

## 16. Casualty Assistance Program Procedures

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**Introduction** This topic provides information and procedures for the processing of claims from survivors of Servicemembers who die while on active duty.

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**a. Background on Casualty Assistance** Each survivor of a Servicemember who dies on active duty deserves special assistance and priority claims processing. Through VBA's efforts to streamline claims processing and improve outreach, these survivors will receive the best possible service.

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**b. Casualty Outreach** Outreach to surviving family members is the responsibility of the regional office (RO) or offices of jurisdiction nearest the survivors' residences.

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**c. Casualty Outreach Program Oversight and Reporting** Oversight of the Casualty Assistance Program is the responsibility of the Military Outreach Staff, Benefits Assistance Service.

The Assistant Director for Client Services and Outreach serves as the liaison with the Casualty Assistance Board (CAB) that is comprised of representatives from the Office of the Secretary of Defense and each of the military departments.

The Assistant Director works with the CAB to assure that the Casualty Assistance Program operates as effectively as possible for survivors.

A Casualty Assistance Program Manager on the Military Outreach Staff has been assigned to oversee day-to-day program operations and will monitor the VTA system to guarantee that the 30-day contact requirement is met and to monitor all RO actions taken to contact the survivors.

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**d. Questions Regarding the Casualty Outreach Program** Questions about Casualty Assistance Program procedures should be directed to the Benefits Assistance Service outreach mailbox:  
[VAVBAWAS/CO/OUTREACH](mailto:VAVBAWAS/CO/OUTREACH)

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**e. Liaison With Military Casualty Assistance Officers (CACOs)** Each RO should establish a strong working relationship with the Casualty Assistance Offices of military installations located within the RO's jurisdictional area. Each RO must designate a Primary and an Alternate Casualty Assistance Coordinator (CAC) to work with the military installations. RO(s) must keep the Program Manager for Casualty Assistance informed of any changes in designation.

The Benefits Assistance Service has furnished RO CAC information to military headquarters officials to help them coordinate casualty assistance efforts with RO(s), when necessary. The contact information is also used by the Military Outreach Staff to deal directly with RO CACO(s).

Contact information may be found at:

[http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/27/outreach/military/casualty\\_assistance/cac\\_index.htm](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/27/outreach/military/casualty_assistance/cac_index.htm)

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**f. Reports of Casualty** Reports of Casualty will be obtained through the VTA system from each Military department for *all* in-service deaths. The RO of jurisdiction will be determined by zip code. The name, location, and telephone number of the military CACO are included for most casualties. More than one RO may be involved in a case depending on the location of survivors.

Reports of Casualty are also sent by the military departments to the Office of Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (OSGLI) to initiate processing of SGLI claims.

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**g. Contact with Surviving Spouses and Dependent Children** As soon as the RO CAC receives notification via the VTA system they should contact the identified military CAO to offer assistance. ***There should be no attempt to contact any survivor unless 30 days has passed since the death of the service member.*** The military will give direction on when VA contact should be initiated. Usually, the first contact with the survivors will be made by telephone to set up a personal visit at a time and place convenient for the survivor(s).

Basic entitlements on individual cases should be reviewed prior to the visit, such as Chapter 30 and 32 refunds, Survivors' and Dependents' Education Assistance, etc. The RO CAC must be familiar with all potential death benefits, not just DIC.

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- g. Contact with Surviving Spouses and Dependent Children**  
(continued)
- During the visit, the RO CAC will:
- provide full benefits information.
  - offer help in completing applications.
  - advise the survivor whom to contact at the local RO, RPO or Philadelphia Regional Office and Insurance Center (RO&IC) for any follow-up actions or questions, and give referral information about other agencies, organizations, and support groups, if available.
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- h. Contact With Surviving Parents**
- Contact with surviving parents will be made only if there is an indication that Parents' DIC entitlement exists. Parents' income and other relevant information will be obtained by the military CAO and will be discussed with the RO CACO before a visit is scheduled with surviving parents.

If entitlement *does* exist, a visit should be made and assistance provided in completing VA Form 21-535. *Application for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation by Parent(s)*. The application should be forwarded to the Philadelphia RO&IC (See "Completing and Submitting DIC Claims for Processing" below). The parents should be advised of the availability of bereavement counseling (see "Bereavement Counseling" below).

If entitlement *does not* exist, a visit is not necessary. Process the DD Form 1300 as a First Notice of Death and request a Presidential Memorial Certificate. The military CACO will explain SGLI death claim and Chapter 30 death benefit procedures to the parents, if appropriate, and the availability of bereavement counseling.

In both situations, annotations shall be made in the VTA system.

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- i. Special Brochure: VA Pamphlet 21-02-1**
- VA Pamphlet 21-02-1 December 2005 Revised, *Benefits and Services for Survivors of Servicemembers Who Die on Active Duty*, is a large tri-fold color brochure with a document pocket.

The brochure is to be given by military CACOs to survivors during their initial visit. RO CACs should provide the brochure to survivors if it was not previously provided. Stock replenishment requests should be e-mailed to: [VAVBOWAS/CO/OUTREACH](mailto:VAVBOWAS/CO/OUTREACH)

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### j. Possible Need for a Fiduciary

The VA employee making initial contact with the survivors of the Veteran must be aware of the potential need for a fiduciary for any VA benefits payable. Although these situations will be rare, they may arise under one of the following circumstances:

- If the dependent is a minor child *not* in the custody of the natural or adoptive parent or stepparent, a fiduciary arrangement must be certified.
- The beneficiary is under an *existing legal disability* such as a Court guardianship, trusteeship or similar arrangement. This may include minors in the custody of a natural or adoptive parent, or stepparent.
- Evidence obtained through personal observation and/or interview indicates that the adult beneficiary may not be able to handle VA benefit payments without assistance.

In the first two situations, a field examination should be conducted as part of the interview, a potential fiduciary certified, and the required forms attached to the completed claim to expedite payment.

When there is a question of competency raised during the interview, obtain medical evidence, if possible, for a competency rating without appointing a fiduciary. Benefits, if payable, may be withheld pending the competency determination in such cases.

Guidelines for conducting adult and minor child field examinations are contained in M21-1MR, Part XI, 2d and 2g (<http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/BL/21/M21/content/contents.asp?address=M21-1MRXI>) respectively. It may be necessary to consult the local Fiduciary Activity for guidance and cross training if a Field Examiner is not conducting the casualty assistance visit.

Upon completion of the visit, a written report covering the findings and recommendations of the field examination should be submitted to the Fiduciary Activity of the regional office where the appointed fiduciary resides.

A VA Form 21-4703 (Fiduciary Agreement) and VA Form 21-555a, *Designation of Payee* must accompany the report when a federal fiduciary is recommended.

Attach a certified copy of the court papers to the VA Form 21-555a if a Court-appointed fiduciary arrangement is recommended.

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**j. Possible Need for a Fiduciary (continued)** The Fiduciary Activity will establish a Principal Guardianship File (PGF) and prepare a VA Form 21-555, *Certificate of Legal Capacity to Receive and Disburse Funds*.

The VA Form 21-555 will be sent with the DIC application to the Philadelphia RO&IC for processing.

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**k. Completing and Submitting DIC Claims for Processing**

VBA's goal is to award in-service death DIC benefits within 48 hours of receipt of the claim.

The DD Form 1300 (Report of Casualty) contains most of the information that is required on a VA Form 21-534, *Application for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation, Death Pension and Accrued Benefits by a Surviving Spouse or Child*. Included are the Veteran's name, social security number, duty status; the name, address, and social security number of the surviving spouse; the name, age, and address of children; and a line of duty determination. Military Departments has verified dependents shown on the DD Form 1300. Hard copies of the DD Form 1300 will be provided to Philadelphia for processing the DIC claims in accordance with the Data Sharing Agreement with the Department of Defense.

VA will accept the VA Form 21-534a, *Application for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation by a Surviving Spouse or Child – In-Service Death Only*) in lieu of a VA Form 21-534. The form requires the claimant's signature and additional information needed for claims processing. The form will also initiate direct deposit, when requested. That will eliminate the claimant's need to request direct deposit after the initial check has been generated.

The completed VA Form 21-534a should be faxed to the Philadelphia RO&IC at 215-381-3084 by the military CACO or RO CAC, depending on who assists the survivor.

Claims status inquiries and other questions should be emailed to the following mailbox: [VAVBAPHI/RO/CASUALTY](mailto:VAVBAPHI/RO/CASUALTY)

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### k. Completing and Submitting DIC Claims for Processing (continued)

VA Form 21-534a can also be found on the VA Forms Website at: <http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/20/cio/20s5/forms/VBA-21-534a-ARE.pdf>

Parents' DIC claims must be made on VA Form 21-535, *Application for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation by Parent(s)*. The applications should be mailed to the Philadelphia RO&IC.

The address is: Department of Veterans Affairs  
Attn: Ralph Davis or Leroy Saunders  
P.O.Box 13399  
Philadelphia, PA 19101

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### l. Education Benefits Processing for Survivors and Dependents

Survivor's and Dependents' Educational Assistance (Chapter 35):

Completed VA Forms 22-5490, *Application for Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance* should be faxed to the Regional Processing Office (RPO) of jurisdiction, as follows:

RPO	Facsimile Number
Atlanta	404-929-3009
Buffalo	716-551-5999
Muskogee	918-781-7864
St. Louis	314-552-9707

RPOs will take immediate action to process the claim and will notify the Veterans Services Staff of the date the award was authorized.

This information should be e-mailed to [VAVBAWAS/CO/OUTREACH](mailto:VAVBAWAS/CO/OUTREACH).

Montgomery GI Bill (Chapter 30) Death Benefit, and Veterans Educational Assistance Program (VEAP – Chapter 32) Contribution Refund:

VA will refund to the designated SGLI beneficiary(ies) any Chapter 30 pay reductions less benefits previously paid to the deceased service member, or the deceased service member's unused Chapter 32 contributions.

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### **I. Education Benefits Processing for Survivors and Dependents** (continued)

The request will not need to be on a particular form. The following written statement will suffice: *“I wish to claim the Chapter 30/Chapter 32 death benefit.”*

The St. Louis Regional Processing Office will automatically receive a hard copy of the DD Form 1300 (Report of Casualty) through the VTA Data Sharing process with the Department of Defense. The statement should have a signed request for the educational refund. The statement *must* contain the name and SSN of the deceased service member.

The request should be faxed to the St. Louis Regional Processing Office: 314-552-9707.

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### **m. SGLI Death Claims Processing**

The Office of Servicemembers’ Group Life Insurance (OSGLI) receives the following items from the casualty branches of each of the service departments:

- DD Form 1300 (Report of Casualty) on which there is a “certifying” stamp/signature
- SGLV Form 8286 (Servicemembers’ Group Life Insurance Election and Certificate)

These documents comprise the service department’s certification of death, the amount of SGLI coverage, and the beneficiary of the coverage.

SGLV Form 8283 (Claim for Death Benefits) is completed by the person making claim for the insurance proceeds. This form is included in the claim package, along with the previously mentioned forms, by the military Casualty Office.

There may be cases where the RO CAC is asked to provide assistance in completing and submitting the Claim for Death Benefits. In those cases, the claim should be submitted to OSGLI by the RO CAC by fax to the following number: **877-832-4943**.

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### n. Home Loan Guaranty: Requests for a Certificate of Eligibility for Surviving Spouses

The surviving spouse should complete Part I of VA Form 26-1817, (*Request For Determination of Loan Guaranty Eligibility - Unmarried Surviving Spouses*).

The RO CACO should then complete Section B of Part II of the form verifying the surviving spouse's basic eligibility, and fax the completed form to the Eligibility Center. The Eligibility Center will make a formal determination of loan guaranty eligibility within one workday of receipt and notify the surviving spouse by mail.

The Eligibility Center is located at the Atlanta, GA Regional Office. The FAX number is **404-929-5401**.

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### o. Use of the Home Loan Guaranty Program for Surviving Spouses

Surviving spouses interested in using the VA home loan guaranty program should contact a lender. The lender will ensure basic program requirements are met.

The RO CAC might also suggest that the surviving spouse use the [VA Home Loan website](#) as a reference point for use of the program, finding a lender, and specific information about the home loan guaranty program.

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### p. Home Loan Guaranty: Financial Hardship for Surviving Spouses

If the surviving spouse with a VA loan needs assistance due to financial hardship, the RO CAC should suggest that the lender be contacted immediately.

Once the lender knows the situation, the lender may be able to suggest a satisfactory plan to make up the missed payment(s). The RO CACO should also refer the spouse to the Regional Loan Center.

Although VA does not make mortgage payments for the surviving spouse, a loan service representative may be able to suggest other remedies.

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**q. Bereavement Counseling** Bereavement counseling is assistance and support to people with emotional and psychological stress after the death of a loved one.

Bereavement counseling includes a broad range of transition services including outreach, counseling, and referral services.

VA offers bereavement counseling to the spouse, children, and parents of Armed Forces personnel who died while on active duty. Family members of reservists and National Guard members who die while on duty are also eligible for counseling.

VA's bereavement counseling is provided at community-based Vet Centers located nearest the survivors.

There is no cost for VA bereavement counseling.

Services are obtained by calling Readjustment Counseling Service (RCS) at (202) 273-9116, (720) 874-1031, or by e-mail to [vet.center@hq.med.va.gov](mailto:vet.center@hq.med.va.gov), both of which are dedicated for this specialized service. RCS staff will assist families in contacting the nearest Vet Center.

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**r. Reporting Requirements – VARO Casualty Assistance Coordinator** The Program Manager will monitor the VTA system to view all actions taken to assist family members.

The In-Service Casualty Assistance Case Report contains detailed information that must be completed by the CAC in the VTA system. It contains free text with up to 200 characters to explain contacts with survivors.

Further information concerning this report may be found at:  
[http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/27/outreach/military/casualty\\_assistance/index.htm](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/27/outreach/military/casualty_assistance/index.htm)

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**s. Reporting Requirements – SGLI** The Philadelphia RO&IC will e-mail the Veterans Services Staff on a weekly basis information on the date SGLI claims are authorized for Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF).

The *encrypted* e-mail should be sent to [VAVBAWAS/CO/OUTREACH](mailto:VAVBAWAS/CO/OUTREACH). The subject line should read “SGLI Claims.”

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**t. Reporting Requirements – Education Benefits** The St. Louis Regional Office will e-mail the Veterans Services Staff on a weekly basis, in the form of a spreadsheet, information on Chapter 30/32 refunds made for OEF/OIF.

The information should be sent to [VAVBAWAS/CO/OUTREACH](mailto:VAVBAWAS/CO/OUTREACH). The subject line should read “Chapter 30/32 Refunds.”

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