

Interim Guidance – Digital Benefits Delivery at Discharge (Digital BDD)

Effective Date: April 20, 2026

Duration: 60-day Soft Launch

Audience: Employees located at the identified Digital BDD soft launch prototype sites, and special missions stations, to include:

- Military Services Coordinators (MSC)
- Veterans Service Representatives (VSR)
- Rating Veterans Service Representatives (RVSR)
- Quality Review Specialists (QRS) nationwide

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1. Purpose

Effective April 20, 2026, VA will conduct a 60-day soft launch of the Digital BDD initiative at 16 prototype sites. This initiative uses digital platforms and automation support to improve timeliness and processing performance for Digital BDD claims submitted by transitioning Service members 180 to 90 days before their anticipated release from active duty (RAD).

Digital BDD removes the need for Service members to submit service treatment records (STRs) and uses automation support to manage examination requests and route claims, while maintaining existing BDD eligibility rules. During the soft launch, only designated prototype sites and, when applicable, special mission stations will process Digital BDD claims.

2. Scope and Soft Launch Overview:

- The Digital BDD initiative will operate as a 60-day soft launch beginning April 20, 2026.
- The 16 prototype sites listed in [Appendix A](#) of this guidance will process Digital BDD claims. In rare cases, when a contention type must be worked by a special mission station per [M21-1, II.ii.3.1.b](#), the National Work Queue (NWQ) will route the Digital BDD claim to that station for specialized processing.
- Transitioning Service members who submit BDD claims 180 to 90 days before their anticipated RAD through an approved digital platform, and who meet the requirements below, will be enrolled in Digital BDD and receive expedited automation-supported processing.
- After the 60-day soft launch, VA will evaluate results and determine a full implementation date, which will be announced separately.
- **Important:** During the 60-day soft launch period, this interim guidance will govern the processing of Digital BDD claims.

All standard BDD procedures outlined in [M21-1, X.i.6](#) remain in effect and apply to current-state BDD claims.

3. Digital BDD Soft Launch Policy & Procedures

BDD Intake Pathways During Soft Launch

During the 60-day Digital BDD soft launch, VA will accept both digital and paper applications for BDD claims.

- **Digital Intake (Digital BDD):**

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- Claims submitted through an approved digital intake platform (VA.gov, QuickSubmit, or by a VA-accredited representative or Veterans Service Organization (VSO) using the VA Accredited Representative Portal (ARP)) that include all required elements will route to a Digital BDD prototype site or special mission station for review and an in-service rating.
- **Non-Digital Intake (Current-State BDD):**
 - Claims received via non-digital methods (e.g., paper applications, mail, fax, etc.) will not be processed as Digital BDD.
 - These claims will be processed as current-state BDD in accordance with existing procedures outlined in [M21-1, X.i.6](#), and controlled under the appropriate current-state BDD end product (EP 336) or BDD-exclusion EP when applicable. Non-Digital intake BDD claims will be routed to the VA Regional Office (RO) of jurisdiction.

To qualify for Digital BDD during the soft launch, the following requirements must be met:

- The BDD claim must be filed 180 to 90 days prior to the Service member's anticipated RAD.
- The claim must be submitted via one of the following approved digital intake platforms:
 - VA.gov
 - QuickSubmit
 - ARP via a VA-accredited representative
- The claim must include a completed Separation Health Assessment (SHA) – Self Assessment, Part A.
- The Service member must be available to report to examinations for 45 days from the date the claim was received.

NOTE: Digital BDD **removes the requirement** for Service members to submit copies of their STRs. As part of the Digital BDD initiative, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has partnered with the Department of War (DoW) to streamline the receipt of service treatment records (STRs). This collaboration removes the burden on transitioning Service Members to collect and provide copies of their STRs to VA.

Claims that meet these requirements will be recognized as Digital BDD claims and automatically assigned the appropriate Digital BDD rating EP and claim label, as shown in [Table 1](#).

4. Exclusions from Digital BDD

During soft launch, claims will be excluded from Digital BDD and processed as current-state BDD when:

- The claim is submitted via fax, mail, or through any method other than VA.gov, QuickSubmit, or ARP; and/or
- The claim is submitted without a completed SHA – Self-Assessment Part A.

In these situations:

- The claim will not qualify as Digital BDD.
- The claim will be controlled under EP 336 with a BDD claim label and processed according to existing current-state BDD procedures outlined in [M21-1, X.i.6.](#)
- Once examinations are requested by a claims processor, the EP 336 will be converted to the appropriate BDD rating EP consistent with [M21-1, X.i.6.B.2.c](#) and [X.i.6.B.2.d.](#)

Important: Service members must meet all BDD program qualification criteria for VA to process their claim under the BDD program, regardless of whether they submit a Digital BDD claim or a traditional paper claim submitted via a non-digital platform.

Digital intake platforms screen claims based on the Service member's anticipated discharge date and BDD program eligibility.

- If a digital intake platform receives a claim with 181 or more days remaining on active duty, the digital intake platform will not allow the submission.
- If the digital intake platform receives a claim between 89 and 1 days prior to the date of release from active duty (RAD), the digital intake system assigns a BDD-excluded end product (EP).

Automation will screen claims for the following BDD exclusions and off-ramp them.

- Pending Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) referral
- Very seriously injured/ill (VSI) / seriously injured/ill (SI)
- Terminally ill Service member

Note: Digital intake and automation will still assign a Digital BDD EP to the claim, and claims processors must manually correct it as a BDD-excluded EP.

Claims processors (MSCs, VSRs, RVSRs) must also review for later-emerging BDD exclusion criteria, such as:

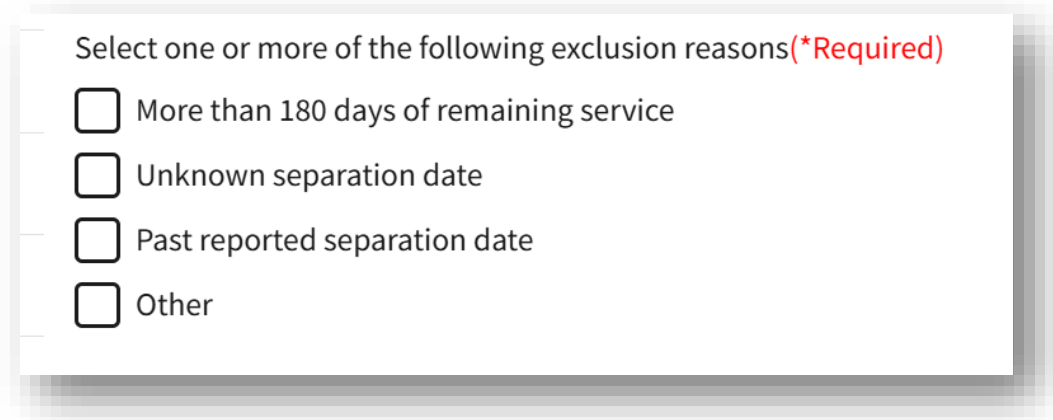
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- Claims from Service members who are unable to report for examinations as provided in [M21-1, X.i.6.B.1.a](#), subject to the exceptions in that block.
- Claims requiring a character-of-discharge (COD) determination.

Note: Policy and procedure for all non-Digital BDD (current-state BDD or BDD-excluded) claims during the 60-day soft launch will remain unchanged, as outlined in [M21-1, X.i.6](#).

Follow the guidance in [M21-1, X.i.6.B.1.-2](#) when processing excluded claims. When a claims processor discovers a BDD-excluded claim, they may verbally inform the Service member of the reason for the exclusion or send a Non-BDD Claim – Request Resubmission notice in VBMS. The claims processor must then select the appropriate reason for the exclusion, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1.



Select one or more of the following exclusion reasons(*Required)

- More than 180 days of remaining service
- Unknown separation date
- Past reported separation date
- Other

If the reason the claim is excluded from BDD does not appear in Figure 1, select 'Other' and copy and paste the appropriate reason for the exclusion from the approved free text into the claimant's notification letter.

Approved Free Text for BDD Exclusion Letters

- You submitted your claim with fewer than 90 days remaining on active duty.
- You submitted additional conditions with fewer than 90 days remaining on active duty.
- You were unable to report to VA examinations. Please notify VA if you are now available for 45 days to report to VA examinations.
- Your claim requires case management because you (*copy and paste the appropriate reason in the BDD-excluded letter*):
 - are very seriously injured/ill,
 - are seriously injured/ill,

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- have loss of a body part, or
- are actively enrolled in the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) program.
- You are terminally ill, and your claim will be expedited outside of the BDD program.
- You are awaiting discharge while hospitalized in a VA or military treatment facility, or
- Your claim requires a character of discharge determination of your military service.

5. End Products for Digital BDD Claims

Digital BDD claims will be established with the following EPs and labels:

Table 1.

Claim Type	Digital BDD EP – Claim Label
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Original	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● 110 – <i>Digital BDD-Initial</i>● 010 – <i>Digital BDD-Initial 8+ Issues</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● New Service-Connection (SC)● Increased evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● 020 – <i>Digital BDD-Non-Original</i>

6. Automation Development Phase

Once a Digital BDD claim is established, VA automation will:

- Automate Private Medical Records (PMR) retrieval when a VA Form 21-4142, *Authorization to Disclose Information to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)*, and VA Form 21-4142a, *General Release for Medical Provider Information to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)*, are provided with the claimant’s application.
- Check daily for receipt of electronic STRs from the Department of War (DoW) for up to 30 days after the claim is received.
- If STRs are received within this 30-day period, automation will submit examination requests for the claimed conditions.
- If STRs are not received within 30 days, the claim will be off-ramped from the automated workflow and manually developed by claims processors at one of the 16 prototype sites or special mission sites, as applicable. (see [section 7](#))

Automation will:

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- Request examinations if STRs are received within 30 days after the claim is received.
- Add a “Delayed BDD Exam Request” tracked item with a 50-day suspense to prevent the claim from automatically updating to Ready for Decision (RFD) once all other tracked items close.
- Add the “Automation Claim Review” and “Automation Claim Review – ADS” special issue indicators to the first contention on the claim. These special issue indicators will ensure National Work Queue (NWQ) routes the claim for review to a prototype site 85 days prior to the Service member’s future RAD date, or when and all tracked items are received and/or closed, whichever is later.

7. Digital BDD – Automation Off-Ramps

A Digital BDD claim will be off-ramped from the automation pathway but remain in Digital BDD when automation cannot complete processing due to situations such as:

- Pending Pension claim
- STRs (Electronic Health Records (EHR) Memo) are not received within 30 days
- Automation technical failure (e.g., unable to retrieve records from the Veterans Health Administration (VHA))
- Technical failure preventing automation from requesting examinations (e.g., the zip code is not valid and there is an error preventing the examination scheduling request from being submitted).

In these cases:

- The claim is off-ramped from the automated workflow.
- The claim remains a Digital BDD claim.
- The claim is routed to one of the 16 prototype sites or special mission stations for manual development by a claims processor, including requesting examinations, as appropriate.
- Automation will add a VBMS note indicating the automation offramp reason and action taken.

8. NWQ Routing Rules (85-Day Touchpoint)

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At the 85-day review touchpoint, claims processors at one of the 16 prototype sites or special mission stations will use the [Touchpoint Screening Workflow, Appendix B](#), to assess the Digital BDD claim for:

- Accuracy of automation-driven development,
- Examination completeness, and
- Address any necessary off-ramp actions, including omitted or inaccurate development, and take appropriate corrective measures.

NOTE: Automation has known technical restrictions that limit its ability to take complete action in certain scenarios. Claim processors should take extra precautions to review the following situations and take corrective action as necessary.

- Additional claims/contentions received after the initial Digital BDD claim.
- The Service member requested to reschedule the examination.
- Need for medical opinion(s), including aggravation.
- Gulf War (GW) undiagnosed illness or Medically Unexplained Chronic Multi-symptom Illness (MUCMI) claims that require GW supplemental language be added to the examination request, [M21-1, X.i.6.C.1.b.](#) and [M21-1, VIII.ii.1.B.2.o.](#)
- Prior periods of military service that would potentially entitle the Service member to different theories of entitlement beyond direct service connection (e.g., PACT Act, Presumption, etc.).
- Claims requiring exclusion from the BDD program based on requiring a character of discharge (COD) determination.
- Address any claimed dependents if a VA Form 21-686c, *Application Request to Add and/or Remove Dependents*, is of record.

Important: After screening the claim, if development is complete, claims processors must close the “Delayed BDD Exam Request” tracked item and update the claim status to RFD.

If additional development is needed, the claims processor must close the 'Delayed BDD Exam Request' tracked item to certify the automation touch-point review, then take the appropriate corrective development actions and add the corresponding development tracked item.

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Note: The 'Delayed BDD Exam Request' tracked item serves as a temporary placeholder to prevent the claim from automatically updating to RFD, allowing the claims processor to complete an automation accuracy review.

Table 2. 85-Day Routing Logic

If...	Then...
The Service member has more than 85 days remaining on active duty, and all examination results are of record,	NWQ will hold the claim in their queue (499) until day 85 before RAD.
The Service member has 85 days or less remaining on active duty, but not all of the examination results are of record,	NWQ will route the claim to a prototype site when all tracked items have closed or have been received, except the “Delayed BDD Exam Request” tracked item.

9. In-Service Rating Decision

- Digital BDD claims that are RFD remain in the NWQ 499 queue until 45 days or less prior to the Service member’s future RAD.
- At 45 days or less prior to RAD, NWQ will route the claim to an RVSR at one of the 16 prototype sites or special mission stations to complete the in-service rating decision in accordance with existing procedures in [M21-1, X.i.6.C.3.d. and e.](#)
- The completed in-service rating will be held in the Service member’s VA electronic folder (eFolder) until RAD ([see Table 4](#)).

Table 3. 45-Day “In-Service Rating” Routing Logic

When....	Then...
All tracked items have been closed or received, and the claim status has been updated to RFD,	NWQ will hold the claim in their queue (499) until approximately day 45 before RAD, then route to an RVSR at one of the 16 prototype sites or special mission stations to complete the in-service rating decision.

10. Finalized Rating and Promulgation of Digital BDD Claims

Once the Service member’s discharge date (RAD) has occurred, NWQ will attempt to route the Rating Decision Complete (RDC) claim to the prototype site that completed the in-service rating using Prior Assignment Routing (PAR), subject to that site’s workload, to finalize the decision.

Claims processors will follow existing procedures for finalizing the rating decision and promulgation as outlined in [M21-1, X.i.6.C.3.h-j.](#)

Table 4. Rating Decision Complete (RDC) Routing Logic

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When....	Then...
An in-service rating is complete, and the claim status updated to Rating Decision Complete (RDC),	NWQ will hold the claim in their queue (499) until the date of anticipated RAD, then route to one of the 16 prototype sites or special mission stations to complete the final rating decision and promulgation.

11. Quality Reviews

During the 60-day soft launch, QRSs are required to cite errors under the appropriate task and adhere to the guidance outlined in [M21-4, 6.4.d](#) for BDD claims included in the Digital BDD soft launch. To facilitate Quality Assurance (QA) in identifying these errors, QRSs should begin their narrative with “Digital BDD Soft Launch.” This approach enables QA to evaluate whether the new procedures result in increased errors and to determine if procedural revisions are necessary. Following the soft launch, QRSs should return to standard error citation practices.

Appendix A: Digital BDD Prototype Sites

Below are the 16 prototype sites that will process Digital BDD claims, including off-ramped Digital BDD claims, during the 60-day soft launch:

- 1) 306 – New York Regional Office
- 2) 308 – Hartford Regional Office
- 3) 311 – Pittsburgh Regional Office
- 4) 315 – Huntington Regional Office
- 5) 321 – New Orleans Regional Office
- 6) 322 – Montgomery Regional Office
- 7) 329 – Detroit Regional Office
- 8) 333 – Des Moines Regional Office
- 9) 334 – Lincoln Regional Office
- 10) 339 – Denver Regional Office
- 11) 344 – Los Angeles Regional Office
- 12) 347 – Boise Regional Office
- 13) 348 – Portland Regional Office
- 14) 350 – North Little Rock Regional Office
- 15) 402 – Togus Regional Office
- 16) 452 – Wichita Regional Office

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Appendix B: Touchpoint Screening Workflow

This screening workflow serves as a guide to help review claims that automation has partially developed, but it does not represent an exhaustive list of potential development actions.

Step	Action
1	<p>Verify Digital BDD inclusion or exclusion and confirm end-product control. Confirm that the initial Digital BDD claim was received 180 to 90 days before the Service member's future RAD date, that a completed SHA-Part A was received, and that no other BDD exclusion applies per M21-1, X.i.6.B.1.b (with the exception that Service members do not have to provide a copy of their STRs).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yes → Confirm the Digital EP and claim label, then proceed to the next step.• No → Exclude the claim from the Digital BDD program and process it as current-state BDD under M21-1, X.i.6.B.1.-2.
2	<p>Verify proper control of subsequent contentions. Determine whether the Service member submitted additional contentions while a Digital BDD claim is already pending.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If Yes →<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Were the additional contentions received 180 to 90 days before the Service member's future RAD date? If yes, add the EP400 contentions to the Digital BDD claim and take appropriate development action.○ Were additional contentions received 89 to 1 day before the Service member's future RAD date? If yes, establish a pre-discharge claim that is excluded from the Digital BDD program. The prototype site must use EPs 010, 110, or 020 as appropriate for the claim type and attach an appropriate non-BDD claim label, per M21-1, X.i.6.C.2.• No → Proceed to the next step
3	<p>Verify that complete STRs are of record. Check for a Pre-Separation Electronic Health Record (EHR) Certification Memo in the STRs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yes → Proceed to the next step

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No → Take appropriate development action, and proceed to the next step <p>Note: Coast Guard does not use Pre-Separation EHR Certification Memos. Assume any STR received from the Coast Guard after the Notification of Interest (NOI) are complete.</p>
4	<p>Review all contentions for proper development actions, with special emphasis on off-ramped claims or known automation limitations, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• clarification requirements (e.g. left, right, bilateral extremity/ies)• late-flowing contentions added to the claim• examination reschedule requests, per M21-1, IV.i.2.F.• pre-existing condition (aggravation claim)• PACT Act entitlement (if the Service member has a prior period of military service)• Gulf War (GW) undiagnosed illness or Medically Unexplained Chronic Multi-symptom Illness (MUCMI)• private treatment or VET Center treatment indicated without the required VA Form 21-4142/a <p>Take any development actions that automation omitted (if applicable), then proceed to the next step.</p>
5	<p>Review examinations that automation generated to ensure the DBQs are accurate and complete.</p> <p>If any required development is missing, take corrective action and move to the next step.</p>
6	<p>Review the claim to ensure all required development actions are completed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If any required development is missing, take corrective action. <p>Once all development actions and examinations are properly initiated, close the “Delayed BDD Exam Request” tracked item.</p>
7	<p>Upon receiving or closing all examination and development tracked items, the claims processor must update the claim status to RFD. NWQ will route the claim—45 days or fewer before RAD—to one of the 16 prototype sites or special mission stations to complete the in-service rating decision in accordance with M21-1, X.i.6.C.3.d and e.</p>