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VAOIG: VA'S ANCHORAGE REGIONAL OFFICE FAILS INSPECTION

Office failed in 13 of 14 operational areas as senior management admits workload not under control.

by Larry Scott, VA Watchdog dot Org

One of these days I'd like to read a report from the VA's Office of Inspector General (VAOIG) that says: "We found no problems at the XXXXX Regional Office. The work was performed quickly and accurately, and staff morale was high." But, that is not to be:

Inspection of VA Regional Office Anchorage, AK -- Report Number 09-01998-42, 12/7/2009 | [Summary](#) | [Report \(PDF\)](#)

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You know things are not going well at this Regional Office when the report contains a statement like this:

" ... the VARO management team lacked reasonable assurance regarding the location of its claims folders ... "

For more mayhem, read the full report.

Report Highlights: Inspection of VA Regional Office, Anchorage, AK

Why We Did This Review

The Benefits Inspection Division conducts inspections at VA Regional

Offices (VAROs) to review disability compensation claims processing and Veterans Service Center (VSC) operations.

What We Found

The Anchorage VARO management team faces challenges in providing benefits and services to veterans. VARO senior management acknowledged its workload was not under adequate control. Challenges include addressing oversight of operational activities, improving insufficient network capacity to support business processes, and providing training to staff. In addition, we found that an internal claims brokering process was in use. However, the process lacks criteria for what type of claim can be brokered. Management indicated it was difficult to manage and monitor the timely completion of brokered work to other VAROs. Further, we found the VARO did not meet the requirements for 13 of 14 operational areas reviewed.

The VARO management team needs to provide additional management oversight and training of personnel responsible for processing claims identified as Haas, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), diabetes, and traumatic brain injury (TBI). Management also needs to improve controls over the following areas:

- Tracking veterans' claims in Control of Veterans Records System (COVERS).
- Establishing correct dates of claims.
- Correcting errors identified by VBA's Systematic Technical Accuracy Review (STAR).
- Completing Systematic Analysis of Operations (SAOs) accurately and timely.
- Safeguarding VARO date stamps and veterans' personally identifiable information (PII).
- Handling veterans' claims-related mail and responding to congressional and other electronic inquiries.

What We Recommended

We recommended that the VARO improve oversight of the quality assurance process for the operational areas where we identified weaknesses. We also recommended the VARO develop and implement a mail routing guide to ensure mail is properly controlled and processed, research the causes and solutions for network capacity issues, and report internal brokering to VBA leadership.

Agency Comments

The Director of the Anchorage VARO concurred with all recommendations. The management team's planned actions are responsive and we will follow-up as required on all actions.

TOPICS: veterans, veterans' benefits, VA, Department of Veterans' Affairs,
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