



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Benefits Administration

Informal Conference Fact Sheet

What is an Informal Conference?

- If you disagree with a benefits decision made by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), there are three decision review options available to you. One of these options is a higher-level review, which is a new review of an issue or issues previously decided by VA based on the evidence of record.
- Informal conferences are a unique component of the higher-level review decision review option. An informal conference is a telephone contact which can be selected in connection with a request for a higher-level review.

Information About Informal Conferences

- The informal conference is your opportunity to speak directly with a higher-level reviewer who has reviewed your case. The sole purpose of the informal conference is to point out errors of fact or law in the decision or decisions you are submitting for review.
- Informal conferences are optional. We may be able to complete your decision more quickly if we do not conduct an informal conference. If there are errors of fact or law you want to point out, you may wish to submit a written statement to identify them along with your claim form instead of requesting an informal conference.
- An informal conference is not the same as a formal hearing, and it is important to understand that new evidence cannot be introduced during the informal conference.
 - New evidence cannot be introduced during a higher-level review, as it is a review of the evidence of record at the time of the prior decision.
 - If you have new evidence, you may submit it with an application for a supplemental claim.

Who is Eligible to Participate in an Informal Conference?

- Any claimant who is eligible to file a higher-level review may select the option for an informal conference when they file their VA Form 20-0996, *Decision Review Request: Higher-Level Review* claim form.

How to participate in an informal conference:

- If you want to participate in an informal conference, at the time of completion of VA Form 20-0996, *Decision Review Request: Higher-Level Review* you must choose 16A or your representative must complete items 16A and 17.

Examples of Informal Conference Use

The table below provides examples of improper and proper use of an informal conference to help claimants understand how to appropriately prepare.

Decision Notification Letter States:	Discussion at Informal Conference	Proper Use of Informal Conference	Reason
There is no evidence of an injury in service	Veteran points out an entry in the service treatment records (STR) which were of record at the time of the previous decision that show evidence of injury in service	YES	Veteran identified an error of fact in VA's prior decision based on the evidence of record at the time of the prior decision
There is no link between an event in service and the current diagnosis	Veteran states his condition is service connected and provides new medical documentation	NO	Veteran cannot introduce facts that were not present at the time of the prior decision

For more information:

- You can find more information at <https://www.va.gov/decision-reviews/>