

— FWD ASSIST HQ —

FIELD GUIDE

File on Paper, by Mail

Complete the paper VA Form 21-526EZ and mail your claim correctly, with proof of delivery.



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A FWD Assist HQ Field Guide

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This guide is education, not representation. It explains how part of the VA system works so you can handle your own business with confidence. It is not legal or claims advice, and reading it does not create any representative relationship between you and the author. The author is not affiliated with the Department of Veterans Affairs, and nothing here is endorsed by the VA.

This guide prints no live VA dollar figures and no rating percentages on purpose, because they change. Before you make a decision based on any number, check the current figure at va.gov. No book can promise you a rating; the evidence in your file decides the result. Help from an accredited Veterans Service Officer is always free. Copyright 2026 FWD Assist HQ. All rights reserved.

In crisis? Call the **Veterans Crisis Line**: dial **988**, then press **1**. You can also text **838255** or chat online at veteranscrisisline.net. It is free, confidential, and available 24/7.

File on Paper, by Mail

Complete the paper VA Form 21-526EZ and mail your claim correctly, with proof of delivery.

Companion to *VA Disability Primer*.

This is general education, not legal or claims advice, and not guidance for your specific claim. It cannot promise you a rating or an outcome, and no one can. For help with your own claim, see a free accredited representative (see [Get Free, Accredited Help](#) at the back). Nothing here creates a representative relationship.

Current as of October 2026. Rules, forms, and figures change. Check current details at va.gov.

THE BEST WAY TO USE THIS GUIDE

The strongest position is to be your own informed advocate and to work with a free accredited representative. An accredited Veterans Service Organization, such as the DAV, VFW, American Legion, or a county or state veterans office, helps at no charge. Accredited claims agents and attorneys can help too. They can't charge for work done before VA issues its initial decision on your claim, and after that they may charge a fee within the limits of 38 CFR 14.636. This guide is here so you understand your own situation and can work with them as a full partner instead of handing it over blind. If you'd rather handle this yourself, and you're comfortable doing that, the guide walks you through every step. Either way, you stay in control.

The Outcome and What You Need Before You Start

The outcome: By the end of this guide you'll have completed the paper VA Form 21-526EZ and mailed it, with your evidence, to VA's intake center. You'll have proof of delivery and a full copy for yourself.

This guide prepares you for the task. It doesn't and can't promise a rating, a percentage, or an outcome. The evidence in your file decides the result.

WHAT YOU NEED BEFORE YOU START

- ☐ The current edition of VA Form 21-526EZ (January 2026), printed from va.gov/forms/21-526ez.
- ☐ A copy of your DD214 or separation documents.
- ☐ Copies of your evidence, never your originals.
- ☐ A pen with dark ink.
- ☐ An envelope and the cost of a mailing service with tracking and proof of delivery.

When to start: Start now with an Intent to File (Step 2), then finish the paper claim within the year. If you can't file online, mailing works when it's done carefully. Allow extra time for delivery.

Start Here: The Basics

You don't have to file online. VA also takes a paper VA Form 21-526EZ by mail, by fax, or in person at a VA regional office. Paper takes more care because no screen catches your mistakes. You print the current form, fill in every part that applies, attach copies of your evidence, keep a copy, and mail it with tracking. VA dates a mailed claim by the day it arrives, not the day you mail it, so proof of delivery matters. This guide walks the paper claim from download to proof of delivery.

Where this is written down: 38 CFR § 3.1(r); 38 CFR § 3.155.

The Steps

STEP 1

Download the current edition of VA Form 21-526EZ.

How. Go to va.gov/forms/21-526ez and print the current edition. Its full name is Application for Disability Compensation and Related Compensation Benefits. As of October 2026 the revision date is January 2026. Read the instruction pages. They explain what to send and where.

Don't use an old copy you had lying around. Print the current one so the questions and the notice pages match what VA uses now.

Done when you have the current 21-526EZ printed and have read the instructions.

STEP 2

Protect your effective date with an Intent to File first.

How. Before you assemble the paper claim, submit an Intent to File. You can call 1-800-827-1000, mail VA Form 21-0966, submit it online at va.gov/resources/your-intent-to-file-a-va-claim, or ask an accredited representative. You then have one year to file the complete claim.

Decision point. If you already have an active Intent to File for compensation, then keep it and note its date. If not, then submit one now so your date is protected while you do the paperwork.

Where this is written down: 38 CFR § 3.155(b).

Done when your Intent to File is submitted or confirmed active and the one-year deadline is on your calendar.

STEP 3

Complete every part that applies, in ink.

How. Print neatly in ink, one letter per box, and fill in each check box completely. Enter your identifying information, each claimed condition, and your service history exactly as it appears on your DD214. Check the box for the Fully Developed Claim program or the standard claim process.

Decision point. If you're claiming a mental health condition, dependents, or Individual Unemployability, then the form's instructions say to send VA Form 21-0781, 21-686c, or 21-8940 with it. If you want VA to get private medical records for you, then include VA Form 21-4142 and 21-4142a. If you were treated at a Vet Center, then include VA Form 21-4142 for those records.

Where this is written down: VA Form 21-526EZ instructions (January 2026).

Done when every part that applies is filled in, matches your records, and any extra forms are attached.

STEP 4

Attach copies of your evidence, not originals.

How. Include copies of the service treatment records, medical records, DBQs, medical opinions, and statements you have. Keep every original yourself.

Don't mail your only originals. Mail can be lost or damaged, and you may need the originals later for a review.

Done when copies of your evidence are attached and your originals are safe at home.

STEP 5

Sign and date the form.

How. Sign and date VA Form 21-526EZ in the signature section. A claim must be signed to be complete. If VA gets an incomplete paper form, it tells you what's missing. If you send the complete claim within a year, VA treats it as filed on the date the incomplete form arrived.

Where this is written down: 38 CFR § 3.160(a); 38 CFR § 3.155(c).

Done when the form is signed and dated.

STEP 6

Make a full copy of the entire packet.

How. Photocopy or scan the completed form and every attachment before it leaves your hands, so you have a record of exactly what you sent.

Done when you have a complete copy of the mailed packet.

STEP 7

Address the packet to VA's intake center.

How. Per va.gov, mail paper disability claims to: Department of Veterans Affairs, Claims Intake Center, PO Box 4444, Janesville, WI 53547-4444. Check the address against the current form and va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim before you mail.

Don't mail it to a VA clinic or hospital. If you'd rather hand it in, take it to a VA regional office in person.

Done when the packet is addressed to the intake center and the address matches va.gov.

STEP 8

Send it with tracking and proof of delivery.

How. At the post office, use a service that gives you a tracking number and proof of delivery, such as certified mail with a return receipt. Keep the receipt and the tracking number with your copy.

Done when the packet is mailed and you have the tracking number.

STEP 9

Confirm receipt and start tracking.

How. Watch the tracking until it shows delivered. Then check va.gov/claim-or-appeal-status or call 1-800-827-1000 to confirm VA has the claim. Paper takes longer to show up than an online filing.

Decision point. If VA can't find your claim after a few weeks, then send it again from your kept copy with a note and your proof of delivery. A free accredited representative can help you follow up.

Done when you've confirmed VA received the claim and you know where to check its status.

Recap Checklist

This is the page to photograph and keep with you. Tick each line as you finish it.

RUN THE WHOLE TASK FROM HERE

- ☐ Printed the current edition of VA Form 21-526EZ and read the instructions.
- ☐ Filed or confirmed an Intent to File to protect your date.
- ☐ Completed every part that applies in ink, matching your DD214, with any extra forms attached.
- ☐ Attached copies of your evidence and kept your originals.
- ☐ Signed and dated the form.
- ☐ Made a full copy of the entire packet.
- ☐ Addressed it to the Claims Intake Center, PO Box 4444, Janesville, WI 53547-4444.
- ☐ Mailed it with tracking and proof of delivery and kept the receipt.
- ☐ Confirmed receipt and noted where to track the claim.

Reminder: rules and rates change. Check any current figure at va.gov. Help from an accredited Veterans Service Organization is free. Accredited claims agents and attorneys can't charge for work done before VA issues its initial decision on your claim. After that, they may charge a fee within the limits of 38 CFR 14.636. This guide prepared you for the task. The evidence in your file decides the result.

Get Free, Accredited Help

For anything about your own claim, talk to an accredited representative. Help from an accredited Veterans Service Organization is free. Accredited claims agents and attorneys can't charge for work done before VA issues its initial decision on your claim. After that, they may charge a fee within the limits of 38 CFR 14.636. Free help is available through Veterans Service Organizations such as the DAV, VFW, and American Legion, and through county and state veterans offices.

To find one near you, visit va.gov/get-help-from-accredited-representative. Representation begins only when you sign VA Form 21-22 (for a Veterans Service Organization) or 21-22a (for an individual agent or attorney). With one rare exception for a single unpaid case, only accredited people can represent you before the VA, and only an accredited agent or attorney can charge you a fee. Nothing in this guide creates that relationship.

A warning about claim sharks. Anyone who offers to file your initial claim for a fee, or who guarantees you a rating or a percentage, is selling something you shouldn't buy. Accredited Veterans Service Organizations help at no charge, and accredited claims agents and attorneys may charge only after VA issues its initial decision, within the limits of 38 CFR 14.636. Report predatory companies to the VA Office of Inspector General at 1-800-488-8244.

Keep Going: The Full Guide

This field guide is the short, do-this-now companion to the book *VA Disability Primer*. See every FWD Assist HQ title that is out now at fwdassisthq.com/books.

Current as of October 2026. Rules, forms, and figures change. Check current details at va.gov.

About the Author

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J. Erickson is a service-disabled Air Force veteran. He served as a military firefighter and as a veteran service officer, where he spent years walking veterans through the same claims process he writes about now. He holds an MBA and writes plain-language guides for veterans who want to understand the system without a translator.

He writes the For the Rest of Us series at fwdassisthq.com. This guide is published by FWD Assist HQ as a veteran education resource. It is not affiliated with or endorsed by the Department of Veterans Affairs.