



Vets Died Waiting for VA to Process Huge Paperwork Backlog

The Veterans Administration (VA) has an enormous backlog of paperwork, and as a result, hundreds of thousands of veterans have died waiting for the VA to process their records. Meanwhile, over 10,000 records were deleted without processing, and the employees responsible were not disciplined. Those are the conclusions of a new [report](#) from the VA's inspector general (IG).



At the request of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, the IG undertook an investigation of a series of allegations made against the VA. The IG substantiated the allegations with only minor caveats.

The first allegation was that the VA had a backlog of 889,000 healthcare applications. The IG found "about 867,000 pending records as of September 30, 2014," most of which had "been inactive for many years." One veteran who applied submitted an enrollment application for care at a VA facility in 1998. Two years later, the application was placed on pending status because of additional information needed, and it remained pending for the next 14 years.

Not all of the pending records are necessarily applications for care. But since "enrollment program data were generally unreliable for monitoring, reporting on the status of health care enrollments, and making decisions regarding overall processing timeliness" (at least 477,000 of the pending applications were not dated, for example), the IG "could not reliably determine how many records were associated with actual applications for enrollment."

The second allegation was even more serious, claiming that 47,000 veterans had died while their healthcare applications were pending. In fact, the situation was possibly far worse. The IG found that over 307,000 pending records "were for individuals reported as deceased by the Social Security Administration [SSA]." Once again, though, the IG could not determine how many of the pending records were actual enrollment applications because of the VA's less-than-optimal enrollment program and lack of "adequate procedures to identify date of death information and implement updates to the individual's status."

The IG substantiated an allegation that "employees incorrectly marked unprocessed applications as completed and possibly deleted 10,000 or more transactions from the Workload Reporting and Productivity (WRAP) tool over the past 5 years." Once more, it was impossible for the IG to determine the full extent of the problem because of "information security deficiencies within WRAP," including allowing bulk deletions, permitting employees who had moved to positions in other agencies to retain their deletion privileges, and giving the contractor who developed WRAP unfettered access to the software and data. In addition, the Office of Information and Technology has neither audit logs nor data backup processes for WRAP.



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The VA's Health Eligibility Center (HEC) conducted a 2010 investigation of the allegations of document destruction and decided not to report its findings, which substantiated the allegations, to the IG's office, supposedly because the HEC couldn't determine whether the destruction was deliberate. However, according to the IG, a December 2010 HEC memo revealed that "HEC management identified individual HEC staff who had incorrectly marked applications as complete in WRAP and had hidden the applications in their desks for processing at a later time. According to the HEC memorandum, a CBO [Chief Business Office] human resources management official advised them against pursuing disciplinary action against staff because HEC leadership implemented the work process and thus had contributed to the situation."

In other words, the VA ignored the problem because it would have made certain officials look bad, thereby letting both those officials and their subordinates off the hook. Contrast that with the treatment meted out to VA whistleblower Scott Davis. Davis, who made many of the allegations that the IG investigated, told [Fox News](#) that "he was asked by his superiors to sign a notice stating that he would not speak publicly again" after he made his allegations public in hopes of spurring action that had not occurred after he submitted the claims through the official chain of command. Davis said he had also felt threatened by his superiors in other ways. Apparently, in the eyes of some officials, telling the embarrassing truth about a government agency's misdeeds is deserving of punishment while actually committing them is not — as long as they can be covered up.

The last allegation the IG investigated was that 40,000 unprocessed applications, spanning a three-year period, were discovered in January 2013. The IG concluded that the alleged number of records was relatively accurate, but only about 11,000 of them were applications, with the rest being "transactions related to health care application updates, correspondence, and alerts." In addition, the oldest application was only four months old at the time.

Once the backlog — which, according to the IG, arose because "HEC did not adequately monitor and manage its workload" — was reported to HEC management in January 2013, they took action to clear it. But this action came at a cost to taxpayers: The IG estimated that HEC put in "at least 7,700 hours of overtime to process the backlog."

"As a result of the backlog," wrote the IG, "approximately 11,000 health care applications were delayed for up to 6 months and approximately 28,000 updates for service members anticipating demobilization were delayed for up to 15 months."

The backlog issues at the VA all boil down to this, said the IG: "CBO has not effectively managed its business processes to ensure the consistent creation and maintenance of essential data." The IG made various recommendations to remedy this, and officials agreed to implement them, but chances are slim that any significant improvement will occur. As Hot Air's [Taylor Millard](#) points out:

The federal government's efforts to "help" veterans has [sic] been rife with fraud all the way back to the 1920s. The very first Veterans' Bureau commissioner, Charles R. Forbes, spent two years in federal prison for defrauding the U.S. Government. The Senate discovered he'd left thousands of pieces of mail from veterans unopened and hardly awarded any disability insurance to wounded vets. This should have been a klaxon warning of the highest order and signaled why the Veterans' Bureau shouldn't have existed. But the federal government wouldn't get rid of the bureau because it would make elected officials look heartless.

One might be tempted to look at the VA's backlog, think that its employees are simply overwhelmed



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with paperwork, and argue for increasing the agency's budget so it can hire more people and improve its technology. But, notes Millard, the VA's budget has already grown from \$87.6 billion in 2009 to \$152.7 billion in 2014, and the agency is requesting \$165.5 billion next year. "So," Millard adds, "the department is asking for plenty of money to 'help' veterans, but isn't spending the money wisely" — no surprise since, like all other government agencies, it's spending other people's money.

The VA is a perfect illustration of the disaster that is socialized medicine: bureaucracy, backlogs, and bungling — some of it merely frustrating, some deadly. Millard suggests, while knowing the advice is extremely unlikely to be followed, shuttering the VA and letting private charities see to veterans' care. That would be a good start. Then it's time to repeal ObamaCare and the myriad other government interventions into healthcare that have made a visit to the doctor increasingly like dealing with the VA.



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