**ISSUED DATE: JANUARY 12, 2017**

## **PROCEDURAL Guidance**

## **requests to Add Dependents**

When a caller expresses intent to file a dependency claim (for compensation, pension, or survivor benefits), Public Contact Representatives (PCRs) must take the following actions:

Compensation:

* Veterans in receipt of compensation who would like to add the following types of dependents can be processed under the Customer Relationship Management Unified Desktop (CRM/UD) procedures:
  + spouse \*except common law
  + minor biological child
  + minor stepchild
* Veterans in receipt of compensation who would like to add dependents other than those listed above can be processed under the following procedures:
  + Offer the option to complete the claim online viaeBenefits (if applicable) and advise that this option is the quickest way and will result in a much faster resolution of the dependency claim.
    - The following additional dependency actions can be processed through eBenefits:
      * Add biological or stepchild who is categorized as a school age child
      * Add a school age adopted child (who is already a dependent on the award)
    - If dependency action is able to be processed in eBenefits and the Veteran would like to submit via eBenefits, the PCR must:
      * Discuss how to enroll in eBenefits and provide options to obtain Premium access, if necessary.
      * Advise the Veteran to include all pertinent dependency information when initiating the claim through eBenefits
      * Advise the Veteran that after the claim is submitted through eBenefits, it will take 24-48 hours for the claim to be finalized or referred for additional processing
  + If the dependency action is not eligible for processing via eBenefits or the Veteran does not want to file the claim using eBenefits, the PCR must document the claim by filling out VA Form 21-686c, *Declaration of Status of Dependents*, and/or VA Form 21-674, *Request for Approval of School Attendance*, and faxing to the Centralized Mail Intake Center.
    - If the Veteran does not have all required information to complete the appropriate standard form, PCR must obtain the available information and submit the form for processing. Additional development can be completed as the claim is being processed.
    - For a common law spouse, PCRs should annotate the common law marriage under Section 16 “Remarks.”
* *Note: PCRs should see checklist document for additional information.*

Pension and Survivor Benefits:

PCR must document the claim by filling out VA Form 21-686c, *Declaration of Status of Dependents*, and/or VA Form 21-674, *Request for Approval of School Attendance*.

* Ask if the dependent that is being added and/or continued as a school age child has income.
  + Document this information on the *Remarks* section of the appropriate standard form(s) VAF 21-686c (Section 16, page 2) and VAF 21-674 (Section 14, page 1).
    - Recommended text: *Claimant states dependent (does/does not) have income to report.*
  + Fax the completed form(s) to the appropriate Pension Management Center (PMC) and upload a copy of the completed form to the appropriate eFolder.

Note: If the claimant does not have all of the required information to complete the appropriate standard form, PCR must obtain the available information and submit the form for processing. Additional development can be completed as the claim is being processed.

**REQUESTS TO REMOVE DEPENDENTS**

Compensation, Pension, and Survivor Benefits:

All requests to remove dependents must be documented on VA Form (VAF) 27-0820, *Report of General Information*, and sent via fax to the Centralized Mail Intake Center or Pension Management Center.

**REQUESTS FOR THE STATUS OF A PENDING DEPENDENCY CLAIM**

Compensation:

PCRs must provide the appropriate status of the claim.

PCRs must also determine if the pending dependency claim is eligible to be resubmitted for possible faster processing via eBenefits. The suggested call flow process is listed below.

* Determine if the pending dependency claim qualifies for processing through Rules Based Processing System (RBPS). The following dependency types can be processed in eBenefits through RBPS:
  + spouse \*except common law
  + minor biological child
  + minor stepchild
  + biological or stepchild who is categorized as a school age child
  + school age adopted child (who is already a dependent on the award)
  + If the claim is eligible for processing through RBPS, PCRs must offer the Veteran the option to resubmit the claim online via eBenefits and advise that this option could result in a much faster resolution of the dependency claim. If the Veteran states he/she would like to resubmit the claim via eBenefits, the PCR must:
    - Discuss how to enroll in eBenefits and provide options to obtain Premium access, if necessary
    - Advise the Veteran to include all pertinent dependency information when initiating the claim through eBenefits
    - Advise the Veteran that after the claim is resubmitted through eBenefits, it will take 24-48 hours for the claim to be finalized or referred for additional processing
    - Advise the Veteran that if the claim is accepted and processed through RBPS that the original claim will be reviewed at a later time to determine if an adjustment to the effective date is required or if an additional retroactive payment is needed
  + If the Veteran states he/she will just wait for the current claim to be resolved, PCRs should apologize for the inconvenience and advise that the claim will be processed as quickly as possible.

Pension and Survivor Benefits:

PCRs must provide the appropriate status of the claim, apologize for the inconvenience, and advise that the claim will be processed as quickly as possible.

**REQUESTS TO PROVIDE INFORMATION REQUIRED BY SUPPORT PERSONNEL TO PROCESS DEPENDENCY CLAIMS**

Compensation (Pension and Survivor Benefits are not applicable at this time):

If a claimant is calling to provide information requested by the VA support personnel, PCRs must:

* + Categorize the call as Type: *Dependent Maintenance* Subtype: *Support Personnel Action Required*, and
  + Review the claimant’s record, to include all notes available in the system of records, to determine what information is needed to finalize the pending dependency claim. PCRs are required to follow the established procedures to take the necessary information on a VA Form 27-0820 and upload the form to the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS) eFolder.

**REQUESTS TO CORRECT ERRORS IN DEPENDENCY CLAIMS**

Compensation, Pension, and Survivor Benefits:

If a claimant is calling to report an error in a dependency claim, PCRs must:

* + Determine that a processing error exists. For example, if the date of birth for a dependent was entered incorrectly making the dependent too old to be added to the record, this is an error. However, if the Veteran does not agree that his/her child cannot be added to the award as a dependent because the child does not meet the eligibility criteria, this would not be a processing error.
  + Initiate VA Form 27-0820, *Report of General Information*, and provide the necessary information to correct the error. Route the VAF 27-0820 to the designated management official via encrypted email for review.
  + Advise caller that he/she will be contacted if additional information is necessary to resolve the issue.

Designated Management Official must:

* Review information provided in VAF 27-0820 and the system of records to confirm the reported error exists.
  + If the reported error cannot be confirmed, take appropriate action to address the issue, e.g., return the VAF 27-0820 to the PCR as an improper referral and enter the appropriate note into the system of records. After taking action to address the improper referral, complete a callback to the claimant to advise of the adjustment to the plan of action to address his/her claim issue.
  + If the reported error can be confirmed, enter a note into the system of records that VAF 27-0820 has been reviewed and confirmed and route the approved VAF 27-0820 via fax to the Centralized Mail Intake Center.
* *Note:* *The designated management official must appropriately address all 27-0820s within 24 hours.*

**VERIFICATION OF DEPENDENTS ON AWARD (21-0538/21-0537 VERIFICATION)**

Compensation and Survivor Benefits:

*Note*: The beneficiary or fiduciary must verify dependents; a VSO or representative cannot verify in lieu of the beneficiary.

When a beneficiary is calling in response to a request to verify dependents, PCRs must review the CRM record to confirm the dependent(s) on the award as of the date on the VA Form 21-0538, *Status of Dependents Questionnaire* or VA Form 21-0537, *Marital Status Questionnaire*. If PCRs cannot reference the form in VBMS or Virtual VA, they must verify dependents as of 60 days prior to the diary for return of the form.

* If a beneficiary reports no change to his/her dependents, PCRs must document this on a VA Form 27-0820 using the “Dependent Verification” quick write and upload to the VBMS eFolder.
* If a beneficiary reports a change causing:
  + The termination of a dependent from the award, PCRs must follow current procedures for requests to remove dependents.
    - The PCR must indicate on the 27-0820 requesting removal, that the beneficiary responded to the VA’s request to verify dependents.
  + A claim for the addition of a dependent, PCRs must follow current procedures for requests to add dependents.
    - In addition to following current procedures for requests to add dependents, for the types of dependents eligible for processing under CRM procedures and for any dependents the Veteran submits using eBenefits, PCRs must document the fact that the Veteran responded to VA’s request to verify dependents and the actions taken by the PCR and/or Veteran on a 27-0820 and upload to the VBMS eFolder.
    - For types of dependents documented on the 21-686c/21-674, PCRs must indicate in the Remarks section of the form that the beneficiary responded to VA’s request to verify dependents (a 27-0820 is not required in this case).
* If dependents were removed from the award because a beneficiary failed to respond to the request to verify dependents and there is no Work Item or End Product pending for the dependency adjustment, regardless of the amount of time that has passed since the award adjustment, PCRs must confirm the dependents on the award at the time of the verification request.
  + If there are no changes to the dependents, document the response on a VA Form 27-0820 using the “Dependent Verification” quick write and fax to the Centralized Mail Intake Center.
    - If there is a change causing removal of a dependent, PCRs must indicate the reason for and date of termination on the 27-0820.
    - If there is a change causing an addition of a dependent, PCRs must also follow current procedures to add dependents and note any actions taken by the PCR on the 27-0820.

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**Q1. HOW SHOULD AGENTS INSTRUCT A VETERAN TO FILE A DEPENDENCY CLAIM IN EBENEFITS?**

A1: Instruct the Veteran to log in to the portal ([www.ebenefits.va.gov](http://www.ebenefits.va.gov)) using their Premium eBenefits account. Once in the portal, instruct the Veteran to hover over ‘Apply for Benefits’ on the home page. On the drop down menu, have the caller select ‘Add Dependents.’ Then advise the Veteran to follow the instructions and fill in all required information.

**Q2. DO I HAVE THE OPTION TO UPLOAD INFORMATION TO SUPPORT MY CLAIM?**

A2: Yes, when submitting the dependency claim, you will have the option to upload documents to support your claim. This is available in Step 3 of the process. The system will accept the following file extensions when uploading documents: .jpg, .jpeg, .txt, .tiff, and .pdf.

**Q3. WHAT HAPPENS IF MY CLAIM IS NOT ABLE TO BE PROCESSED THROUGH THE AUTOMATED PROCESSING SYSTEM? WILL I HAVE TO RESUBMIT THE CLAIM? HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE FOR A DECISION TO BE MADE?**

A3: No, you will not need to resubmit your claim. If your claim is unable to be finalized through the automated system, it will be forwarded to your regional office for standard processing. Typically, if a claim can be finalized through the automated system, you should receive a decision within 15-30 days. If your claim must be processed through the standard method, you should receive a decision within (include the average processing time).

**Q4. HOW WILL PCRS KNOW IF A DEPENDENCY CLAIM WAS SUBMITTED FOR PROCESSING BY AN AGENT?**

A4: Review the notes on the record to confirm a dependency claim was submitted for processing by an agent. An example of the required note is listed below:

* 686c submitted to add (dependent category)(name of dependent)
* Ex: 686c submitted to add minor child Joe Veteran

**Q5. WHAT ACTION SHOULD PCRS TAKE IF A CLAIM WAS PROCESSED BY VA SUPPORT PERSONNEL AND THE ORIGINAL DEPENDENCY CLAIM WAS CANCELLED, BUT THE EFFECTIVE DATE OF THE AWARD IS NOT CORRECT?**

A5: This situation would be considered to be an error in processing and should be referred for corrective action as outlined in the above guidance.

**Q6. WHAT ACTION SHOULD PCRS TAKE IF THE ORIGINAL DEPENDENCY CLAIM WAS CANCELLED MORE THAN 30 DAYS AGO, BUT THE NECESSARY ACTIONS HAVE NOT BEEN TAKEN TO ESTABLISH A NEW CLAIM FOR PROCESSING BY VA SUPPORT PERSONNEL?**

A6: This situation would be considered to be an error in processing and should be referred for corrective action as outlined in the above guidance.

**Q7. HOW SHOULD PCRS CATEGORIZE DEPENDENCY CLAIM RELATED CALLS IN CRM?**

A7: PCRs should utilize the “*Dependent Maintenance*” call type and the following sub-types based on the call:

* Requests to Add Dependents: *Utilize the appropriate “Add” Subtype when processing through CRM and Submitted via Form 686c/Submitted via Form 674 when submitted outside CRM*
* Requests to Remove Dependents: *Remove Dependents*
* Requests to Provide Information Required by Support Personnel/Corrective Action of Error Needed: *Support Personnel Action Required*
* Requests to Verify Status of Dependents: *Update Dependents*

**Q8. WHAT ARE ACCEPTABLE WAYS FOR A BENEFICIARY TO RESPOND TO VA’S REQUEST FOR VERIFICATION OF DEPENDENTS ON AN AWARD?**

A8: In response to VA’s request to verify dependents on a beneficiary’s award, a beneficiary may respond via a 21-686c in eBenefits, by contacting the National Call Center, or by sending VA a completed 21-686c or 21-0538/21-0537.

**Q9. IF THE BENEFICIARY FAILED TO RESPOND TO A REQUEST TO VERIFY DEPENDENTS AND RECEIVED A DUE PROCESS LETTER WITH SPECIFIC RESPONSE INSTRUCTIONS, SUCH AS COMPLETING A 21-686C, WHAT ACTION SHOULD PCRS TAKE?**

A9: In response to a due process notice for failure to respond to a request to verify dependents, PCRs must still document the beneficiary’s response following the procedures in Verification of Dependents on Award.

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| **EFFECTIVE DATE FOR QUALITY REVIEW PURPOSES** | **CHANGE** |
| March 1, 2017 | * Clarification of procedure for request to add common law spouse * Added procedures for dependency verification after due process period |
| December 1, 2016 | * Updated to include procedures for beneficiary response to VA’s request for verification of dependents (21-0538/21-0537) |
| August 1, 2016 | * Updated to include updates to Centralized Mail procedures * Removed special expedite procedures for pending dependency claims * Removed call categorization requirements for escalation procedures * Added Pension-related dependency claims processing requirements |
| March 1, 2016 | * National rollout of Pilot, elimination of segmented guidance for pilot and non-pilot agents * All non-CRM compensation dependency claims documented on 686c/674 * All removals are sent to CIC/PMC * Option to expedite dependency claim removed * Telephone development 27-0820s are uploaded to VBMS and calls categorized as Support Personnel Action Required * Processing error 27-0820s are faxed to EIC |
| August 1, 2015 | * Expediting applies only to RBPS-eligible claim types * Timeframes adjusted for error corrections and expediting |
| June 1, 2015 | * Procedural guidance and suggested script for expediting pending claims added. * Procedural guidance updated to include guidance for initiating a claim type that falls outside of the ITF procedures. * Procedural guidance updated to include transferring all Veteran requests to add/remove a dependent to a Pilot Agent. |
| March 1, 2015 | Pilot expanded to include the removal of spouses. |
| February 1, 2015 | Pilot expanded to include adding school age children. Instruction added to notify Compensation Service of support personnel processing errors. |
| November 1, 2014 | Pilot expanded to include adding minor stepchildren. Removed option for pilot agent to resubmit pending claim. |
| August 1, 2014 | Pilot initiated to add minor biological children and spouses. Existing claims could be resubmitted through pilot or eBenefits. |