



US DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Office of Audits and Evaluations

VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION

VBA Did Not Take All Corrective Actions for Veterans Prematurely Denied Service Connection for Conditions That Could Be Associated with Burn Pit Exposure

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QUALITY STANDARDS

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) has released this management advisory memorandum to provide information on matters of concern that the OIG has gathered as part of its oversight mission. The OIG conducted this review in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency's Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation for independence, evidence collection and analysis, and quality control.

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DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
WASHINGTON, DC 20001



April 17, 2025¹

MANAGEMENT ADVISORY MEMORANDUM

TO: Michael J. Frueh, Acting Under Secretary for Benefits
Veterans Benefits Administration

FROM: Larry Reinkemeyer, Assistant Inspector General
VA Office of Inspector General's Office of Audits and Evaluations

SUBJECT: The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) Did Not Take All Corrective
Actions for Veterans Prematurely Denied Service Connection for Conditions That
Could Be Associated with Burn Pit Exposure

In July 2022, the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) published a report finding that VBA staff prematurely denied service-connected compensation to veterans with conditions that could be associated with burn pit exposure.² The OIG made seven recommendations to VBA based on its findings. VBA took corrective action on five recommendations, which the OIG closed. The two remaining recommendations were for VA's under secretary for benefits to review two datasets the OIG believed contained prematurely denied claims of veterans seeking service connection for burn pit-related conditions, correct any errors, and provide certification of completion. In two separate memoranda to the OIG in May and August 2024, VBA requested closure of both open recommendations, asserting it had taken corrective actions as needed on all the claims. However, further review by the OIG of the claim population determined VBA did not take required corrective actions on at least an estimated 25 percent of veterans' denied claims related to burn pit exposure. This management advisory memorandum is meant to convey the information necessary for VBA to determine whether additional actions are warranted. The OIG is taking no additional steps at this time. However, the OIG will keep open the two remaining

¹ This memorandum was sent to the Veterans Benefits Administration on April 17, 2025, to provide the opportunity for review and comment. Following that period, VBA's comments were given full consideration, and any requests for change supported by sufficient evidence were addressed before publication.

The OIG issues management advisory memoranda when exigent circumstances or areas of concern are identified by OIG hotline allegations or in the course of its oversight work, particularly when immediate action by VA can help reduce further risk of harm to veterans or significant financial losses. Memoranda are published unless otherwise prohibited from release or to safeguard protected information.

² VA OIG, [Veterans Prematurely Denied Compensation for Conditions That Could Be Associated with Burn Pit Exposure](#), Report No. 21-02704-135, July 21, 2022. Since about 2001, the US military has used large, open areas of land known as burn pits to dispose of waste from its bases in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Djibouti when no feasible alternatives exist. The burned waste products included various chemicals and were mixed with jet fuel to ignite them. According to VBA, the pits did not completely incinerate the waste generated, and smoke blew over the bases and into living areas. It is estimated that some burn pits were nearly 20 acres wide. VA recognizes burn pit exposure as a potential cause of disabilities.

recommendations from the July 2022 report until VBA demonstrates and certifies that appropriate corrective actions have been completed.

Disability Compensation Claims Process

VA pays monthly disability compensation to veterans with service-connected disabilities according to the severity of the disability. After a veteran submits a claim to VA, a veterans service representative reviews it and assists the veteran in gathering evidence needed to evaluate it. Once development actions are complete, a rating veterans service representative then analyzes the evidence and decides the claim. Finally, a different veterans service representative implements the decision, notifies the veteran, and authorizes payment. Figure 1 shows the tasks involved at the development, rating, and award and authorization stages.

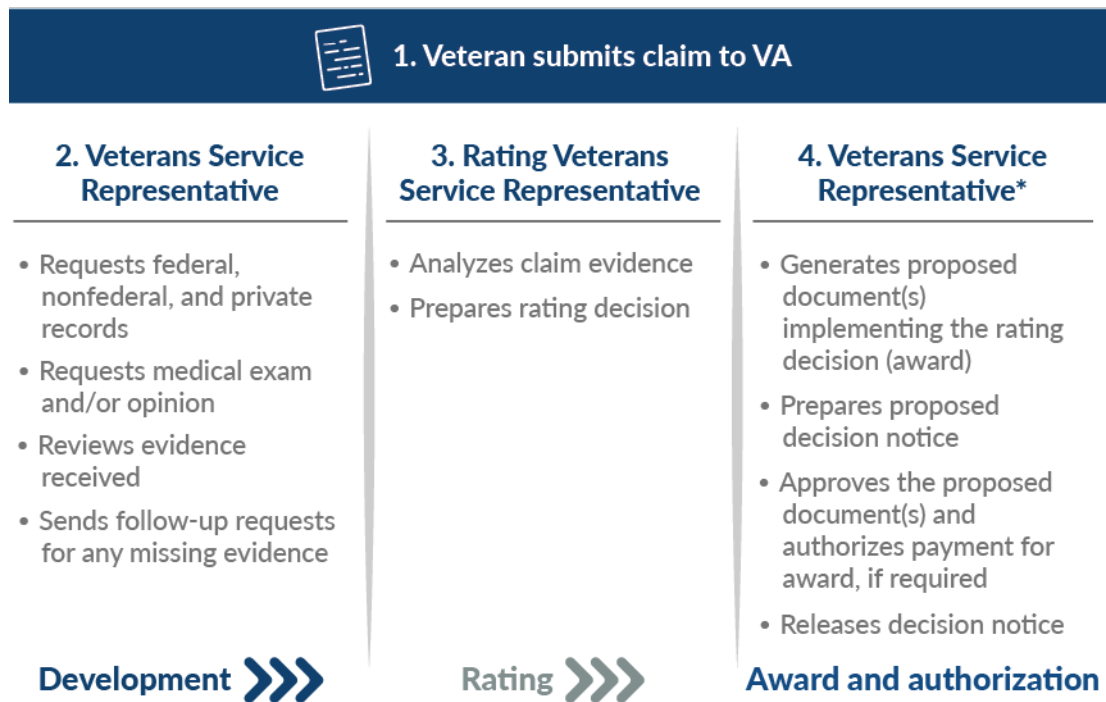


Figure 1. VA benefits claims process.

Source: VA OIG's analysis of VA Manual 21-1 and VBA training materials.

*Decisions cannot be generated (awarded) and authorized by the same veterans service representative.

Processing Claims Related to Burn Pit Exposure

At the time the OIG conducted its previous review, which covered a period of May 1, 2020, to May 1, 2021, there were no specific disabilities presumed to be associated with exposure to burn pits.³ VBA processed these claims like most other disability compensation claims—requiring

³ A presumptive disability relieves veterans of the burden to prove that a disability or illness was caused by exposure that occurred during military service.

evidence of a current disability; an event, injury, or disease that occurred during military service; and a link establishing that the current disability had its onset or inception during military service.⁴ VBA training materials instructed staff to treat military service occurring during time frames and in locations known for burn pit use as the service-related event of exposure. VBA policy at that time also noted staff had a duty to consider exposure to environmental hazards based on the location of service.⁵ This meant VBA staff should have inferred burn pit exposure for veterans who served in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Djibouti even if claimants did not explicitly claim exposure.

When conducting this second review, the OIG applied—and errors found were based on—the criteria in effect at the time of the OIG’s original review period, in accordance with VBA procedural guidance.

Of note, following publication of the OIG’s report, VBA updated its guidance on processing burn pit claims pursuant to the passage of the PACT Act.⁶ Though the OIG applied the criteria in effect during the original review period for its follow-up review, the team determined that the errors identified during the second review would also warrant correction when applying PACT Act criteria. Appendix A gives details on the updated procedures for processing burn pit exposure claims in accordance with the PACT Act.

VA Medical Examination and Opinion Process

Submitting a substantially complete claim requires VA staff to assist a claimant in obtaining a medical examination or opinion when necessary to substantiate their claim.⁷ For the OIG’s review period, a claim associated with burn pit exposure required a medical examination and opinion if

- competent lay or medical evidence or persistent or recurrent symptoms supported a current disability;⁸

⁴ VA Manual 21-1, *Adjudication Procedures Manual*, sec. IV.ii.2.B, “Determining Service Connection (SC),” March 2, 2017.

⁵ VA Manual 21-1, *Adjudication Procedures Manual*, sec. IV.ii.2.C, “Service Connection (SC) for Disabilities Resulting From Exposure to Environmental Hazards or Service in the Republic of Vietnam (RVN),” March 14, 2017.

⁶ Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act of 2022, Pub. L. No. 117-168.

⁷ A substantially complete application for service-connected disability benefits contains the claimant’s name; their relationship to the veteran, if applicable; information sufficient for VA to verify the claimed service, if applicable; the benefit claimed and any medical condition(s) upon which it is based; and the claimant’s signature.

⁸ Lay evidence means any evidence not requiring specialized education, training, or experience. Lay evidence is competent if it is provided by a person with knowledge of facts or circumstances and conveys matters that can be observed and described by a lay person. Veterans describing their own symptoms of a claimed disability would be an example of lay evidence.

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- the evidence established that the veteran served in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Djibouti from about 2001 to the present; and
 - the evidence indicated the claimed disability or symptoms may be associated with the established event, injury, or disease that occurred during military service.⁹

When requesting a medical examination or opinion to determine whether a claimed condition was due to a nonpresumptive environmental hazard, VBA employees were required to inform the medical examiner of the nature of any applicable hazard and the location and time of exposure. In an additional development step to help with veterans' burn pit claims, employees were required to provide examiners with a fact sheet to ensure a fully informed opinion based on all known objective facts.¹⁰ The fact sheet on burn pits informed examiners that VA considered the veteran exposed to burn pit toxins and noted the organs and body systems that could be affected by the exposure. VBA staff were required to forward the claims folder with the fact sheet to the examiner and ask for a review of medical and other evidence. Examiners were to review the fact sheet and provide an opinion and rationale for whether the veteran's claimed disability was related to the hazardous environmental exposure.¹¹

Results of Previous Review

The OIG's previously published report found that VBA staff nearly always made the correct decision when granting compensation for conditions identified as burn pit-related, but most denials were premature—that is, veterans may not have received the benefits they were eligible for because a determination of whether a condition was due to burn pit exposure was not based on a fully developed claim. Incomplete development of claims resulted from VA staff not requesting opinions from medical examiners as to whether conditions were as likely as not due to burn pit exposure.

During the initial review, the team analyzed a sample of 51 claimed conditions for which compensation was denied and estimated that VBA staff incorrectly processed 870 of 1,000 claimed conditions VBA identified as related to burn pit exposure.¹² Of those 870, nearly 630 denials had the potential to affect veterans' benefits because VBA staff did not obtain additional evidence that could have been grounds for favorable decisions, such as a medical opinion, before deciding the claim.

⁹ VBA training material for claims processors titled, "Claims Based on Exposure to Environmental Hazards in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Djibouti," October 2020 and February 2016.

¹⁰ VA Manual 21-1, *Adjudication Procedures Manual*, sec. IV.ii.1.I, "Developing Claims for Service Connection (SC) Based on Other Exposure Types," May 11, 2020, and April 12, 2019.

¹¹ VA Manual 21-1, "Developing Claims for Service Connection (SC) Based on Other Exposure Types."

¹² Claimed condition refers to an illness or disability a veteran has filed a benefits claim for. A single claim may be for multiple conditions.

The OIG had also reviewed another sample drawn from denials of compensation for conditions that VBA staff did not identify as related to burn pits. The sample consisted of the five most frequently claimed conditions related to burn pit exposure, as reported by VBA: bronchial asthma, chronic bronchitis, allergic rhinitis, sleep apnea, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. The OIG estimated that more than 4,200 of these conditions were denied during the review period.¹³ The review team estimated that VBA staff improperly processed 4,100 of these (97 percent), with over 3,900 having the potential to affect veterans' benefits.

The previous report made seven recommendations to the under secretary for benefits. After publication of the report, VBA took corrective action on five of the recommendations, and the OIG closed them. The two remaining open, recommendations 2 and 3, were for VA's under secretary for benefits to do the following:

2. Review all denials of compensation claims identified as burn pit claims completed from May 1, 2020, to May 1, 2021, for conditions claimed by eligible veterans to be due to burn pit exposure; correct any errors identified; and provide certification of completion of the review to the Office of Inspector General.
3. Review all denials of compensation claims not identified as burn pit claims completed from May 1, 2020, to May 1, 2021, for conditions of bronchial asthma, chronic bronchitis, allergic rhinitis, sleep apnea, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease submitted by veterans who served where and when burn pits were used even if not specifically cited in the claim; correct any errors identified; and provide certification of completion of the review to the Office of Inspector General.

VBA's Office of the Chief of Staff reported that the Office of Field Operations selected eight VA regional offices to review the claims in response to the OIG's recommendations.¹⁴ According to a VBA program analyst, any claims processor with available capacity could have received the work; however, offices had discretion to use local routing rules to specify which staff would receive these cases.

On May 29, 2024, VBA requested that the OIG close recommendation 2 on the basis that staff had reviewed "all denials of compensation claims identified as burn pit claims completed between May 1, 2020, and May 1, 2021, for conditions claimed by eligible veterans to be due to burn pit exposure." VBA provided a workbook consisting of 1,266 claimed conditions that were

¹³ The review population for this dataset initially consisted of 11,887 claimed conditions, resulting in a sample size of 71. However, after excluding samples that the OIG determined to be outside the scope of the review, the remaining population was estimated to be 4,220 denied conditions. Samples were determined to be out of scope for reasons that included veterans not serving at a burn pit location or time frame.

¹⁴ For recommendation 2, the offices chosen were Atlanta, Georgia; Boston, Massachusetts; Denver, Colorado; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Phoenix, Arizona; Roanoke, Virginia; San Diego, California; and Wichita, Kansas. For recommendation 3, the following offices were selected: Atlanta; Boston; Milwaukee; San Diego; Houston, Texas; San Juan, Puerto Rico; Seattle, Washington; and Waco, Texas.

denied for burn pit exposure, which staff had reviewed. VBA's analysis determined the decisions for the conditions did not contain errors, had errors corrected, or did not require correction because the veteran had passed away.

On August 12, 2024, VBA requested that the OIG close recommendation 3 on the basis that staff had "completed the review and taken corrective action on all claims identified." VBA provided a workbook consisting of 11,887 claimed conditions that were denied and potentially could be linked to burn pit exposure. VBA said staff determined the decisions for the conditions did not contain errors, had errors corrected, or did not require correction because the veteran had passed away.

What the OIG Did

The OIG team conducted statistically random reviews of veterans' claims from each of the two populations VBA noted its staff had reviewed. As such, each sample included all of a veteran's claimed conditions associated with burn pit exposure. The team excluded any claims previously sampled as part of its original review if it had already determined the claim presented no risk of incorrect benefits determinations. For the veterans' claims reviewed in response to recommendation 2 (referred to as dataset 1), the team reviewed 55 from a population of 901.¹⁵ For veterans' claims reviewed in response to recommendation 3 (referred to as dataset 2), the team reviewed 65 from a population of 10,841.¹⁶ Appendix B provides more detail on the team's methodology.

VBA Did Not Fully Correct Prematurely Denied Benefits for Conditions That Could Be Associated with Veterans' Burn Pit Exposure

The OIG estimated nearly 280 veterans (31 percent) from the first dataset with denied claims for conditions that could be associated with burn pit exposure still had processing errors not identified and corrected by VBA, regardless of whether they met scope requirements of the previous review. Applying the scope requirements of the previous review—which consisted of eligible veterans claiming burn pit-related conditions that were denied—the OIG estimated 36 percent of the veterans had claims with processing errors that were not identified and corrected by VBA. An estimated 94 percent of the errors potentially affected veterans' monetary benefits, as VBA did not order medical exams and opinions for burn pit-related conditions that included the required fact sheets for consideration. Without sufficient medical opinions based on the fact sheets, the veterans' claimed conditions were denied service-connected compensation prematurely. Example 1 illustrates one of the errors the OIG found that VBA did not correct.

¹⁵ Because some veterans had multiple claimed conditions, this number is less than the 1,266 claimed conditions referred to in the previous section.

¹⁶ Because some veterans had multiple claimed conditions, this number is less than the 11,887 claimed conditions referred to in the previous section.

VBA officials concurred with the OIG’s analysis of this sample, and another medical opinion was requested.

Example 1

A veteran who served in Iraq and Afghanistan submitted a service-connected compensation claim for a skin condition due to burn pit exposure. Staff requested a medical exam and opinion but did not include the necessary fact sheet for burn pit claims, which explains to the medical examiner how exposure to such toxins can affect the skin. The medical examiner diagnosed the veteran with seborrheic dermatitis and opined it was unlikely due to military service, and the veteran was therefore denied service connection. Because the examiner did not receive, and therefore could not consider, the fact sheet when rendering the medical opinion, the veteran could be missing out on service-connected compensation benefits.

For the second dataset, the OIG estimated nearly 2,700 veterans (25 percent) still had processing errors for burn pit-related claims that were denied and not identified and corrected by VBA. Applying the scope requirements of the previous review—which consisted of eligible veterans who were denied service connection for bronchial asthma, chronic bronchitis, allergic rhinitis, sleep apnea, or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and served where and when burn pits were used, even if not specifically cited in the claim—the OIG also estimated 55 percent of the veterans had claims with processing errors that were not identified and corrected by VBA. As with the first dataset, an estimated 94 percent involved a potential monetary impact to veterans whose claims were denied after VBA did not ensure medical exams included the required fact sheets for consideration. Example 2 illustrates one of the errors from the second dataset that the OIG found was not corrected by VBA. VBA officials concurred with the OIG’s analysis of this sample, and it is still pending corrective action.

Example 2

A veteran who served in Iraq submitted a service-connected compensation claim for sleep apnea and did not provide a statement that the condition was due to burn pit exposure. A VA rating decision denied compensation for the disability, noting there was no evidence it was directly related to the veteran’s military service. However, VBA policy noted, “Because Veterans generally will not possess knowledge of all relevant environmental hazards, Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) personnel should be aware of the environmental hazards that may apply for claimants who served in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Djibouti, even if

the claimants did not allege such exposure.”¹⁷ Given the veteran had evidence of a respiratory condition and served in a burn pit location, and VA’s fact sheet notes the respiratory system can be affected by burn pit exposure, VA had a duty to assist the veteran by obtaining a medical opinion about whether the condition was due to burn pit exposure. According to VBA’s policy, an opinion should be sought regardless of whether the veteran provided a statement claiming the condition was due to an environmental hazard. As a result of staff not fulfilling their duty to assist, the veteran could be missing service-connected compensation benefits.

After being presented with the errors the OIG team found, a quality consultant for VBA said he had no specialized insights as to why errors were not corrected or caught by staff. He added it would be unfounded speculation to determine why but also noted VBA is committed to improving the quality of this organization and will take all reasonable steps to do so.

Requested Action

Given the considerable errors identified in this second review of claims, the OIG lacks assurance that VBA has taken sufficient corrective action to address the OIG team’s original findings and remains concerned that, after nearly three years, veterans affected by these errors could still be missing service-connected compensation benefits to which they are entitled. Accordingly, the OIG did not concur with VBA’s requests to close recommendations 2 and 3 from the July 2022 report. These recommendations will remain open, and the OIG will continue to request quarterly updates from VBA on the progress it has made to appropriately remediate all errors and ensure corrective actions are taken for veterans’ denied claims related to burn pit exposure from the population identified by the OIG.

VA Management Comments

The acting undersecretary for benefits reported that VBA will establish a workgroup to plan and complete file reviews for recommendations 2 and 3 of the related published OIG report, *Veterans Prematurely Denied Compensation for Conditions That Could Be Associated with Burn Pit Exposure*. The workgroup will evaluate and develop workload management plans, procedures, training, and quality processes for the reviews. The target completion dates will be developed by the workgroup based on the finalized plan. VBA stated that this plan will better identify the root causes of claims processing errors related to burn pit exposure and ensure high confidence in the

¹⁷ VA Manual 21-1, *Adjudication Procedures Manual*, sec. IV.ii.2.C, “Service Connection (SC) for Disabilities Resulting From Exposure to Environmental Hazards or Service in the Republic of Vietnam (RVN),” March 14, 2017.

accuracy of corrective actions. The full text of the acting under secretary's response to the OIG's memorandum is in appendix C.

Appendix A: Presumptive Conditions Related to Burn Pit Exposure Expanded Under the PACT Act

Effective August 10, 2022, the Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act allowed for presumptive service connection for certain diseases associated with exposure to burn pits and other toxins.¹⁸ That meant if a qualifying disease manifested in an eligible veteran, the disease would be considered to have been incurred or aggravated during active military service, even without evidence of the disease during service.

The law added more than 20 presumptive cancers and illnesses related to burn pit exposure:

- **Cancers**
 - brain cancer
 - gastrointestinal cancer of any type
 - head cancer of any type
 - kidney cancer
 - lymphoma of any type
 - lymphomatic cancer of any type
 - melanoma
 - neck cancer of any type
 - pancreatic cancer
 - reproductive cancer of any type
 - respiratory cancer of any type
- **Illnesses**
 - asthma that was diagnosed after service
 - chronic bronchitis
 - chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
 - chronic rhinitis
 - chronic sinusitis

¹⁸ Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act of 2022, Pub. L. No. 117-168.

-
- constrictive bronchiolitis or obliterative bronchiolitis
 - emphysema
 - glioblastoma
 - granulomatous disease
 - interstitial lung disease
 - pleuritis
 - pulmonary fibrosis
 - sarcoidosis

The PACT Act also expanded qualifying service for conceded burn pit exposure to all the locations and time frames shown below:¹⁹

- On or after August 2, 1990, a duty station in (including airspace above) Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, and the United Arab Emirates
- On or after September 11, 2001, a duty station in (including airspace above) Afghanistan, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Uzbekistan, and Yemen

¹⁹ PACT Act Title III, sec. 302.

Appendix B: Statistical Sampling Methodology

Sampling Design

The team coordinated with an OIG statistician to review a statistical sample of veterans from each dataset. The first sample consisted of 55 records, and the second sample consisted of 65. The statistical projections have 90 percent confidence levels with the following precision and expected error rates:

- **Dataset 1.** Precision of 9.8 percent given an expected error rate of 30 percent
- **Dataset 2.** Precision of 9.7 percent given an expected error rate of 35 percent

Weights

Samples were weighted to represent the population from which they were drawn, and the weights were used in the estimate calculations. For example, the team calculated the error rate estimates by first summing the sampling weights for all sample records that contained the given error, then dividing that value by the sum of the weights for all sample records.

Projections and Margins of Error

The projection is an estimate of the population value based on the sample. The associated margin of error and confidence interval show the precision of the estimate. If the OIG repeated this audit with multiple sets of samples, the confidence intervals would differ for each sample but would include the true population value 90 percent of the time.

The OIG statistician employed statistical analysis software to calculate estimates, margins of error, and confidence intervals that account for the complexity of the sample design.

The sample size was determined after reviewing the expected precision of the projections based on the sample size, potential error rate, and logistic concerns of the sample review. While precision improves with larger samples, the rate of improvement decreases significantly as more records are added to the sample review.

Figure B.1 shows the effect of progressively larger sample sizes on the margin of error.

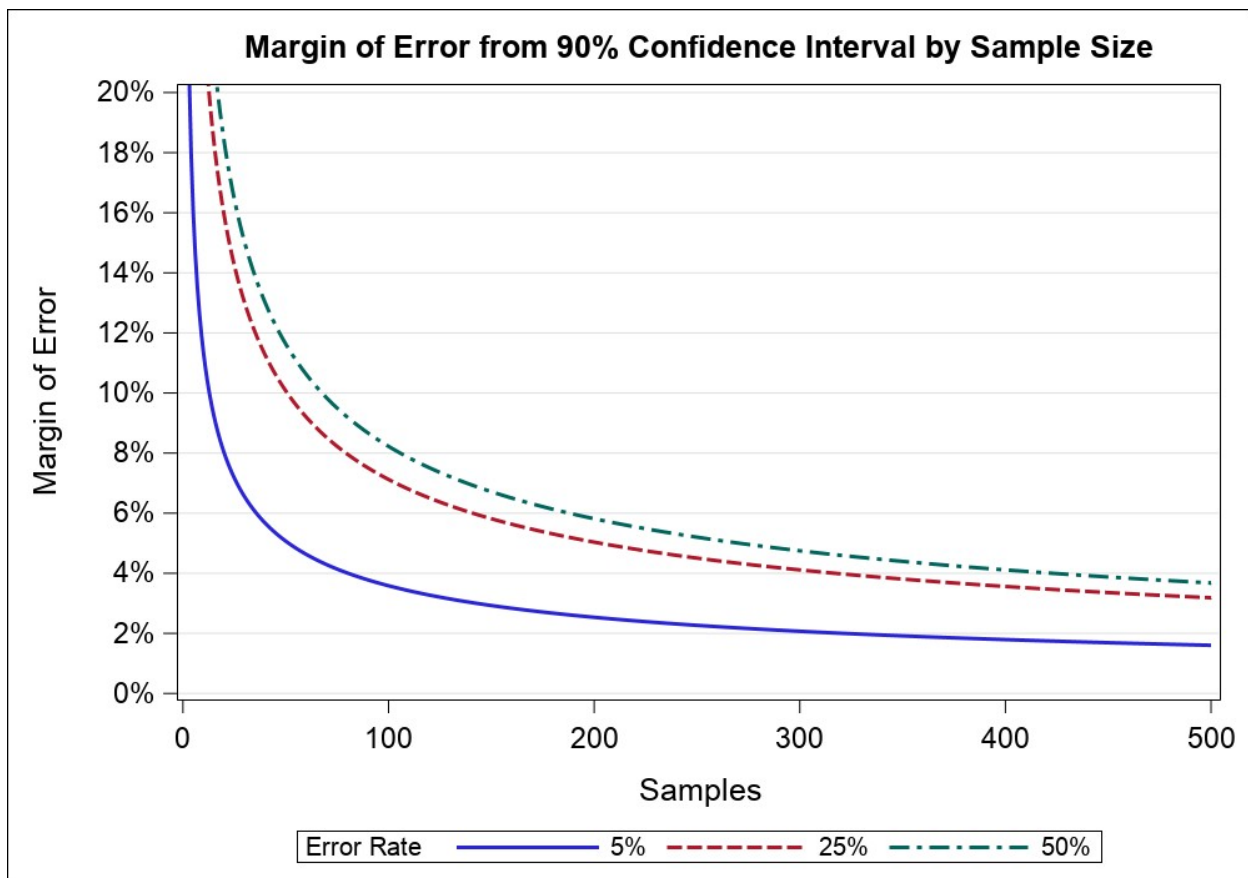


Figure B.1. Effect of sample size on margin of error.

Source: VA OIG statistician's analysis.

Projections

The following tables detail the review team's analysis and projected results for claims completed during the review period of May 1, 2020, to May 1, 2021.

**Table B.1. Statistical Projections for Estimated Population of Veterans
VBA Identified as Having Burn Pit Exposure Claims**

Description	Estimate number	Margin of error based on 90 percent confidence interval	90 percent confidence interval lower limit	90 percent confidence interval upper limit	Count from sample
Veterans from population prematurely denied service connection and not identified or corrected by VBA	278 (31%)	92 (10%)	187* (21%)	370 (41%)	17

Description	Estimate number	Margin of error based on 90 percent confidence interval	90 percent confidence interval lower limit	90 percent confidence interval upper limit	Count from sample
Veterans who met the scope of the previous review whose claims contained processing errors that were not identified and corrected by VBA	36%	11%	25%	48%*	17
Errors that involved potential impact to veterans	94%	9%	85%	over 99%	16

Source: VA OIG statistician's projection of estimated population based on the team's findings.

* Projections and confidence intervals may not total precisely due to rounding.

Table B.2. Statistical Projections for Estimated Population of Veterans Who Served in Burn Pit Locations and Time Frames but Had Claims for Respiratory Conditions VBA Did Not Identify as Burn Pit-Related and Denied*

Description	Estimate number	Margin of error based on 90 percent confidence interval	90 percent confidence interval lower limit	90 percent confidence interval upper limit	Count from sample
Veterans from population prematurely denied service connection and not identified or corrected by VBA	2,669 (25%)	971 (9%)	1,697‡ (16%)	3,640 (34%)	16
Veterans who met the scope of the previous review whose claims contained processing errors that were not identified and corrected by VBA	55%	15%	40%	71%‡	16

Description	Estimate number	Margin of error based on 90 percent confidence interval	90 percent confidence interval lower limit	90 percent confidence interval upper limit	Count from sample
Errors that involved potential impact to veterans	94%	10%	84%	over 99%	15

Source: VA OIG statistician's projection of estimated population based on the team's findings.

** Respiratory conditions were bronchial asthma, chronic bronchitis, allergic rhinitis, sleep apnea, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.*

‡ Projections and confidence intervals may not total precisely due to rounding.

Appendix C: VA Management Comments

Department of Veterans Affairs Memorandum

Date: April 30, 2025

From: Acting Under Secretary for Benefits (20)

Subj: Office of Inspector General (OIG) Draft Management Advisory Memorandum – VBA Did Not Take All Corrective Actions for Veterans Prematurely Denied Service Connection for Conditions That Could Be Associated with Burn Pit Exposure [Project No. 2024-03642-AE-0127]

To: Assistant Inspector General for Audits and Evaluations (52)

1. Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the OIG draft report: VBA Did Not Take All Corrective Actions for Veterans Prematurely Denied Service Connection for Conditions That Could Be Associated with Burn Pit Exposure. The report highlights an opportunity for the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) to strengthen its processes on this topic.

2. VBA remains steadfast in our commitment to ensure Veterans receive all benefits they are entitled to under the law and provides the attached response to the OIG draft report.

<i>The OIG removed point of contact information prior to publication.</i>

(Original signed by)

Michael J. Frueh

Attachment

Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)

Comments on OIG Draft Report Comments on the OIG Management Advisory Memorandum

VBA Did Not Take All Corrective Actions for Veterans Prematurely Denied Service Connection for Conditions That Could Be Associated with Burn Pit Exposure [Project No. 2024-03642-AE-0127]

The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) concurs with the Office of Inspector General (OIG) findings in the draft report and provides the following general comment in response to the draft Management Advisory Memorandum:

VBA appreciates the opportunity to review the OIG findings in the memorandum. VBA plans to establish a workgroup for the planning and implementation of the file reviews for Recommendations 2 and 3 of the related published OIG report, *Veterans Prematurely Denied Compensation for Conditions That Could Be Associated with Burn Pit Exposure* (Report No. 21-02704-135; Published July 21, 2022). The workgroup will evaluate and develop workload management plans, procedures, training, and quality processes for the reviews. The target completion dates will be developed by the workgroup based on the finalized plan.

This plan will better identify the root causes of claims processing errors related to burn pit exposure and ensure high confidence in the accuracy of corrective actions.

For accessibility, the original format of this appendix has been modified to comply with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended.

OIG Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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