

VA COMPENSATION & PENSION

Understanding Mental Health Examinations

HOW IS A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION EVALUATED BY VA?

When you submit a claim for a particular mental health condition, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will process your claim as a claim for any mental health conditions that may be reasonably defined by:

- ▶ The description of the claim
- ▶ The symptoms that you describe
- ▶ The information and evidence that you submit, and
- ▶ Any other information and evidence obtained

Since mental health conditions share similar symptomatology and findings, in order to make sure the correct mental health condition is evaluated as it relates to your claim, VA does a thorough review of all of the medical and non-medical evidence surrounding your claim.

For VA purposes, you can only be rated for one mental health condition. VA will review the entire body of evidence to gain a clear understanding of how your mental health condition symptoms impact your social and industrial functioning and which diagnosed mental health condition(s) may be related to your claim.

When determining the actual evaluation of the mental health condition, VA refers to Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV or DSM-5) findings to assign appropriate evaluations using the Mental Disorder Criteria in the VA Schedule for Rating Disabilities.

WHY IS A REVIEW MENTAL HEALTH EXAM NEEDED?

Future mental health exams are only required or allowed under certain circumstances:

- ▶ When assigning a pre-stabilization rating
- ▶ When the evidence of record clearly shows the likelihood for improvement

Sound medical evidence is required, indicating the likelihood of improvement, to warrant a future exam. Other than those reasons listed above, there are no automatic future exams required or allowed by regulations.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO ATTEND MY MENTAL HEALTH EXAM?

When a mental health examination is requested to confirm your continued entitlement to disability benefits, it is important that you attend your scheduled disability examination. If for some reason you are unable to attend your mental health examination you must notify VA and request your examination to be rescheduled. However, if you fail to attend your scheduled mental health examination without adequate reason, the VA will review the current evidence of record and may be required by law to do one of the following:

- ▶ Continue payment for the disability(ies) for which the examination was scheduled, if there is no change in severity of your disability(ies) as supported by evidence of record,
- ▶ Discontinue payment for the disability(ies) for which the examination was scheduled, or
- ▶ Reduce payment for the disability(ies) for which the examination was scheduled to minimum evaluation established by law.

It is very important that you attend your review examination to ensure that the abovementioned actions do not occur in the absence of the findings that would have been obtained through your examination. VA wants to ensure that the appropriate disability rating is assigned based on your individual examination findings.

WHY HAS MY DIAGNOSIS CHANGED?

A change in diagnosis of a mental health condition can happen when there is

- ▶ A progression in the mental health condition resulting in the additional symptomatology better fitting the criteria of a different mental health condition diagnosis,
- ▶ A correction of an error in the prior diagnosis, or
- ▶ A development of a new and separate mental health condition

Remember that there can only be one evaluation for a mental health condition, so any change in diagnosis will reflect the most accurate diagnosis and symptomatology.

REMEMBER: The examiner is only involved in performing the claim exam. They do not make the rating decision. Only a VA regional office can answer questions regarding your claim.



For more information, visit <http://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/claimexam.asp>



U.S. Department
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Your VA Claim Exam

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