

Filing for VA Benefits — Quick Guide

Best practices for Williamson County veterans filing a VA claim, from DD-214 to decision

STEP 1 — GET YOUR DD-214

- **Lost or never received it? Order free at [archives.gov/veterans](https://www.archives.gov/veterans) (eVetRecs) or by mailing/faxing Standard Form 180 (SF-180) to the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC).**
- Standard processing: 10–20 business days online; 8–12 weeks by mail. Mark “EMERGENCY” if needed for burial, medical, or homelessness reasons.
- Request the “Member Copy 4” — the long-form version schools, employers, and the VA typically want.

STEP 2 — PROTECT YOUR EFFECTIVE DATE

- **File an Intent to File FIRST — at [VA.gov](https://va.gov), by phone (800-827-1000), in person, or through a VSO.**
- This locks in your effective date and can be worth months of back pay.
- You then have 1 year to submit your full claim before the Intent to File expires.

STEP 3 — GATHER YOUR EVIDENCE

- DD-214 and service treatment records
- Current diagnosis from a doctor
- Evidence linking the condition to your service (a “nexus”)
- Buddy statements, marriage/birth certificates for dependents

Every claim needs: diagnosis + in-service event + a medical link between them.

STEP 4 — GET FREE HELP TO FILE

- **Use a VA-accredited VSO (DAV, VFW, American Legion, or your County Veteran Service Officer) — always free, never a fee for an initial claim.**
- Appoint them with VA Form 21-22 so they can access your file and submit evidence.
- Submit a Fully Developed Claim (FDC) if your evidence is complete — it's the fastest path to a decision.

IF YOU'RE DENIED OR UNDERRATED

- You have 3 options, and 1 year from the decision letter to use them:

Supplemental Claim — add new evidence; no deadline, but file within 1 year to protect your effective date.

Higher-Level Review — a senior reviewer re-checks the same evidence for an error; no new evidence allowed.

Board Appeal — a Veterans Law Judge reviews your case.

HELPFUL LINKS

Order your DD-214: [archives.gov/veterans](https://www.archives.gov/veterans)

File a claim / Intent to File: va.gov/disability

Find a VSO near you: va.gov/vso

Williamson County VSO: 512-943-1900

VA benefits hotline: 800-827-1000

Full step-by-step guide and Williamson County contacts:

wilcoveterans.org