

TEXAS VETERANS COMMISSION
Claims Representation
Staffing and Outcome Data Analysis
January 2021

The data covered in this report is for fiscal years 2019-2020

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 use 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 continue to conduct a comprehensive overall assessment of claims performance, lessons learned, and needed improvements.

Data and Analysis

1. Workload

Figure 1: 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	102,119	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
2019	169,476	5,637	283,417	\$4,434,547,500
2020	102,534 ¹	4,727 ¹	234,112 ²	\$4,310,193,039 ²

Figure 1: Demand for TVC Claim Services

In 2019 TVC Claims saw an increase of new claims filed. We anticipate the increasing trend would have continued; however, beginning March 2020 COVID-19 closures limited face to face interactions and direct access to services. Claims Benefit Advisors (CBAs) at each facility continued serving customers through work-from-home remote services by offering phone, email, and web-based video services (Zoom, Skype, Teams, etc.).

TVC is currently authorized 142.5 Claims Department personnel. Since the 2018 reporting, TVC Claims has added nine rural office locations which has accounted for 62,870 Client assistances since COVID-19 impacted services.

The trend in the reduction of appeals filed on behalf of Texas veterans is attributable to efficient filing procedures and higher quality standards. Claim Benefit Advisors ensure a [Fully-Developed Claims process](#) is used by the claimants whom we represent. CBAs ensure claimants' Fully-Developed Claims are processed by filing a VA Form 21-0966 for claimants, known as an Intent to File. This document preserves a date of claim for up to 1-year. This procedure allows claimants the necessary time to gather medical evidence, supporting documents to adjudicate their claims with the Veterans Administration properly and fully develop their claim prior to submittal of an actual claim of VA Form 21-526ez for benefits to the VA. This process has proven successful in reducing the number of denials and need for appeals.

Further aiding in the higher quality control standards of the filing processes, the Strike Force Teams and Decision Review Officers located at the Regional Offices review submitted claims for quality and rating control issues to address concerns prior to final submittal to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

TVC Claims Department has developed strategies through the Learning Management System (LMS) training platform for continued performance training and skills enhancement of the Claims Benefit Advisors and Veteran County Service Officers through monthly training. This platform is continually updated with new VA policies and procedures as they occur to ensure staff are current on Department of Veterans Affairs initiatives.

2. Veterans Unseen at each TVC Claims Office

Figure 2. Seen/Not Seen Data for FY-20 (through period of March 2020)³

Location	Office Staff	TOTAL # CLIENTS SEEN	TOTAL LEFT NOT SEEN	% OVERALL NOT SEEN
AMARILLO VAMC	1	293	16	5%
BIG SPRING VAMC	1	0	0	0%
* DENTON	1	353	0	0%
EL PASO VAHCS	4	2690	274	10%
FORT BUSS SFL-TAP	2	430	0	0%
FORT WORTH VAOPC	4	1753	428	24%
* HUTCHINSON COUNTY (BORGER)	1	96	0	0%
LUBBOCK VAOPC	1	1704	76	4%
MIDLAND	1	595	6	1%
SAN ANGELO VAMC	1	603	27	4%
SHEPPARD AFB	1	258	0	0%
* TAYLOR COUNTY (ABILENE)	1	0	0	0%
WACO REGIONAL OFFICE	19.6	1056	8	1%
WICHITA FALLS	1	0	0	0%
TOTAL:		9382	835	9%

Location	Office Staff	TOTAL # CLIENTS SEEN	TOTAL LEFT NOT SEEN	% OVERALL NOT SEEN
* ANDERSON COUNTY (PALESTINE)	1	309	0	0%
AUSTIN VAOPC	3	5442	570	10%
CEDAR PARK CBOC	1	0	0	0%
☞ CHEVY CHASE	0	54	0	0%
COLLEGE STATION VAOPC	1	595	52	9%
DALLAS VAMC	3	3947	209	5%
FORT HOOD SOLDIER SERVICE CENTER	1	0	0	0%
* LAMAR COUNTY (PARIS)	1	139	0	0%
MARSHALL	1	1954	10	1%
TEMPLE VAMC	6	6506	739	11%
☞ TYLER	0	535	13	2%
* TEXARKANA COLLEGE	1	619	0	0%
TOTAL:		19033	1593	8%

☞ Tyler & Chevy Chase facilities are no longer staffed sites.

Location	Office Staff	TOTAL # CLIENTS SEEN	TOTAL LEFT NOT SEEN	% OVERALL NOT SEEN
AUDIE MURPHY VAMC	4	2723	379	14%
BROOKS ARMY MEDICAL CENTER (BAMC)	1	152	1	1%
* COASTAL BEND COLLEGE (BEEVILLE)	1	42	0	0%
CORPUS CRISTI NAS	1	459	0	0%
CORPUS CHRISTI VAOPC	3	2319	127	5%
GOOD SAMARITAN VETERANS OUTREACH TRANSITION CENTER (FORMERLY: FORT SAM HOUSTON)	2	854	24	3%
FRANK TEJEDA VAOPC	10.8	3573	652	18%
* CENTRAL TEXAS TECHNOLOGY CENTER (GUADALUPE COUNTY)	1	25	0	0%
HARLINGEN VAOPC	3	1307	213	16%
KERRVILLE VAMC	2	454	108	24%
LAREDO VAOPC	1	1275	34	3%
McALLEN VAOPC	2	1768	66	4%
* VAL VERDE COUNTY (DEL RIO)	1	6	0	0%
TOTAL:		17203	1940	11%

Location	Office Staff	TOTAL # CLIENTS SEEN	TOTAL LEFT NOT SEEN	% OVERALL NOT SEEN
BEAUMONT VAOPC	1	1602	48	3%
CONROE CBOC	2	714	40	6%
GALVESTON CBOC	1	300	2	1%
HOUSTON REGIONAL OFFICE	24.6	4844	406	8%
HOUSTON VAMC	5	2411	331	14%
KATY VAOPC	1	1415	150	11%
LAKE JACKSON VAOPC	1	590	9	2%
LUFKIN VAOPC	2	2448	180	7%
TOMBALL VAOPC	1	869	141	16%
VICTORIA VAOPC	1	803	0	0%
TOTAL:		15996	1307	8%

* Denotes new TVC CBA facility since last reporting (2018). Based on January 2019 manpower staffing analysis conducted we determined these offices best fit customer needs.

Figure 2: Seen/Not-Seen Data by District for 2020: Provides data of customers who were assisted by TVC Claims Staff at each of the office locations listed in calendar year 2020 through office closures in March 2020. VA facilities and TVC Office locations were closed to face-to-face interactions and appointments due to COVID-19 protocols.

The 2018-2019 Sunset Advisory Report⁴ recommended TVC Claims allow veterans to schedule appointments for claims counseling while maintaining the option for walk-in services ([Issue 2, Recommendation 2.7, 86th Legislature, Sunset Report](#)).

TVC used [Microsoft Bookings](#) to create an appointment system for veterans and surviving family members to book virtual office appointments throughout the State. Bookings appointment pages were established for each of the TVC Claim locations to continue services for claimants without risking health and safety. Bookings was beta-tested at the Houston Regional Office in July of 2020 and phased into all Claims offices in September of 2020. Prior to COVID-19, Claims Department offered appointments at 15 of its 49 locations. Through December 31, 2020 TVC Claims has accounted for 19, 874 appointments (575 no-shows, or 2.8% overall) and 85,524 phone calls to veterans¹ in support of claims.

Performance:

The TVC Claims Department regularly analyzes output and efficiency data from key measures reported to the Legislative Budget Board (LBB). The data is reported and analyzed from 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:

- **Outcome Measures⁵**
 - VA Monetary Awards to Veteran's w/Service-Connected Disabilities.
 - VA Monetary Awards to Veterans to Totally Disabled Wartime Veterans.
 - VA Awards to Survivors or Orphans of Veterans.
 - Percent of TVC Claims Granted by VA.
 - Percent of Favorable VA Claim Rating Decisions Filed by TVC.
 - Percent of VA Appeal Rating Decisions filed by TVC.
 - Percent of Total Claims Filed by TVC that are Fully-Developed Claims (FDC).
 - Percent of Claims Submitted by the TVC Strike Force (SF) Teams.
 - Average Number of Days TVC Claims were Pending Adjudication with VA.

- **Output Measures⁵**
 - Number of Claims filed and Developed on Behalf of Disabled Veterans.
 - Number of Non-Service Connected Claims Filed to Department of Veterans Affairs.
 - Claims Filed and Developed on Behalf of Survivors /Orphans of Veterans.
 - Active Veterans Benefit Cases for Veterans Represented by TVC.
 - Appeals of Unfavorable VA Decisions filed on Behalf of Veteran's.
 - Number of Files reviewed by State Strike Force Team.
 - Number of Fully Developed Claims (FDC) filed by the FDC Team.

- **Efficiency Measures⁵**
 - VA Payments to Veterans represented TVC, Per Dollar Spent.
 - VA Payments to Vets through State Strike Force Team/State Dollar Spent.

Quality of Claims Prepared

Texas Veterans Commission Claims Department is committed to process improvement and quality assurance training programs. The Learning Management System (LMS) system used by the TVC Training department integrates training from learning platforms and resources such as Department of Veterans Affairs; National Veterans Legal Services Program; LinkedIn Learning, Centers for Disease Control, Bureau of Medicine, and others to ensure skill and proficiency of Claim Benefit Advisors. These various training courses aide in the research, development of quality claims, and appeals at initial filing.

Special Programs Analysis

Claims Department leadership evaluates Strike Force (SF) and all Fully Developed Claims (FDC) team data on a quarterly basis. SF teams are located at each Regional Office to ensure close proximity to VA resources. The SF team has shifted from assisting in the claims backlog to quality assurance by reviewing claims. Strike Force ensures a claim submittal is accurate reducing the need for appeals.

The FDC teams are located throughout TVC's field offices, with emphasis on rural locations, to ensure veterans are best served for claim assistance. The FDC team's primary focus is on filing Fully Developed Claims for veterans and surviving family members, which leads to faster decisions and reduces the VA claims backlog.

Recommendations

COVID-19 placed limitations to services; the department was quickly able to adapt once equipment (laptops, cell phones, etc.) was purchased and issued to all locations. The online appointment initiative using Microsoft Bookings increased the number of appointments and claimants being served as we closed out FY-20. Due to the nature of phone/virtual appointments it is difficult to determine staffing levels in each location. The Claims Assistance Department is continuing to analyze Microsoft Bookings data as well as feedback from veterans and staff. Here are some recommendations based on data from March 2020 through December 2020.

- Suspend the adjustment of staffing levels during the COVID-19 pandemic due to lack of information and the unpredictability of future requirements.
- Continue with the development and improvements to TVC Claims Department Microsoft Bookings programing for each office.
- Continue monthly training of CBAs/VCSOs with current web-based LMS strategies of VA approved training.

References:

Note 1: Data from Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) Client Management System (CMS) VetraSpec Database for claims filed CY- 2020.

Note 2: Data from VA-HINES report.

Note 3: Data received from in-office reporting.

Note 4: Sunset Advisory Commission, Staff Report with Final Results, Texas Veterans Commission, 2018-2019 86th Legislature, Recommendation 2.7, Modified

Note 5: Governor's Office of Budget, Planning and Policy and Legislative Budget Board (LBB) by Texas Veterans Commission Legislative Appropriations Request (LAR) Fiscal Years 2022-2023 (*Not to all*), dated September 18, 2020.