

Montana Veterans' Affairs Division

Subject: Veterans' Disability Claims Services in Montana – A Montana Snapshot within the National Context

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Introduction: As a very large, very rural state, Montana is challenged to provide its veteran population effective, accessible services. This report provides a “snapshot” of key data that portrays the effectiveness of the State of Montana's veterans' service program, in context to the rest of the nation.

Note: Reference is made to both Montana's national and “Western states” rankings. The 11 Western states include: Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, California and Nevada.

<> **Montana's Rural Character:** (2000 census)

Population Density – 6.2 persons per sq. mile - **#3** lowest pop. density in US
Population Living in Rural Area – 46% - **#7** highest in US (**#1** in the 11 Western states)

<> **Montana's Veteran Population:** (2004 VA estimate)

104,004 - **#2** veteran population per capita in US

<> **Montana Veterans enrolled in VA Health Care System:** (2004)

25,834 / 24.84% - **#9** highest in US (**#2** in the 11 Western states)

<> **Power of Attorney Representation (POA):** Veterans whose claims are developed and represented through POA average \$6,225 more in annual veteran disability compensation than those without. (2004)

National Ave. % POA Representation: 63.8%
Montana % POA Representation: 76.3% - **#2** US (**#1** in the 11 Western states)

National Disability Compensation Ave: \$10,631 with POA; \$4,406 without POA.
Montana Disability Compensation Ave: \$10,267 with POA; \$4,372 without POA.

<> **Service-Connected Disability Compensation:** (2004)

National Ave. Annual Disability Compensation: \$8,378
Montana Ave. Annual Disability Compensation: \$8,871 - **#15** US (**#4** in the 11 Western states)

National Ave. % of Vets Receiving Disability Compensation: 10.2%
Montana % of Vets Receiving Disability Compensation: 12.1% - **#13** US (**#3** in the 11 Western states)

<> Compensation and Pension Rating Action Timeliness – Percentage of claims being rated in more than 120 days: (2004)

National Ave. % Completed in More Than 120 days: 60.2%
Montana % Completed in More Than 120 days: 58.9% - #17 US (#2 in the 11 Western states)

<> Statistical Technical Accuracy Review (STAR): STAR measures the accuracy of compensation claims processed at VA regional offices (including Fort Harrison) by reviewing a statistical sampling of completed and rated claims. ***The STAR rating is impacted directly by the disability claim product submitted.*** Because the Montana Veterans' Affairs Division develops and submits the great majority of the state's veteran disability compensation claims, its claim product has a direct impact on the Fort Harrison regional office's STAR rating. STAR rating criteria:

- + Were all claimed issues addressed?
- + Were all inferred/ancillary issues addressed?
- + Was Veterans Claims Assistance Act (VCAA) pre-decision "notice" provided and adequate?
- + Does the record show VCAA development requirements?
- + Was grant/denial of all issues correct?
- + Was percent evaluation correct?
- + Were all effective dates affecting payment correct?
- + Were all payment rates correct?

<u>STAR Error Rate</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>
National Average	14.6%	13.0%
<u>Montana</u> Average	9.1% (#2 US)	3.7% (#1 US)

Montana's VA Regional Office (located at Fort Harrison) has the lowest error rate in the nation.