

What is VAI?

Veterans Assisted Inquiry



HOW TO MANAGE CASE MANAGEMENT

A LEADERSHIP GUIDE

March 2000

① Case MORT is not BTR
② CAPS is not Case MORT
Veterans Benefits Administration

"We are dealing with veterans, not procedures - with their problems, not ours."
Omar Bradley - 1947

The *mission* of the Veterans Benefits Administration, in partnership with the Veterans Health Administration and the National Cemetery System, is to provide benefits and services to veterans and their families in a responsive, timely and compassionate manner in recognition of their service to the nation.

Our *vision* is that the veterans whom we serve will feel that our nation has kept its commitment to them, employees will feel that they are both recognized for their contribution and are part of something larger than themselves; and taxpayers will feel that we've met the responsibilities they've entrusted to us. Courage, honesty, trust, respect, open communication, and accountability will be reflected in our day to day behavior.

VBA Core Values

- Veterans have earned our respect and are our reason for being, our common purpose. All our efforts are directed toward meeting their needs.
- We are committed to communicating to our veterans and among ourselves in a timely, thorough, accurate, understandable and respectful manner.
- We openly share our concerns and views and listen to those of veterans in order to bring about improvements in benefits and services, and the climate in which they are provided.
- We value understandable business processes which consistently produce positive results.
- We foster an environment that promotes personal and corporate initiative, risk taking and teamwork.
- We are open to challenge and flexible in our attitudes.
- Respect, integrity, trust and fairness are hallmarks of all our interactions.
- We value a culture where everyone is involved, accountable, respected and appreciated.
- We will perform at the highest level of competence, always, and take pride in accomplishment. We are a "can do" organization.

(Report on the Status of Reengineering the Compensation and Pension Claims Process - January 2000)

Must have knowledge & must share

From the Undersecretary for Benefits

"Case management is our claims processing approach to ensure we meet and exceed this expectation [of responsiveness]. If a claim requires development, we will advise the claimant - in clear, plain language, either written, by telephone or in person - what evidence is needed, what the claimant's responsibility is, when to expect a decision, and who he or she can contact when needed. And case management will be proactive rather than reactive. We will not wait for the claimant to contact us with a question or problem. We will periodically contact him or her to advise how the claim is progressing. Our Veterans Service Representatives will basically handle a portfolio of cases, managing these cases through the claims process from time of receipt until the claimant is notified of the decision."

Joe Thompson

(USB Vision - December 1998)

GOALS FOR CASE MANAGEMENT

Short Term Objectives. The Veterans Benefits Administration's (VBA) roll out plan calls for a gradual extension of case management and the tools of case management. VBA's objective, which is now yours, is to get personnel familiar with, and using, the policy and procedures of case management. The Claims Automated Processing System (CAPS), one tool of many case management tools, will be introduced. CAPS is a bridge to a more complete claims processing package still under development, Modern Award Processing (MAP-D). The experience gained from using case management and CAPS proactively is paramount to the development, improvement, and success of MAP-D. It is important for you to keep personnel informed that VBA is in an environment of constant improvement based on experience in the workplace. People may get cynical if they see case management as just so much "trial and error" tinkering. You can counter these negative views if your remarks are clear and well informed about what case management is. Share information and coordinate with all personnel often throughout the case management process.

Long Term Objectives. Field personnel know better than anyone that the agency cannot fulfill the expectations of veterans, follow the will of Congress, and meet the goal of smaller, more efficient government by maintaining the status quo. It is imperative that we avoid a long series of segregated "quick fixes." Just the appearance of action is no longer an acceptable response to this challenge. We must move inexorably toward real solutions, where the agency meets service goals at justifiable costs to taxpayers. We are now on such a course. We have a vision and a plan. We are simultaneously building infrastructures based on business process reengineering, training requirements, personnel initiatives, and policy that will allow us to achieve success. Managers play a significant role in this vision. Employees will have no reason to believe in the future if you, their leader, do not also believe.

BPR Initiatives. Case management is not Business Process Reengineering (BPR). There are numerous BPR initiatives and projects. Some of the initiatives that form the VBA's BPR efforts are:

- Case Management
- Customer Accessibility
- Team Management
- Veteran Service Center Teams
- Decision Review Officer
- Contract Medical Examinations
- Pre-Discharge Claims
- Training - Responsibility - Involvement and Preparation of Claims (TRIP)
- MAP-D
- National Automated Response System (N-ARS)
- State Benefits Reference System
- Veteran Service Representative Position
- Training and Performance Support Systems (TPSS)
- Community of Practice
- Pension Simplification
- VBA's Intranet and Internet Information Access

• STAR

Must give positive leadership

Rewarding Work Environment. The goals in our vision may be difficult to reach if we fail to take into account the dynamic aspects of claims processing and provide positive leadership. The current workload and work environment have made jobs very stressful. Job satisfaction is often not realized. If work demands are impossible to meet, employees suffer and veterans do not receive world class service. Case management will not reduce workload. In short, it may even add to it. It is critical that all VBA leaders are aware of problems. New initiatives in the early stages of implementation have been designed to improve our work environment and service to the veteran. VBA's aim is to make the agency the employer of choice with high job satisfaction. You must keep the lines of communication open between upper management and employees so that the widest possible problem solving base can be applied to the specific situation.

BENEFITS OF CASE MANAGEMENT

Veterans. Our veterans and claimants will have a better understanding of the claims process and will receive excellent customer service if we properly case manage claims. Veterans and claimants will have direct access to teams that process their claims. They will be fully informed of the status of their claims and will trust the information they receive. Surveys of case managed claims show that claimants have more confidence in the claims process and a higher opinion of VA.

Employees. Employees will have a work tool that will greatly enhance their ability to case manage claims. They will communicate with claimants more effectively. Case management encourages proactive contact with our claimants. It personalizes the claim and improves rapport with the claimant. Employees can build and access databases quickly to respond to inquiries from claimants and provide consistent and accurate information. With your direction and support, employees will embrace case management as a means to provide world class customer service. Case management will yield an efficient claims process.

Managers. You will be assured that claims are processed in the most efficient manner resulting in improved cycle times; elimination of piecemeal work; and improved quality. Claims will be done right the first time. As employees become proficient in case management and accept the philosophy of providing superior customer service, you can expect improved balanced scorecard results.

Taxpayers. The claims process will become more efficient resulting in lower costs per claim. Taxpayers will be assured that tax dollars expended for processing claims will be most cost effective.

Agency. In return, the agency will get:

- Respect and trust from veterans and claimants.
- Respect and credibility from stake holders.
- Data integrity.
- A more satisfied work force.

VAI?

Work Process. All employees must realize that change does not come without difficulty, frustration, and uncertainty. While each employee is subject to individual challenges, as a member of a team they have the capability to resolve issues involved in claims processing from claim receipt through decision notification. Each employee shares in the decision making and is empowered to devise procedures for more efficient claims processing.

creating improvement

COPING WITH CHANGE

Expectations. Setting reasonable expectations is paramount to success. Case management is a fundamental change, and fundamental change is inherently stressful. Setting attainable expectations and providing resources to meet these expectations will ensure your employees will cope better. Managers must involve employees in setting expectations. Feedback is essential. Empowered employees can more readily address workload and work process situations. As with any business change, there is the potential for counter-productive rumors to arise. It is imperative that managers deal with rumors swiftly and truthfully.

Measuring Compliance. Experience shows that employees omit case management procedures when confronted with the pressures of workload backlogs. Managers must perform regular compliance reviews. Current information systems are not integrated; therefore, there is no easy way to gauge levels of participation by employees. Managers must rely on existing databases such as WIPP, CAPS, and VACOLS to ensure compliant case management. Your reviews must be more than just a cursory inspection of the systems. You must delve into the multiple layers of these tools to assess the level of participation by your employees. This is a very time consuming process but is critical to the successful implementation of case management.

Rewards and Recognition. Rewards and recognition should be performance based. Employees should be rewarded and recognized for meeting objectives. Conflicts will arise if your reward and recognition systems are in conflict with performance objectives. You should seek creative methods for immediate recognition of employees' performance.

CRITICAL COMPONENTS

Effective Leadership. Case management is one of the most dynamic initiatives in VBA. In order to be an effective first line manager, you must be technically proficient with the process and all tools of case management. This knowledge will provide you the ability to respond to questions from your employees on all aspects of case management.

Training. Case management cannot be learned entirely in a training environment. You must be committed to ensuring employees have ample opportunity to learn everything associated with case management. Employees must be allowed to transition to the new work environment without added workload pressures. You must be aware and knowledgeable of all the work processes performed by employees in order to address any resistance from employees.

Process. Case management is not "one size fits all". Case management is a proactive partnership between decision makers and the claimant. As we are more proactive in the claims process, claimants will be better informed of the status of their claims from inception to decision. The intensity of case management and the frequency of contacts are individualized and based on the needs of the claimant.

This leadership guide was a collaborative effort of several individuals who have participated in implementing case management at their stations. Our sincerest thanks to these individuals:

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This leadership guide is not a technical guide. There are several technical guides which must be used in conjunction with this leadership guide for successful implementation of case management.