



# Rapid Appeals Modernization Program (RAMP)

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**ChooseVA**

**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# Rapid Appeals Modernization Program

## The *Rapid Appeals Modernization Program (RAMP)*

began on November 1, 2017 and allows eligible Veterans with pending appeals the option to have their decisions reviewed in the new **Higher-Level Review** or **Supplemental Claim** lanes

**As of April 2, 2018 any Veteran that meets the eligibility criteria below may participate in RAMP (no invitation required)**

- Participation is voluntary and Veterans are encouraged to opt in
- Veterans must have an active disability compensation appeal in one of the following appeal stages:
  - NOD
  - Form 9
  - Certified to the Board (not activated)
  - Remand



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# RAMP Opt-in Election

## RAMP OPT-IN ELECTION

RETURN THIS PAGE ONLY IF YOU WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN RAMP

(DO NOT complete this form if you wish to remain in the current legacy appeals process)

Once you have read and understood the attached VA letter, please indicate your election by completing and returning this notice with the coversheet provided to the address noted below.



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
EVIDENCE INTAKE CENTER  
PO BOX 4444  
JANE SVILLE WI 53547-4444  
OR  
FAX TO: 844-631-7818

By completing this form, I elect to participate in RAMP. I am withdrawing all eligible pending compensation appeals in their entirety, and any associated hearing requests, to participate in VA's RAMP Initiative and have my eligible appeals proceed under the new process described in the Appeals Modernization Act. I understand that I cannot return to the current (legacy) appeals system for the issues withdrawn. I also acknowledge that, in the event I want the Board to review my claim, the Board will not consider my appeal under the new process until no earlier than October 2018.

I elect the following review option (select only one):

Supplemental Claim

I elect to have all eligible issues currently on appeal processed as a supplemental claim. I would like to submit or have already submitted new and relevant evidence in support of my claim for benefits. I understand that I have 30 days from the date of my election to submit additional evidence or notify VA of evidence that VA can assist in gathering.

Higher-Level Review

I elect to have all eligible issues currently on appeal reviewed in the higher-level review process. I understand that this review will be based upon the evidence submitted to VA as of the date of this election and VA will not seek additional evidence on my behalf as part of the higher-level review.

Place a check in the box below if you would like a one-time telephonic informal conference with the Higher-Level Reviewer. If you have an accredited representative (VSO, attorney, or agent) please include his or her contact information below. (This option may cause some delay in the processing of your higher-level review in scheduling.)

Informal Conference

Representative/Org. \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Claimant or Authorized Representative Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



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# RAMP Lanes

## RAMP Supplemental Claim Lane

- Any decision to award benefits must be based on **new and relevant evidence** or a **clear and unmistakable error** in the prior decision
- In RAMP, VA **presumes** that there is new and relevant evidence when a Veteran **first elects to participate**
- Open evidentiary record with **duty to assist** Veterans in gathering evidence to support the claim
- Decision authority given to **RVSRs** for rating issues and **VSRs** for non-rating issues
- Tracking under End Product (EP) **683** with claim label ***RAMP-Supplemental Claim Review (Rating or Non-Rating)***

## RAMP Higher-Level Review Lane

- **De novo review** of the issue(s) previously on appeal (**difference of opinion authority**)
- **Closed record & no duty to assist**
- Review of all evidence of record on the date that VA receives the Veteran's RAMP election
- Decision authority granted to **Decision Review Officers (DROs)** and **Senior VSRs**
- Optional one-time telephonic **informal conference** with the higher-level reviewer to identify specific errors in the case
- **Quality feedback loop:** Return of the claim for correction when a duty to assist error or required development is found and the higher-level reviewer cannot grant the maximum benefit
- Tracking under **EP 682** with claim label ***RAMP - Higher Level Review (Rating or Non-Rating)***



# RAMP Benefits

## For Veterans & Representatives :

- Faster decisions and early resolution of disagreements
- Improved decision notices
- Allows more Veterans to use the new, more efficient process
- Demonstrates VA's commitment to improve services for all Veterans who have appeals, not just those who receive a future decision
- Accelerates resolution of legacy appeals at the earliest points in the process
- Same effective date for benefits regardless of the Veteran's choice of review option
- Requires VA to have clear and convincing evidence to change any findings favorable to the Veteran in a previous VA decision
- Veterans who participate in RAMP fill the Board's new dockets first

## For VA & External Stakeholders :

- Eliminates the inherent inefficiencies in the legacy system, thus decreasing the number of work hours spent by VA and Veterans' representatives working legacy appeals
- Shortens the time that VA and Veterans' representatives must operate two appeal systems
- Allows VA and Veterans' representatives to fully assess and adapt to the new law
- Early resolution in VBA reduces legacy appeals to the Board and Federal courts



# RAMP Monthly Mailing Schedule

Monthly Mailing					
Date	Oldest Appeals	New Appeals (Estimated)	Date	Oldest Appeals	New Appeals (Estimated)
01-Nov-17	500	N/A	1-Jul-18	30,000	12,000
01-Dec-17	5,000	N/A	1-Aug-18	30,000	12,000
01-Jan-18	10,000	N/A	1-Sep-18	30,000	12,000
01-Feb-18	25,000	<b>10,087 (Actual)</b>	1-Oct-18	30,000	12,000
01-Mar-18	25,000	<b>8,959 (Actual)</b>	1-Nov-18	30,000	12,000
01-Apr-18	30,000	<b>7,457 (Actual)</b>	1-Dec-18	30,000	12,000
01-May-18	30,000	<b>8,669 (Actual)</b>	1-Jan-19	N/A	N/A
01-Jun-18	30,000	12,000	<b>1-Feb-19</b>	<b>Appeals Modernization Implementation</b>	
			<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>335,500</b>	<b>119,172</b>

- Notice sent by letter each month
- Started with oldest appeals in each appeal stage
- All new appeals added beginning in February 2018
- Follow-up letters sent 45 days after initial notice
- RO contacts have a complete listing of mailed notices



# RAMP Election Rates - National

## Total Notices Mailed

164,370

## RAMP Opt-in Elections Received

12,506 (7.6% total election rate)

## Election Rate by Mailing Cohort

Nov 17  
7.8%

Dec 17  
10.7%

Jan 18  
11.6%

Feb 18  
12.8%

Mar 18  
10.6%

Apr 18  
7.2%

\* All data shown as of May 1, 2018

# RAMP Election Rates – St. Petersburg

## Total Notices Mailed

19,521

## RAMP Opt-in Elections Received

1,288 (6.6% total election rate)

## Election Rate by Mailing Cohort

Nov 17  
1.4%

Dec 17  
5.6%

Jan 18  
10.9%

Feb 18  
10.5%

Mar 18  
9.1%

Apr 18  
6.1%

\* All data shown as of May 1, 2018



# RAMP Election Rates – Florida DVA

## Total Notices Mailed

2,488

## RAMP Opt-in Elections Received

166 (6.7% total election rate)

## Election Rate by Mailing Cohort

Nov 17  
5.6%

Dec 17  
6.9%

Jan 18  
10.2%

Feb 18  
11.4%

Mar 18  
9.2%

Apr 18  
7.3%

\* All data shown as of May 1, 2018

# RAMP Quick Stats - National

**Legacy Appeals  
Converted**

16,255

**RAMP Lane  
Choices**

HLR – 65%  
Supp – 35%

**NOD to Opt-in  
Days (Avg.)**

898 Days

**Average Days to  
Complete**

55 Days

**Retroactive  
Benefits  
Awarded**

\$13,630,688

**Claim Grant  
Rate**

Total – 44%  
HLR – 46%  
Supp – 38%

\* All data shown as of May 1, 2018

# Veteran Testimonials

## After 10 years of appealing, a Gulf War Era Veteran receives a 100- percent evaluation in less than two months.

VA denied this Veteran's claim for a mental health disorder in June 2008. After many years of appeal decisions, including remands from the Board, the Veteran opted into the Higher-Level Review lane in RAMP in November 2017. VA granted service connection with a 100-percent evaluation in 48 days and paid **\$276,490** in retroactive benefits.

## After waiting seven years, a Veteran receives a full grant of benefits in less than 30 days.

The Veteran submitted a NOD in March 2014 and elected to participate in RAMP in December 2017. VA granted service connection for a mental health disorder, established a 100-percent evaluation effective June 2010, and paid the Veteran **\$104,485** in retroactive benefits.

## A Veteran receives a total disability evaluation retroactive for seven years in 41 days.

In 2014, VA denied this Vietnam Era Veteran's claim for an increased evaluation for his service-connected mental health disorder and entitlement to a total evaluation based upon individual unemployability (TDIU). The veteran elected to participate in RAMP in December 2017. After waiting five years for action on his appeal, he received a grant of benefits in 41 days in RAMP. VA paid the Veteran almost **\$125,000** in retroactive benefits.



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# Frequently Asked Questions

## **Q: What if I have not received a RAMP notice letter? Can I opt-in?**

A: Yes. Beginning on April 1, 2018, VA will allow any Veteran with a pending appeal to opt into RAMP by using a publicly available RAMP Opt-in Election document and bar code coversheet.

## **Q: Will RAMP be faster than the current process?**

A: Yes. VA anticipates processing RAMP Higher Level Reviews and Supplemental Claims in an average of 125 days. The average resolution time for legacy appeals is 3 to 7 years.

## **Q: What will happen with my appeal if I choose not to participate in RAMP?**

A: If you choose not to participate, the appeal will continue to be processed under the current process. However, keep in mind that participating in RAMP has many advantages, such as earlier resolution, protected favorable findings, protected effective dates for benefits, more review options, and better decision notices.

## **Q: I have multiple appeals with multiple issues. Do I have to choose the same lane for all of them?**

A: Yes. In RAMP, you must choose either the Higher-Level Review lane or the Supplemental Claim lane for all eligible compensation appeals and appealed issues.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **Q: What if I have a Board or DRO hearing pending? Can I opt-in?**

A: It depends. If you have requested a DRO or Board hearing you may participate in RAMP. However, appeals that have been activated by the Board for a decision are not currently eligible for RAMP. Also, keep in mind that if you request a Higher Level Review in RAMP, you have the option of requesting an informal conference with the reviewer to identify any errors that you believe VA made in the prior decision.

## **Q: If I participate in RAMP and withdraw my appeal, I would be going to the back of the line. Why should I start over if I have already been waiting several years in the current appeal process?**

A: VBA will conduct a new review of your claim and issue a new decision. If you are dissatisfied with the new decision, you can file another Supplemental Claim, request a Higher Level Review (following a supplemental claim decision), or appeal to the Board. Veterans participating in RAMP will receive access to the Board's three new dockets, placing them at the front of the line when the Board begins operating them. This will likely result in a faster Board decision compared to staying in the legacy process, as the Board is currently deciding appeals with Form 9 dates up to December 2014.



# Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: I am representing a Veteran in a Higher Level Review. If I request an informal conference with the higher level reviewer, do I have to arrange for the Veteran to attend the conference?**

A: No. In an informal conference, which is a telephone call between the representative and the higher level reviewer, the representative identifies any errors that VA made in the prior decision. The informal conference is not a hearing and is not for the purpose of gathering evidence.

**Q: I received a recent decision from VA. I want to appeal my decision, may I elect RAMP instead of filing an appeal?**

A: No; however, you may file a notice of disagreement (NOD) and request participation in RAMP at the same time. VA will first process your NOD and then process your RAMP election.

**Q: Will VA continue development on my appeal if I elect RAMP?**

A: Yes. If you elect the Supplemental Claim lane in RAMP. VA has a duty to assist Veterans in gathering evidence to substantiate the claim in the Supplemental Claim lane. VA will complete all development actions prior to issuing a decision. If you elect the Higher-Level Review lane, VA will discontinue developing for evidence and the record is limited to the evidence of record when you submit your RAMP Opt-in Election.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **Q: What do I do if I disagree with my RAMP decision?**

A: If you remain dissatisfied with the decision you receive in RAMP, you will have a year to use the other RAMP lane or appeal to the Board of Veterans' Appeals, and your effective date for your benefits will be protected.

## **Q: Is it true that the Board won't decide my appeal of a RAMP decision until after February 2019?**

A: No. The Board will begin deciding these appeals in October 2018. Also, Veterans who appeal a RAMP decision will be first in line in the Board's new dockets.

## **Q: When does RAMP end?**

A: RAMP will conclude in February 2019 when the new law takes effect.

