



Leaked Doc Shows Long Wait for Pending Applications With VA

A leaked document obtained by the Huffington Post reveals that more than 238,000 veterans died while their applications were pending through the Department of Veterans Affairs. The document also shows that, as of April, there are 847,000 veterans in the Department of Veteran Affairs' backlog.

Since last year, the Veterans Administration has been under harsh scrutiny after reports exposed that the Phoenix facility had been altering its scheduling books and that at least 40 veterans had died while awaiting care. Senator John McCain, an Arizona Republican, said though the scandal began in his home state, it has since become a national crisis. "Altogether, similar reports of lengthy waiting lists and other issues have surfaced in at least 10 states," according to the *Washington Times*.

Scott Davis, program specialist at the VA's Health Eligibility Center in Atlanta, provided the Huffington Post with an April 2015 report entitled "[Analysis of Death Services](#)," which reviewed the accuracy of the VA's veteran death records. The report shows that there are 847,822 veterans pending enrollment in VA healthcare, and that of those veterans, 238,657 are now deceased.

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The Huffington Post emphasizes that this waiting list is "unrelated to the VA backlog that made news last year, which left vets who already had coverage with extremely long wait times."

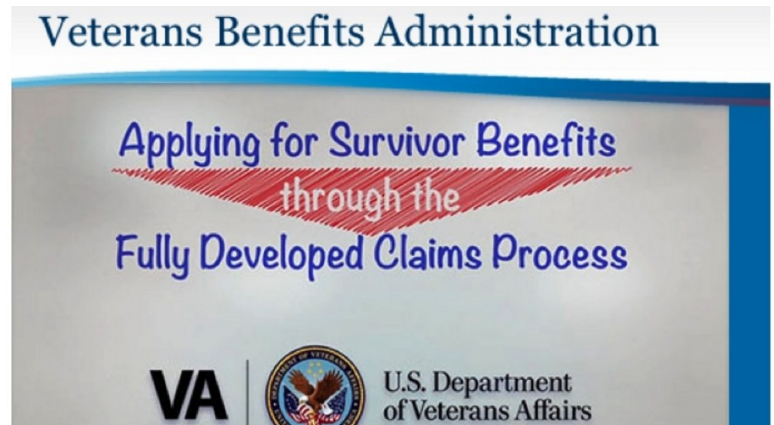
In other words, veterans are virtually guaranteed a long wait no matter where they are in the process of healthcare through the VA.

According to VA spokeswoman Walinda West, the log is large because it has no means to remove from the list those applicants who have since died. West also states that the record system has been in place since 1985, suggesting that the data too could be decades old, and that some of the applicants may have gone on to use other insurance.

West states that approximately 81 percent of veterans who come to the VA "have either Medicare, Medicaid, Tricare or some other private insurance."

Therefore, according to West, some of those veterans who were in "pending status" may have elected to instead use other options rather than complete "their eligibility application."

But Davis contends West's statements are simply untrue. According to Davis, an incomplete application





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would not be listed as a pending application. Likewise, the health records system that West addressed is separate from the pending applications for enrollment in healthcare, which Davis indicates only began in 1998. Davis provided an internal VA chart that shows backlogged applications dating back only to 1998.

To West's point about veterans having other insurance, Davis contends it's "immaterial." "VA wants you to believe, by virtue of people being able to get health care elsewhere, it's not a big deal. But VA is turning away tens of thousands of veterans eligible for healthcare," he said.

Davis believes that the VA is purposely making it difficult for veterans to access their services. "VA is making it cumbersome, and then saying, 'See? They didn't want it anyway,'" he opines.

Davis has become a well-known VA whistleblower. He recently addressed a letter to Senator Johnny Isakson (R-Ga.), Senate Veterans Affairs Committee chair, wherein he laid out the issues with the healthcare backlog. In the [letter](#), Davis pointed out that there are 34,000 combat veterans among those listed for pending care that do not belong there, as combat veterans are provided five years of guaranteed eligibility for VA healthcare.

"There are currently over 18,000 recent Iraq and Afghanistan Combat Veterans, whose applications for healthcare are lingering in a pending status," the letter reads, "Over 16,000 Iraq and Afghanistan Combat Veterans have had their eligibility for healthcare expire due to inaction by VA leadership."

Davis closed the letter with a request for Senator Isakson to file a Congressional Inquiry with the Executive Office of the President.

Davis has suggested ways in which pending applications can be expedited in order to avoid a backlog. He suggests that veterans applying for healthcare should be able to upload their DD-214 forms, which contains all of their military information that should prove their eligibility. Likewise, he indicates that the VA should assign staff to review all of the pending applications. According to Davis, the White House has the ability to direct the VA to do these things.

Whether the Obama administration will do so is yet another issue. Last year, the *Washington Times* reported that the Obama administration had been briefed on the weaknesses of the VA and the excessive wait times and did nothing to address them.

According to the *Washington Times*, officials had briefed Obama's transition team following Obama's 2008 election on the need to decrease excessive wait times through the development of a new system. The *Washington Times* report directly contrasted assertions made by the White House indicating that the president had no knowledge of the VA wait-list scandal until the news broke the story.

Further, the Daily Caller obtained evidence that the Obama administration knew about an internal VA investigation into secret "paper" waiting lists conducted in 2010 under then-VA Secretary Eric Shinewski.

"We conducted this review to determine the validity of an allegation that senior officials in Veterans Integrated Service Network 20 (VISN) instructed employees at the Portland VA Medical Center to use unauthorized wait lists to hide access and scheduling problems," according to an August 17, 2010 VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) report entitled "Review of Alleged Use of Unauthorized Wait Lists at the Portland VA Medical Center," which was obtained by the online Daily Caller.

"OIG has reported problems since 2005 with schedulers not following established procedures for making or recording medical appointments. This practice has resulted in data integrity weaknesses that impacted the reliability of patient waiting times and facility waiting lists," the report continued.



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“The OIG received an anonymous e-mail alleging the use of unauthorized paper wait lists, and that the eye clinics had over 3,500 patients waiting more than 30 days for appointments,” according to the report.

Meanwhile, the Huffington Post reports, Davis sent copies of the April 2015 report to House and Senate committees overseeing veterans’ affairs, as well as to the White House. According to HuffPo, Eric Hannel, staff director of the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigation, said his team was looking into the report, while a spokesman for the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee did not respond to a request for comment.



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