

Department of Veterans Affairs

§ 21.1031

(iii) NAVMC 10883, Application for Tuition Assistance, and either NAVEDTRA 1560/5, Tuition Assistance Authorization or NAVMC (page 2), Tuition Assistance Authorization;

(iv) Department of Homeland Security, USCG CG-4147, Application for Off-Duty Assistance; and

(v) Request for Top-Up: eArmyU Program.

(4) The claimant must also provide to VA the following information, to the extent it is not contained on any form filed under paragraph (c)(1) or (c)(3) of this section:

(i) His or her name;

(ii) His or her Social Security number;

(iii) The name of the educational institution;

(iv) The name of the course or courses for which the claimant wants educational assistance;

(v) The number of the course or courses;

(vi) The number of credit hours for each course;

(vii) The beginning and ending date of each course;

(viii) The cost of the course or courses; and

(ix) If the claimant doesn't want to receive the full amount of that cost not met by the Secretary of the military department concerned, the portion that the claimant wishes to receive.

(5) If the claimant's military department uses an electronic tuition assistance application process with electronic signatures, VA will accept an electronic transmission of the approved tuition assistance application directly from the military department concerned on behalf of the claimant if—

(i) The electronic tuition assistance application indicates the servicemember's intent to claim tuition-assistance top-up; and

(ii) The information described in paragraph (c)(4) of this section is included in the electronic application.

(Authority: 38 U.S.C. 501, 3034(a), 3241(a), 3471, 3513, 5101(a))

(The Office of Management and Budget has approved the information collection provisions in this section under control numbers 2900-0074, 2900-0098, 2900-0099, 2900-0154, 2900-0695, and 2900-0698.)

[72 FR 16964, Apr. 5, 2007]

§ 21.1031 VA responsibilities when a claim is filed.

(a) *VA will furnish forms.* VA will furnish all necessary VA claim forms and instructions, and, if appropriate, a description of any supporting evidence required upon receipt of an informal claim.

(Authority: 38 U.S.C. 5102)

(b) *VA has a duty to notify claimants of necessary information or evidence.* (1) Except when a claim cannot be substantiated because there is no legal basis for the claim, or undisputed facts render the claimant ineligible for the claimed benefit, when VA receives a complete or substantially complete application for educational assistance provided under subpart C, D, G, H, K, or L of this part VA will—

(i) Notify the claimant of any information and evidence that is necessary to substantiate the claim; and

(ii) Inform the claimant which information and evidence, if any, the claimant is to provide to VA and which information and evidence, if any, VA will try to obtain for the claimant.

(2) The information and evidence that VA, pursuant to paragraph (b)(1) of this section informs the claimant that the claimant must provide, must be provided within one year from the date of the notice. If VA does not receive such information and evidence from the claimant within that time period, VA may adjudicate the claim based on the information and evidence in the file.

(3) If the claimant has not responded to the request within 30 days, VA may decide the claim before the expiration of the one-year period prescribed in paragraph (b)(2) of this section, based on all the information and evidence in

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the file, including information and evidence it has obtained on behalf of the claimant. If VA does so, however, and the claimant subsequently provides the information and evidence within one year of the date of the request, VA must readjudicate the claim. If VA's decision on a readjudication is favorable to the claimant, the award shall take effect as if the prior decision by VA on the claim had not been made.

(4) If VA receives an incomplete application for benefits, it will notify the claimant of the information necessary to complete the application and will defer assistance until the claimant submits this information. If the information necessary to complete the application is not received by VA within one year from the date of such notice, VA cannot pay or provide any benefits based on that application.

(5) For the purpose of this paragraph, if VA must notify the claimant, VA will provide notice to:

- (i) The claimant;
- (ii) His or her fiduciary, if any; and
- (iii) His or her representative, if any.

(Authority: 38 U.S.C. 5102, 5103, 5103A(a)(3))

[64 FR 23771, May 4, 1999, as amended at 72 FR 16965, Apr. 5, 2007]

§ 21.1032 VA has a duty to assist claimants in obtaining evidence.

(a) *VA's duty to assist begins when VA receives a complete or substantially complete application.* (1) Except as provided in paragraph (d) of this section, upon receipt of a complete or substantially complete application for educational assistance under subpart C, D, G, H, K, or L of this part, VA will—

(i) Make reasonable efforts to help a claimant obtain evidence necessary to substantiate the claim; and

(ii) Give the assistance described in paragraphs (b) and (c) of this section to an individual attempting to reopen a finally decided claim.

(2) VA will not pay any fees a custodian of records may charge to provide the records VA requests.

(Authority: 38 U.S.C. 5103A)

(b) *Obtaining records not in the custody of a Federal department or agency.* (1) VA will make reasonable efforts to obtain relevant records not in the custody of a

Federal department or agency. These records include relevant records from:

- (i) State or local governments;
 - (ii) Private medical care providers;
 - (iii) Current or former employers;
- and
- (iv) Other non-Federal governmental sources.

(2) The reasonable efforts described in paragraph (b)(1) of this section will generally consist of an initial request for the records and, if VA does not receive the records, at least one follow-up request. The following are exceptions to this provision concerning the number of requests that VA generally will make:

(i) VA will not make a follow-up request if a response to the initial request indicates that the records sought do not exist or that a follow-up request for the records would be futile.

(ii) If VA receives information showing that subsequent requests to the initial or another custodian could result in obtaining the records sought, reasonable efforts will include an initial request and, if VA does not receive the records, at least one follow-up request to the new source or an additional request to the original source.

(3) The claimant must cooperate fully with VA's reasonable efforts to obtain relevant records from non-Federal agency or department custodians. The claimant must provide enough information to identify and locate the existing records, including—

(i) The person, company, agency, or other custodian holding the records;

(ii) The approximate time frame covered by the records; and

(iii) In the case of medical treatment records, the condition for which treatment was provided.

(4) If necessary, the claimant must authorize the release of existing records in a form acceptable to the person, company, agency, or other custodian holding the records.

(Authority: 38 U.S.C. 5103A)

(c) *Obtaining records in the custody of a Federal department or agency.* (1) VA will make as many requests as are necessary to obtain relevant records from a Federal department or agency. These records include but are not limited to:

- (i) Military records;