

307,000 veterans may have died awaiting Veterans Affairs health care, report says

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New report: More than 300,000 vets died awaiting care 01:21

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

The Department of Veterans Affairs has been under fire for not giving vets enough access to care

A VA inspector general report finds 307,000 vets died before applications processed

The report notes that some VA staffers hid applications for care in their desks

(CNN) Hundreds of thousands of veterans listed in the Department of Veterans Affairs enrollment system died before their applications for care were processed, according to [a report issued Wednesday](#).

The VA's inspector general found that out of about 800,000 records stalled in the agency's system for managing health care enrollment, there were more than 307,000 records that belonged to veterans

who had died months or years in the past. The inspector general said due to limitations in the system's data, the number of records did not necessarily represent veterans actively seeking enrollment in VA health care.

In a response to a request by the House Committee on Veterans Affairs' to investigate a whistleblower's allegations of mismanagement at the VA's Health Eligibility Center, the inspector general also found VA staffers incorrectly marked unprocessed applications and may have deleted 10,000 or more records in the last five years.

In one case, a veteran who applied for VA care in 1998 was placed in "pending" status for 14 years. Another veteran who passed away in 1988 was found to have an unprocessed record lingering in 2014, the investigation found.

For more than a year, [CNN investigated and reported on veterans' deaths](#) and delays at VA facilities across the country, including detailed investigations in November 2013 and January 2014 [examining deaths at two VA facilities in South Carolina and Georgia](#).



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The report released Wednesday reveals a web of complications with the VA's management of health care enrollment data, including a lack of procedures to oversee records, software glitches within the records system and inconsistency in identifying veterans who have died.

The inspector general found the VA's office responsible for enrollment "has not effectively managed its business processes to ensure the

consistent creation and maintenance of essential data."

Additionally, the investigation states the Veterans Health Administration "has not adequately established procedures to identify individuals who have died, including those with pending health care enrollment records."

The report said an internal VA investigation in 2010 found staffers had hidden veterans' applications in their desks so they could process them at a later time, but human



PHOTOS: Major federal agencies

resources later recommended the staffers responsible not be disciplined.

Scott Davis, a program specialist at the VA Health Eligibility Center, said thousands more veterans who have returned from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan have not received care because of being erroneously placed in the enrollment system's backlog.

He said many of these combat veterans have since lost their five-year eligibility for care due to the delay.

[VA inspectors say Phoenix was in total 'chaos'](#)

"People who fought, and who earned the right to VA health care, were never given VA health care," Davis said. "They literally died while waiting for VA to process their health care application."

Davis said he alerted both the VA's inspector general and members of Congress to problems with the Health Eligibility Center records more than a year ago.

He said he also alerted the White House and senior officials at the VA, but was ignored.

VA Deputy Inspector General Linda Halliday said in a statement Wednesday that whistleblowers "have proven to be a valuable information source to pursue accountability and corrective actions in VA programs."

In a statement, the VA said it "continues the efforts outlined in previous blogs and public responses to contact veterans with a record in a pending status ... to determine if they desired to enroll in VA healthcare. We have been reaching out to veterans to let them know the additional information needed so that we may complete their application."

As of June 30, the VA sent letters to 302,045 veterans asking them to submit required documents to establish their eligibility, and 34,517 of those veterans have since been enrolled for care, the VA said.

"Our mission is to provide timely access to earned health care and benefits for millions of veterans. That is a responsibility that we do not take lightly," the agency said.

[Read the full statement from the VA](#)

In response to issues with the VA's enrollment records, Rep. Jeff Miller, a Florida Republican and chairman of the House VA Committee, said in July, "(This) troubling news highlights VA's ongoing mismanagement and calls into question VA's ability to adequately care for our nation's veterans."

"No veteran should ever fall through the cracks when attempting to receive the care they have earned," Miller said.

Correction: An earlier headline on this story mischaracterized the number of veterans who may have died while awaiting care from the VA.