



Highlights of [GAO-10-445](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-389) mandated that GAO evaluate the Department of Veterans Affairs VA training for disability claims processors. This report answers the following two questions: (1) How appropriate is the training provided to experienced disability claims processors? (2) How adequate is the Veterans Benefits Administration's (VBA) monitoring and assessment of this training? To address these questions, GAO conducted a web-based survey of a nationally representative sample of claims processors, interviewed VBA headquarters and regional office officials, and reviewed VBA training material, relevant federal statutes, regulations, and court cases.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that VBA (1) adopt procedures for routinely monitoring and ensuring compliance with annual training requirements, including more fully using its available electronic data to ensure that training requirements are met, (2) develop clear written guidance on the types of activities all regional offices should and should not count toward completion of annual training requirements, and (3) develop and implement a written strategy for routinely assessing the appropriateness of the training regional offices provide to experienced claims processors. In its comments, VA generally concurred with GAO's conclusions and concurred with all of GAO's recommendations.

[View GAO-10-445 or key components.](#)
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VETERANS' DISABILITY BENEFITS

Expanded Oversight Would Improve Training for Experienced Claims Processors

What GAO Found

VBA's annual training requirements and the training received by experienced staff—those with more than two years experience—may not be appropriate, based on the results of GAO's survey of claims processors nationwide. Experienced claims processors had problems with five key areas: the number of hours of training required, the amount of training received on particular topics, the usefulness of some subject matter, the way training is delivered and the timing of training. GAO's survey results indicated that 60 percent of experienced claims processors who believed that VBA requires 80 hours of training annually found it difficult to meet this training requirement given their workload. In addition, based on its survey, GAO estimates that 45 percent of supervisors of experienced Rating Veterans Service Representatives (RVSR) and 53 percent of supervisors of experienced Veterans Service Representatives (VSR) thought that only some or few, if any, of the experienced staff they supervise need 80 hours of training to perform their job duties effectively.

Many experienced staff also thought they received too little training on some topics and too much on others. For example, 42 percent thought they received less training than needed in how to rate claims involving special monthly compensation and 34 percent thought they received more than enough training on records management. Finally, opinions varied on how helpful the various modes of training were. Nearly all claims processors, in general, considered on-the-job experience to be the method of training best suited to their needs. An estimated 39 percent of all experienced claims processors, in general, felt that the training they received was delivered too late, suggesting that regional offices may not always deliver the training needed by experienced claims processors in a timely manner.

According to *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, federal agencies must have control mechanisms in place to help ensure that all employees receive appropriate and consistent training. Under its recently revised annual training requirements, VBA delegates considerable responsibility for training experienced claims processors to each of its 57 regional offices. In particular, regional offices are responsible for ensuring that claims processors complete annual training requirements. Each office also determines what topics are covered for half of the required training hours, what material to provide on each of these topics, and how and when the training should occur. Regional offices also have considerable discretion in determining what activities qualify as training. However, VBA lacks controls to ensure that regional offices deliver required training and record completed training in a consistent manner, and does little to assess the appropriateness or consistency of the training experienced claims processors receive.