

Veteran Claims Made Easy™

DENIED CLAIM

TROUBLESHOOTING GUIDE

Understand what VA decided. Identify the evidence issue. Know what needs your attention next.

Clarity Before You File.

Start With the Decision, Not the Reaction

A VA denial tells you what VA decided. Your first job isn't to immediately choose what to file next. Your first job is to understand **why VA reached that decision**.

Slow the process down. Separate what VA accepted from what VA says was not established. Then identify whether the problem involves missing evidence, the way existing evidence was evaluated, or something else in the decision.

This guide will help you work through that process one step at a time.

Then a **Decision Snapshot**:

- Decision date: _____
- Condition/issue decided: _____
- Decision: _____
- Date I received the decision: _____
- Any deadline identified in the decision: _____

Before You Do Anything Else

- ☐ I read the entire decision
- ☐ I reviewed the evidence VA says it considered
- ☐ I identified the favorable findings
- ☐ I identified VA's stated reason for the decision
- ☐ I have not assumed that filing more evidence automatically solves the problem

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What Did VA Say Was Not Established?

Identify the Fact at Issue

In my own words, VA denied the claim because:

Which part appears to be at issue?

- ☐ Current condition/diagnosis
- ☐ In-service event, injury, disease, or exposure
- ☐ Connection between the current condition and service
- ☐ Current severity of the condition
- ☐ Another eligibility requirement
- ☐ I am not sure yet

What Did VA Already Accept?

Favorable findings listed in the decision:

1.

2.

3.

Don't rebuild what VA has already established.

A favorable finding can help narrow your attention to the part of the claim that remains unresolved.

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Follow the Evidence

Evidence VA Says It Considered

Evidence	Considered by VA?	What fact does it address?
Service records	☐ Yes ☐ No/Unsure	
Medical records	☐ Yes ☐ No/Unsure	
C&P examination	☐ Yes ☐ No/Unsure	
Personal statement	☐ Yes ☐ No/Unsure	
Buddy/lay statements	☐ Yes ☐ No/Unsure	
Medical opinion	☐ Yes ☐ No/Unsure	
Other	☐ Yes ☐ No/Unsure	

Now Ask the Important Question

Is the problem that evidence may be missing—or that VA reached a different conclusion from evidence already in the record?

- ☐ Potentially relevant evidence appears to be missing
 - ☐ The evidence appears to be there, but VA evaluated it differently
 - ☐ Both may be involved
 - ☐ I cannot tell yet
-

If a C&P Examination Matters

C&P Exam Review

If VA relied on a C&P examination or medical opinion:

- ☐ I identified the examiner's conclusion
- ☐ I read the reasoning supporting that conclusion, if available
- ☐ I compared the examination with my relevant medical records
- ☐ I noted factual statements that appear inconsistent with the record
- ☐ I identified evidence I believe deserves another look
- ☐ I separated disagreements about facts from disagreements about medical conclusions

What did the examiner conclude?

What reason did the examiner give?

What specifically concerns me about the examination?

“I disagree with the examiner” isn’t the end of the analysis.

Identify the specific fact, evidence, omission, inconsistency, or reasoning that concerns you.

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Diagnose the Problem

Your Denial Diagnostic

VA decided:

VA accepted:

VA says this was not established:

Evidence addressing that issue:

Potential gap, disagreement, or question I identified:

What I need to understand or gather before deciding what comes next:

Stop and Check

- ☐ I can explain the denial in plain English
- ☐ I know which fact remains at issue
- ☐ I know what evidence addresses that fact
- ☐ I know whether I may have an evidence gap
- ☐ I identified any concern with VA's treatment of existing evidence
- ☐ I know what question still needs an answer

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Before Choosing What Comes Next

VA provides different ways to seek review of a decision. Those options have different rules concerning evidence, review, timing, and procedure.

This guide does not select a review option for you. Its purpose is to help you understand the problem first so that you can evaluate your available options from a more informed position.

Questions to Answer Before Acting

- ☐ Am I trying to address something missing from the record?
- ☐ Am I questioning how VA handled evidence already in the record?
- ☐ Is there new information or evidence I believe needs consideration?
- ☐ Have I read the review options and instructions provided with my VA decision?
- ☐ Do I understand the applicable filing deadlines?
- ☐ Would I benefit from assistance from a VA-accredited representative before deciding?

Deadlines matter.

Review the date of your decision and the instructions VA provided with it. If you are uncertain about your options, deadlines, or how they apply to your particular situation, consider speaking with a VA-accredited representative.

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Your Next-Step Worksheet

My Denial Action Sheet

The one issue I need to understand better:

The evidence I need to review:

Evidence/information I may need to locate:

Questions I need answered:

1.

2.

3.

Important date/deadline: _____

My next action:

Final Thought

Don't respond to a denial by simply adding more paperwork.

Understand what VA decided. Identify the fact still at issue. Determine what the evidence actually establishes. Then make your next decision from clarity rather than frustration.

Clarity Before You File.
