

Evidence Gap Checklist

A working tool for organizing what your VA disability claim has, and what it still needs



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HOW TO USE THIS CHECKLIST

This checklist helps you take inventory of your VA disability claim file before you file, while a claim is pending, or before a decision review. For each item, mark Have, Need, Not applicable, or Question for review (to raise with an accredited representative, Veterans Service Organization, or attorney).

This is an organizing tool, not a legal or medical opinion. It does not tell you what to claim, diagnose a condition, or establish that your service caused a condition. VA — not Veteran Claims — makes all eligibility and rating decisions.

VA generally needs evidence to support these elements for most original claims: a current diagnosis, an in-service event, injury, or exposure, and a link (“nexus”) between them. Some claims (presumptive conditions, chronic illness within one year of discharge, increased-rating claims) follow different rules. If you're not sure which category applies to you, that's a good question for review, not something to guess at here.

SECTION 1 — IDENTITY AND SERVICE RECORDS

ITEM	HAVE	NEED	N/A	QUESTION
DD214 or other separation document	☐	☐	☐	☐
Full service treatment records (active duty)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Service personnel records (unit, duty station, MOS/rate)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Reserve/National Guard orders (if applicable — ADT/IADT)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Records reconstructed after the 1973 NPRC fire (if affected)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Separation Health Assessment (if filing through BDD)	☐	☐	☐	☐

Notes / where to get missing records: DD214 and service records can be requested through milConnect or the National Archives. If your Army or Air Force records were destroyed in the 1973 St. Louis fire, VA has a separate process to help reconstruct them.

SECTION 2 — CURRENT DIAGNOSIS

ITEM	HAVE	NEED	N/A	QUESTION
Current written diagnosis from a VA or private provider	☐	☐	☐	☐
Recent treatment notes reflecting the diagnosis (last 12 months, if available)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Test results, imaging, or labs supporting the diagnosis	☐	☐	☐	☐
Diagnosis reflects a condition that is still current (not fully resolved)	☐	☐	☐	☐

Notes: A diagnosis that is old, resolved, or missing entirely is one of the most common gaps VA identifies. If you don't have a current diagnosis, a first step is often scheduling an evaluation with your provider — not writing a description of symptoms yourself.

SECTION 3 — IN-SERVICE EVENT, INJURY, OR EXPOSURE

ITEM	HAVE	NEED	N/A	QUESTION
Service treatment record entry documenting the event/injury	☐	☐	☐	☐
Unit or incident records (line-of-duty determination, accident report, sick call log)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Records placing you at a location tied to a known exposure (burn pits, Agent Orange, Camp Lejeune water, radiation, etc.)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Buddy statement describing an event with no paper record	☐	☐	☐	☐
Awards, citations, or performance evaluations that corroborate circumstances	☐	☐	☐	☐

Notes: Not every in-service event has a paper trail. Lay evidence (your own statement or someone else's) can help fill gaps here — see the Buddy Statement Field Guide.

SECTION 4 — NEXUS / RELATIONSHIP EVIDENCE

ITEM	HAVE	NEED	N/A	QUESTION
Medical opinion connecting the current condition to the in-service event ("nexus letter" or equivalent)	☐	☐	☐	☐

ITEM	HAVE	NEED	N/A	QUESTION
Treatment records showing continuity of symptoms from service to today	☐	☐	☐	☐
Secondary-condition evidence (new condition linked to an already-service-connected disability)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Condition falls under a presumptive category (no individual nexus needed if requirements are met)	☐	☐	☐	☐

Notes: This is the element evaluators weigh most heavily and the one veterans most often leave incomplete. A private or VA provider's written opinion is not required in every case, but where one exists it should be in the file. Do not ask a provider to state something they don't believe — an inaccurate opinion can hurt a claim more than a missing one.

SECTION 5 — SEVERITY

ITEM	HAVE	NEED	N/A	QUESTION
Recent clinical findings describing severity (range of motion, test scores, frequency/duration)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Records covering flare-ups or bad episodes, not just baseline/good-day findings	☐	☐	☐	☐
Medication list and dosages tied to the condition	☐	☐	☐	☐
Hospitalization or emergency care records, if any	☐	☐	☐	☐

SECTION 6 — FUNCTIONAL IMPACT

ITEM	HAVE	NEED	N/A	QUESTION
Description of how the condition affects work (missed days, accommodations, reduced duties)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Description of how the condition affects daily activities (household tasks, self-care, driving, sleep)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Statement(s) from family, coworkers, or friends describing observed limitations	☐	☐	☐	☐
VA Form 21-8940 and 21-4192 (if pursuing Individual Unemployability)	☐	☐	☐	☐

SECTION 7 — LAY EVIDENCE

ITEM	HAVE	NEED	N/A	QUESTION
Your own written statement (VA Form 21-4138 or plain statement)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Buddy/witness statement(s) (VA Form 21-10210) from someone who observed the event or the condition's effects	☐	☐	☐	☐
Statements are dated, specific, and describe direct observations (not assumptions or diagnoses)	☐	☐	☐	☐
VA Form 21-0781 (Statement in Support of Claimed Mental Health Disorder), if applicable	☐	☐	☐	☐

SECTION 8 — MISSING OR UNCERTAIN RECORDS

Use this section to list anything you're still tracking down or unsure how to get.

RECORD NEEDED	WHERE YOU THINK IT MIGHT BE	STATUS
		☐ Requested ☐ Waiting ☐ Not started
		☐ Requested ☐ Waiting ☐ Not started
		☐ Requested ☐ Waiting ☐ Not started
		☐ Requested ☐ Waiting ☐ Not started

PRIORITIZED NEXT ACTIONS

List up to five next steps in the order you plan to do them. Example prompts: request DD214, schedule an appointment to document current severity, ask a specific person for a buddy statement, submit VA Form 21-4142 authorizing VA to request private records, contact an accredited representative about a specific question flagged above.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Questions to bring to an accredited representative, VSO, or attorney:

A NOTE ON ACCURACY

Fill this out based on what actually happened and what you actually experience — frequency, severity, duration, and functional impact as you've lived them. This checklist is designed to help you organize existing, truthful evidence. It is not a script, and it should never be used to suggest symptoms, embellish an event, or claim something that didn't occur.

WHAT THIS CHECKLIST IS NOT

This is an educational organizing tool from Veteran Claims. It is not legal or medical advice, does not diagnose any condition, does not establish service connection, and does not guarantee any rating or outcome. Veteran Claims is not part of, and is not endorsed by, the Department of Veterans Affairs. For claim strategy, deadlines, or legal questions, talk with an accredited attorney, claims agent, or VSO representative.

VERIFIED AS OF AND SOURCES

Verified as of: August 11, 2026.

RULES CHANGE: VA forms, evidence rules, and procedures change — always confirm current requirements at the official source links below before relying on this checklist.

- Evidence needed for your disability claim — <https://www.va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim/evidence-needed/>

- 38 CFR 3.303, Principles relating to service connection — <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-38/chapter-I/part-3/subpart-A/subject-group-ECFR39056aee4e9ff13/section-3.303>
- Lay/Witness Statement, VA Form 21-10210 — <https://www.va.gov/forms/21-10210/>
- Statement in Support of Claim, VA Form 21-4138 — <https://www.va.gov/forms/21-4138/>
- Reconstructing records destroyed in the 1973 NPRC fire — <https://www.va.gov/records/get-military-service-records/reconstruct-records>
- Individual Unemployability — <https://www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/special-claims/unemployability>
- Statement in Support of Claimed Mental Health Disorder(s), VA Form 21-0781 — <https://www.va.gov/forms/21-0781>

Continue at the official source: <https://www.va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim/evidence-needed/>