

Watchdog: 900,000 vets may have pending health care requests

September 2 2015, byMatthew Daly

Nearly 900,000 military veterans have officially pending applications for health care from the Department of Veterans Affairs, the department's inspector general said Wednesday, but "serious" problems with enrollment data make it impossible to determine how many veterans were actively seeking VA health care.

About one-third of the 867,000 [veterans](#) with pending applications are likely deceased, the report says, adding that "data limitations" prevent investigators from determining how many now-deceased veterans applied for [health care benefits](#) or when. The applications go back nearly two decades, and officials said some applicants may have died years ago.

More than half the applications listed as pending do not have application dates, and investigators "could not reliably determine how many records were associated with actual applications for enrollment" in VA [health care](#), the report said.

The report also says VA workers incorrectly marked thousands of unprocessed health-care applications as completed and may have deleted 10,000 or more electronic "transactions" over the past five years.

Linda Halliday, the VA's acting inspector general, said the agency's Health Eligibility Center "has not effectively managed its business processes to ensure the consistent creation and maintenance of essential data" and recommended a multi-year plan to improve accuracy and usefulness of agency records.

Halliday's report came in response to a whistleblower who said more than 200,000 veterans with pending [applications](#) for VA health care were likely deceased.

The [inspector general](#)'s report substantiated that claim and others, but said there was no way to tell for sure when or why the person died. Similarly, deficiencies in the VA's information security—including a lack of audit trails and system backups—limited investigators' ability to review some issues fully and rule out data manipulation, Halliday said.

The VA has said it has no way to purge the list of dead applicants, and said many of those listed in the report are likely to have used another type of insurance before they died. Officials are reviewing enrollment data to ensure integrity, said VA spokeswoman Walinda West.

The Health Eligibility Center has removed a "purge and delete functionality" from a computer system used to track agency workloads, West said. VA will provide six months of data to demonstrate that any changed or deleted data on VA workloads has undergone appropriate management review, with approvals and audit trails visible, West said.

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