**VA News Article - Beware: Claims predators want to prey on your benefits**

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[Beware: Claims predators want to prey on your benefits - VA News](https://news.va.gov/133852/beware-claims-predators-want-to-prey-on-your-benefits/)

Have you noticed advertisements from companies offering to help with the VA claims and appeals process? Do their services seem too good to be true, leaving you wondering whether to trust them? If so, you are not alone.

More Veterans are getting VA health care and benefits than ever before, which also presents opportunities for scammers to commit fraud against Veterans and their families. These increased benefits have led to a rise in shady companies and individuals that are not accredited by VA, offering claims assistance services and charging hefty fees when they do. This expansion of benefits has also attracted individuals and companies who are misleading Veterans to think it is okay to exaggerate disability symptoms in order to get higher disability ratings.

VA refers to these companies and individuals as “claims predators”; these claims predators are not accredited by VA. They are known to aggressively prey on Veterans’ benefits through various channels such as mail, telephone or online platforms. They try to take advantage of Veterans and their beneficiaries by using high-pressure tactics, sharing misleading information and making false promises to convince Veterans to sign up for their services. Unfortunately, these services usually come at a high cost to Veterans, with little to no actual benefit.

To avoid falling victim to claims predators, Veterans and their loved ones must be cautious when seeking assistance with their VA claims and appeals. It’s crucial to always verify the legitimacy of the individual or company before providing any information. VA strongly advises against working with unaccredited companies and individuals. Instead, VA recommends seeking help from [VA accredited](https://www.va.gov/get-help-from-accredited-representative/find-rep/) claims agents, attorneys and Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs). These individuals and organizations are recognized by VA, having established the good character and competence necessary to navigate the VA benefits system, ensuring Veterans and their beneficiaries receive the benefits they have rightfully earned.

It’s important that Veterans and their families know they should never pay a fee to file an initial claim for benefits. In fact, it’s unlawful for anyone to charge a fee for preparing an initial claim. Only [VA accredited attorneys, claims agents and VSO representatives](https://www.va.gov/ogc/apps/accreditation/index.asp) can lawfully assist Veterans with their initial benefits claims. Only accredited attorneys and claims agents may charge a fee to:

* Consult or advise VA claimants seeking review of or to appeal their claims.
* Collect evidence for a supplemental claim or an appeal.
* Prepare and file a supplemental claim.
* Submit requests for higher level review.
* [Submit an appeal](https://www.va.gov/decision-reviews/) to the Board of Veterans Appeals.

VA remains committed to educating Veterans about these fraudulent schemes by claims predators while providing the necessary [resources and tools](https://www.va.gov/disability/get-help-filing-claim/) to help Veterans pursue their VA benefits claims safely. To learn more about fraud scams and how to safeguard your benefits, [visit the Protecting Veterans from fraud website](https://www.va.gov/initiatives/protecting-veterans-from-fraud/).

If you suspect a representative acted unlawfully or unethically while assisting you in filing a VA benefits claim, file a report and learn more at VSAFE.gov or call 1-833-38V-SAFE (1-833-388-7233), a new government-wide website and call center designed to protect Veterans, service members, and their families from fraud and scams. These tools will inform Veterans and their families about common fraud schemes and help protect themselves, and provide an outlet for reporting and further assistance.

Remember, you earned your benefits, don’t let claims predators prey on you. Work with a VA recognized representative to receive the support you deserve.