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# **News Release**

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## **VA and DoD Announce Disability Evaluation System Pilot Expansion**

*Delivering Benefits Faster to Veterans*

WASHINGTON –To expedite the delivery of benefits to many injured servicemembers who receive disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Department announced the expansion of a program with the Department of Defense (DoD) to streamline the application process for people retiring or exiting the military due to disabilities.

“Streamlining our disability claims system and working closely with DoD to care for today’s generation of heroes are among VA’s top priorities,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “We will never lose sight of the fact that Veterans and military personnel have sacrificed for their country and earned the right to access services from VA and DoD.”

The pilot, called the Disability Evaluation System (DES), began in November 2007 and is expanding to an additional six military installations, bringing the total number to 27 military facilities where a single physical examination serves as the basis for determining whether military personnel are fit enough to stay on active duty and to determine their eligibility for VA disability compensation. To date over 5,431 servicemembers have participated in the pilot.

The new locations will be Fort Benning, Ga.; Fort Bragg, N.C.; Fort Hood, Texas; Fort Lewis, Wash.; Fort Riley, Kan.; and Portsmouth Naval Medical Center, Va. The estimated completion date for the new expansion is scheduled for March 31, 2010.

“The decision to expand the pilot was based upon favorable reviews focusing on the program’s ability to meet timeliness, effectiveness, transparency, and customer and stakeholder satisfaction,” said Noel Koch, deputy under secretary of defense, Office of Wounded Warrior Care and Transition Policy.

Before the DES pilot, military personnel leaving active duty with medical problems had to go through two different, sometimes lengthy, processes before eligibility for VA benefits was determined. During the first process the military determined suitability to remain on active duty. The second process through VA focused on protecting lifetime income that may be threatened by service-related disability.

“VA must continue to focus on creating processes that are transparent and promote accountability,” said Shinseki. “Servicemembers need to know that VA is working to cut bureaucratic red tape and provide faster services.”

The Defense Authorization Act of 2008 authorized the DES pilot, which was recommended by the Task Force on Returning Global War on Terrorism Heroes, the Independent Review Group, the President’s Commission on Care for America’s Returning Wounded Warriors (the Dole/Shalala Commission), and the Commission on Veterans’ Disability Benefits.

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