



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM)
Assessment of Department of Veterans Affairs Physical and Mental Health
Examinations and the Department's Schedule of Rating Disabilities for Disability
Compensation Claims Related to Military Sexual Trauma (MST)



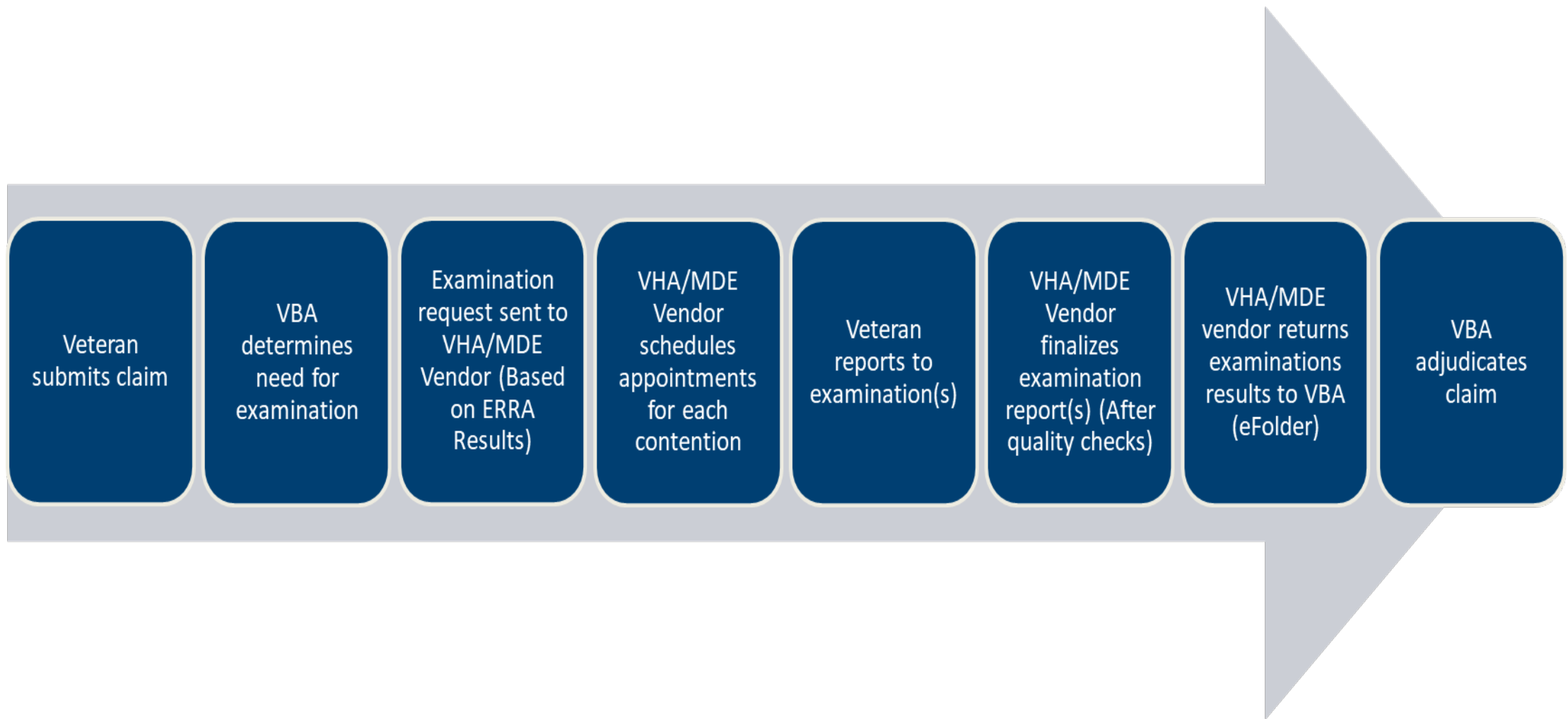
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VA Disability Claim-Exam Process



How VA Distributes Examinations

- Veterans Health Administration (VHA) resources are considered first and utilized when performing disability examinations
- VBA users are mandated to use the Examination Request Routing Assistant (ERRA)
 - Veteran's zip code and VHA capacity in that zip code determines whether to route to VHA or the VBA Medical Disability Examination Office (MDEO) Contractor
- If VHA does not have capacity or capability to complete an examination type, an MDEO contract vendor will receive the examination request.

Examiner Gender Preference

- If the claim is related to a mental or physical health condition resulting from MST VHA/Vendor will offer a choice of a male or female examiner.
 - The Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (P.L. 116-315, the DELIVER Act), January 5, 2021
- Both exam vendors and VHA solicit examiner preference at the time the appointment is scheduled.

VA Disability Benefits Questionnaires (DBQs)

- DBQs are examination templates used by examiners to conduct VA disability evaluations. These primarily are body system based but there are a few by condition such as the DBQ to evaluate Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).
 - Primarily revised in accordance with the VA Schedule for Rating Disabilities (VASRD)
 - Revisions also based on precedential court decisions, Executive Orders, recommendations from the Office of the Inspector General (OIG), clinical and field suggestions and quality trends
- DBQ updates to conform with VASRD revisions to mental health criteria (tentatively scheduled for July 2025)
- The Initial PTSD DBQ is the one most often used with claims related to MST



MST Claims Processing Improvements

Trauma-Informed Plain Language

[2024] The new form, **21-0781, titled "Statement in Support of Claimed Mental Health Disorder(s) Due to an In-Service Traumatic Event(s),"** was released for use in June 2024. It includes clearer filing instructions and is written in plain trauma-informed language.

[2024] **The MST grant and denial claim paragraphs** are updated to articulate MST decisions better using trauma-informed, plain language.

[2024] **VA exam fact sheet** detailing exam expectations was released on September 12, 2024.

Trauma-Informed Plain Language

[2023] **MST Claims Fact Sheet** has been improved to encourage survivors to file claims. It is written to manage expectations using trauma-informed principles and plain language.

Updated Rating Decision Text for MST claim decisions, incorporating trauma-informed language.

Benefits Delivery at Discharge

Removed the burden on BDD applicants from retelling traumatic experiences by eliminating the need for 21-0781 for Benefits Delivery at Discharge.

Added Resource Language

[2023-2024] My VA 411 Paragraph Added to MST Letters.

MyVA411

Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors can confidentially report incidents of sexual assault or sexual harassment at VA facilities by calling 1-800-MyVA411 (1-800-698-2411, option 9) MyVA411 will route complaints about sexual harassment at VBA facilities to VBA Client Relations through the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) currently used for the VA Hotline. VBA Client Relations leadership will work with the Office of Field Operations, District Offices, and Regional Offices to investigate the complaint

MST Resource

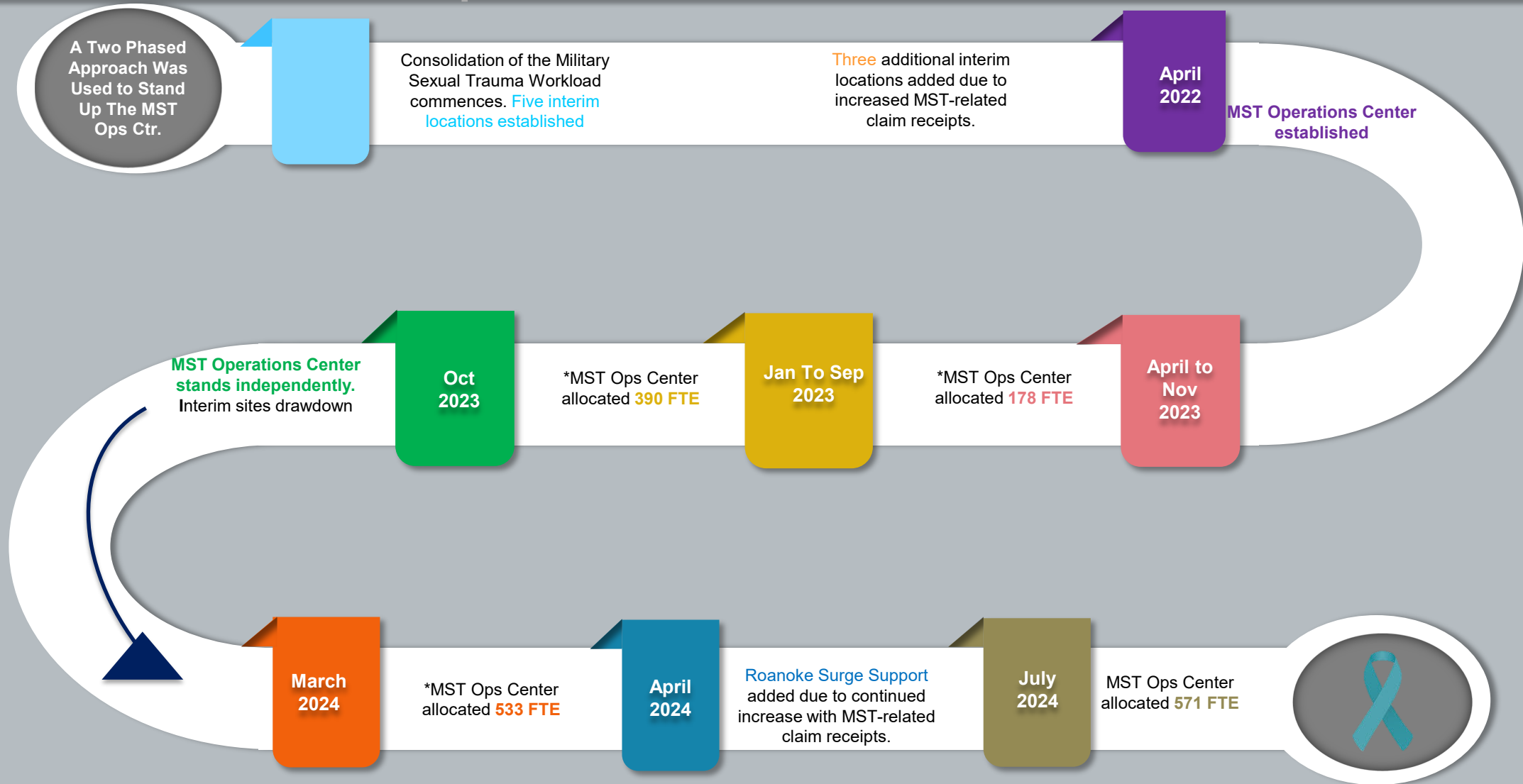
2023-2024 Created an **MST Processing Map for active-duty soldiers** to educate and inform in coordination with the Sexual Trauma Work Group.

Other MST Processing Improvement Efforts

- MDEO is developing a job aid for contract examiners on *Trauma-Informed Communication with Veterans and Service Members Who Have Experienced Military Sexual Trauma*.
- MDEO updated the Examination Scheduling Assistant (ESA) to reflect when MST opinions should be requested. The ESA provides claims processors the tools necessary to determine whether exams/opinions are warranted and ensure the exam requests are accurate and complete.



MST Claims Processing Consolidation



VBA MDEO Contract Examiner Required Credentials

- Credentialing for all examiner types is required and completed through industry standard practices to include confirmation of the examiner's good standing to include:
 - to have all licenses, permits, accreditation, and certificates required by law
 - only licensed graduates of an accredited school conduct examinations
 - all licenses shall be current, full and unrestricted
 - cannot be barred from practicing such health care profession in any State, the District of Columbia, or Commonwealth, territory, or possession of the United States
 - monthly status reports to ensure that licensing is current and has not been revoked



VBA MDEO Contract Examiner Required Credentials

- VBA MDEO Contract Examiners must complete the same Compensation and Pension certification training as VHA examiners prior to completing any examination.
- The Contractor will ensure every examiner has completed all required training and is prepared to complete accurate, high-quality disability examinations.
- MDEO conducts monthly training compliance reports and will not accept examinations from examiners who are not complaint.
- MDEO develops and provides additional training, job aids, and micro-learnings to address hot topics and trends.



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VBA MDEO Contract Examiner Required Training

General Certification Courses

- General Certification Overview
- **Military Sexual Trauma and the Disability Examination Process**
- Aggravation Opinions
- Medical Opinions
- Gulf War Certification

Supplemental Courses

- Understanding Military Culture
- Suicide Awareness and Prevention
- Lethal Means Safety
- The Veteran Experience
- Assessing Deployment Related Environmental Exposures (WRIISC MOD)

Specialty Courses

- Mental Health Certification Course
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Examination
- PACT Act: Key Terms & Medical Opinions for Examiners
- Separation Health Assessment (SHA) DBQ Training
- Camp LeJeune Contaminated Water (CLCW)
- Conducting Spina Bifida Examinations



VBA MDEO Contract Examiner Required Training

Military Sexual Trauma and the Disability Examination Process:

Lesson 1: Military Sexual Trauma (MST)

Lesson 2: DoD and VA Policies and Programs

Lesson 3: MST-Related Disability Claims

Lesson 4: MST and the Separation Health Assessment (SHA)

Lesson 5: Considerations for MST-Related PTSD Examinations

9 Objectives for Examiners:

1. Define military sexual trauma (MST).
2. Summarize the prevalence of MST in the armed forces.
3. Explain the potential impact MST may have on physical and mental health.
4. Identify the DoD and VA policies and programs for assisting individuals who experienced sexual assault or sexual harassment during service.
5. Describe methods to support MST survivors through the disability claims process.
6. Disclosing MST during a separation exam.
7. Recognize the contents of the VA-designated MST handout.
8. Identify the requirements and best practices for sharing MST-related materials during the SHA process.
9. Define marker evidence and explain an examiner's responsibilities for identifying and evaluating marker evidence for MST-related PTSD examinations.



Questions

