have the financial resources to hire additional staff to meet the high demand for

services. Also, there is limited space available at the VA facilities and TVC needs to work with the VA management to acquire additional space. TVC collaborates extremely well with the VA in Texas, which is the reason why TVC employees can co-locate with VA staff at their facilities at no cost. However, space is an issue and is something TVC and the VA will continue to explore.

TVC will address solutions to all the locations that demonstrated a high level of veterans' unseen. The 25% of veterans TVC was unable to assist at the Frank Tejada VA Outpatient Clinic (OPC) is a concern and will remain one of the top priorities when resources become available. The same concern is at Fort Worth VA OPC with 19% of veteran customers not being able to be assisted. The goal of TVC is to reach a 0% Not Seen rate as exhibited at the Big Spring, Ft Bliss, BAMC (FT Sam Houston), Corpus Christi NAS and Victoria offices. In addition, TVC will make every effort to either schedule appointment for veterans who could not be seen on a given day or collect the necessary information from them to follow-up and schedule a future appointment.

TVC continues to analyze the best use of resources including data above to determine appropriate staff locations. Rural locations are also a top priority regarding staffing decisions. TVC will continue to work with local partners in rural areas to ensure veterans are able to receive much needed assistance.

Performance

The TVC Claims Department regularly analyzes output and efficiency data from key measures reported to the Legislative Budget Board (LBB). The output and efficiency data are reported and analyzed from each office, district, and the entire Claims Department. Below are the key output and efficiency measures the TVC Claims Department is required to report to the Legislative Budget Board:

- **Output measures**
 - Service-Connected Disability Claims Filed for Veterans;
 - Active cases represented by TVC through a Power of Attorney (POA);
 - Appeals for Veterans and/or Survivors;
 - Files reviewed by Strike Force (SF) Team; and
 - Files reviewed by Fully Developed Claim (FDC) Team.
- **Efficiency Measures**
 - VA Payments to Veterans through SF/state dollar spent.

Quality of Claims Prepared

The Claims Department is currently constructing a task force to evaluate different methods of measuring claims quality. The Claims Department is following guidance from the SSR and targeting the following to be tracked:

- The quality of claims submitted to the Strike Force Teams;
- The percent of TVC claims processed by the VA as fully developed claims;
- The success rate of TVC claims and appeals, matching the claim to the corresponding decision; and
- The average VA processing time for claims and appeals.

Once the task force completes its process, then the Claims Department will move forward with a quality measure for claims submitted to the VA and will include in their annual operational plan. After the quality

measure has been determined to be an effective tool, TVC will work with the LBB on “key measure” adjustments.

Special Programs Analysis

The Claims Department leadership evaluates the Strike Force (SF) and Fully Developed Claims (FDC) teams on a quarterly basis. Based on the trend analysis of the VA claims backlog, the focus of the SF team has expanded to prevent the claims backlog on the front end. In addition to assisting the VA in reducing the existing claims backlog, the SF team now provides quality reviews on recently filed claims to ensure submitted claims are error free and do not end up contributing to the backlog. This effort to shift the focus of the SF team allows them to be proactive instead of reactive. The SF teams have been relocated to the Regional Offices, to ensure they have the maximum VA resources available. The FDC teams have been relocated into the field offices, with a heavy emphasis on rural locations, to best serve veterans with claims assistance. The FDC team’s primary focus is to file FDC claims for veterans, which ultimately leads them to a faster VA decision and reduces the overall VA claims backlog.

Lessons Learned

TVC has learned many lessons based on the analyzation stated above as well as feedback from staff at all levels of the Claims Department. Some of the lessons learned are as follows:

- The demand for claims services continues to increase at a high rate;
- TVC needs to regularly assess staffing locations to address the demand for services;
- The number of Veteran Benefits Advisors at locations with a high demand will have priority;
- Performance measures through the LBB are primality based on output rather than outcomes/or efficiencies;
- Redirecting the SF team’s priority while ensuring FDC teams are in strategic locations and taking a proactive approach rather than reactive is proving successful;
- Partnering and ensuring the Veteran County Service Officers (VSCO) have all the tools they need will ultimately benefit Texas veterans and enhance the partnership further; and
- Moving from only assisting veterans who “walk-in” for services to include appointments has proven to work well, especially in extremely busy offices.

Improvements

1. Improvements Implemented

In FY 2018, TVC began using an electronic claims case management software to process and file all disability claims to the VA. The Claims Department has been mainly using paper when processing disability claims for veterans to the VA. The move to an electronic claims processing was severely needed. This move has increased efficiency and reduced the amount of time it takes the VA to receive a claim from TVC's Veteran Benefits Advisors.

The Claims Department along with the Training Section have worked together to implement an online learning management system in January 2019. This allows additional training opportunities for both the Claims Department employees as well as the VCSOs. These training opportunities are vital to keep TVC employees and VCSOs updated on the most recent information from the VA. There continues to be training available at a regional level for those TVC employees and VCSOs who seek face-to-face instruction rather than online.

The Claims Department established a policy letter to outline the plan of action and implementation of an appointment process for large Claims offices effective June 5, 2018 in order to decrease the number of clients left unseen. The Claims Department analyzed the appointment process effectiveness and made necessary changes following the first quarter. Additionally, the District Managers send a quarterly report on the number of veterans/dependents seen, walk offs (unseen), rescheduled appointments, and cancelled appointments. The Claims Department uses these quarterly reports to make necessary revisions and analyzes the effectiveness every six months.

2. Needed Improvements

Although TVC and more specifically the Claims Department have made changes to increase efficiency ensuring as many veterans receive high-quality services, more needs to be accomplished. The following are some improvements needed:

- Decisions on staffing locations as well as the amount of staff at certain locations will be continuous need for improvement and based on current and future resources available;
- Evaluate and assess all policies and procedures on a yearly basis to ensure optimal efficiency;
- Evaluate the effectiveness of special teams such as the SF to ensure they are being utilized in the most effective manner;
- Continuously work with the VCSOs and the VCSO Advisory Committee to ensure they have all the tools necessary to be successful to include a heavy focus on training and assistance; and
- Work with the LBB on efficiency and outcome-based performance measures.

Summary

In conclusion, the assessment conducted by the Claims Department clearly shows an increased demand for disability claims services. Continuing to utilize staff in an effective manner is crucial for future success. Thus, an ongoing evaluation of staff locations is a must and will continue. TVC will also work with VA partners to continue exploring work space options at no cost to TVC. In addition to working with the VA,

TVC will work with local partners to identify space in rural communities in need of disability claims services.

It is also apparent that the partnership between TVC and the VCSOs along with the VCSO Advisory Committee is vital now and in the future. The Claims Department will seek input from VCSOs regarding training to include training improvements. The VCSO Advisory Committee also plays a large role in the partnership and any training adjustments needed.

Lastly, the need for TVC to establish outcome and efficiency measures is important to demonstrate success. The Claims Department will work with staff at all levels to include TVC executive staff to determine the most effective measures to implement. Once these measures are identified and proved to be sound, TVC leadership will work with the LBB to discuss possible implementation.

TVC will continue to improve and implement best practices to ensure Texas veterans are provided high-quality services in filing their disability claims and pensions.