

# VACI Policies and Instructions

## Mental Health Preparation (Prep) Call

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### 1 Mental Health Preparation (Prep) Call – Introduction

A mental health (“MH”) preparation (“Prep”) call is when an SVC/VC has a conversation with a client to discuss their upcoming MH exam with a Telemedica provider. These instructions mandate certain things that must and cannot be discussed during a MH Prep call.

### 2 Prior to the Prep Call: Documentation Instructions

Prior to conducting a prep call, there are certain steps that are to be completed:

- Create a folder titled “Mental Health” in the client’s main folder.
- Upload a copy of the “Preparing for Your Mental Health Evaluation” video from Telemedica.
- If the client :
  - pursues PTSD to be service connected, upload a copy of the “VA Form 21-0781”.
  - needs a “Buddy Letter”, upload a copy of the “VA Form 21-10210”.
  - needs a “Statement in Support of their Claim”, upload a copy of the “VA Form 21-4138”.
  - needs a “Sworn Declaration”, upload a copy of the “Sworn Declaration Template”.
  - pursues MST to be service connected, upload a copy of the “VA Form 21-0781a”.

The above listed documents are the **ONLY APPROVED** documents that may be shared with the client through the client’s folder.

All other approved resources that may be shared with the client are **ONLY AVAILABLE** through the Elite Experience Portal (EEP) and **CANNOT** be added to the client’s folder.

All documents that are shared with the client must be done either through the (EEP) or in the client’s main folder.

### 3 Conducting the Prep Call

SVC/VC must offer a prep call to all clients that have opted in for a “Mental Health” exam. Below are the next steps that are required to be followed by every SVC/VC when conducting a mental health prep call:

- **SVC/VC’s Requirements:** Explain to the client:
  - How to access the Mental Health folder that was created, which contains the reference items listed above.
  - How they should access through the EEP the “Insider’s Guide to the 31 VA Mental Health Symptoms Revealed and Explained” document.
  - How it is best practice for the client to write down the symptoms and circumstances that apply to them as they read through the document.
  - How writing down the symptoms and circumstances gives the client the ability to reference their symptoms and circumstances easily during the exam if needed.
  - That they should access through the EEP and watch the video from Brian Reese “How to Prepare for Your Psych Eval + 31 VA Mental Health Symptoms Explained” to get an idea of how to properly tell and explain their story and symptoms during the exam.
  - That they should watch the video from Telemedica “Preparing for Your Mental Health Evaluation” to get an idea from the provider on what to expect during the exam.
  
- **Discussing the Client’s Symptoms and Circumstances:** If the client asks about what specific symptoms and circumstances apply to rating percentages, explain to the client that they need to review the “Insider’s Guide to the 31 VA Mental Health Symptoms Revealed and Explained” document.
  - Explain that at this point you cannot discuss specific mental health symptoms or specific circumstances that apply to any particular rating percentage as this can be interpreted as directing or guiding a client towards a specific rating rather than getting an independent review of their actual symptoms and circumstances.
  - It is important to note and point out that the “Mental Health Symptoms VS Typical VA Ratings” document should not be discussed with the client at this point as this is an internal document for VACI employee use only and can be interpreted as leading or guiding the client towards a specific rating rather than identifying and discussing their specific symptoms and circumstances.
  - Explain the importance of being “Uncomfortably Vulnerable” during the exam.
  - Explain the importance of identifying all of the client’s specific symptoms and specific circumstances during the exam.
  - Explain the importance of giving specific examples of the client’s specific symptoms and specific circumstances during the exam.
  - Providing the client specific examples of a specific symptom or specific circumstance is not the same as discussing and/or advising the client on how to discuss a specific symptom or specific circumstance.

- **Client’s “Overall Disability Picture”:** It is important to note and point out to the client that there are many other factors that play into how the VA rates mental health claims which are used to give an “Overall Disability Picture” of the client which should coincide with the VA rating that is given by the VA. Examples of other factors that may be considered:
  - Overall social and occupational impairment.
  - Mental health treatment being sought out and received by the client.
  - Trouble with the law.
- **Occupational and Social Impairment Notice:** SVC/VCs must ensure to discuss with the client that the “Occupational and Social Impairment” section of the IMO IS NOT what equates to a specific disability rating.
  - VA rates mental health on many factors, however the majority of mental conditions are rated on a schedule based on categories of symptoms and circumstances.
  - Each rating has 5 main categories of symptoms and circumstances in which the client must have the majority of the symptoms and circumstances to be rated at a certain level/rating.
  - Not every single symptom or circumstance has to be present in order to be assigned the rating, but the rating that most closely defines the condition should be used by the VA.
- **Lifestyle Impact Claim Notice:** SVC/VCs must ensure to properly explain that the VA **Does NOT** service connect and or rate a client for what is commonly called a “Lifestyle Impact Claim”.
  - SVC/VCs must explain that the client’s mental health symptoms and conditions that are caused by an already service-connected disability is a mental health claim that is filled secondary to their service-connected disability.
  - A “Lifestyle Impact Claim” to the VA is actually a claim for an increased scheduled rating for an already service-connected disability (called an extra-schedular rating).
  - A mental health claim and mental health disability are not an extra-schedular rating.
- **Encourage C&P Prep:** SVC/VCs must encourage the client to attend “C&P Exam Prep” classes that are available to the client.

## 4 Prohibited Discussion Items

**SVC/VCs are prohibited from discussing specific symptoms or specific circumstances that apply specifically to what that client is experiencing.** SVC/VCs are not acting in a mental health provider role within VACI, and as such, must ensure the client does not go into detail regarding all of their specific symptoms and specific circumstances that surround their mental health condition, circumstances, and symptoms during conversations with the SVC/VC.

Clients may give examples of symptoms or circumstances that surround their mental health condition; however, the SVC/VC are prohibited from giving the client specific examples of how to explain or discuss those specific symptoms or specific circumstances that apply specifically to the client.

- SVC/VCs are **permitted** to discuss and give random examples of:
  - What a symptom is and looks like.
  - Circumstances.
  - Show a disability that is service connected may be affected by, causes, or aggravates a mental health symptom or circumstance.
  
- SVC/VCs are **prohibited** from:
  - Trying to give an all-inclusive list of what symptoms or circumstances apply or look like to the client except for the approved listed document in the “Prior to Prep Call” section.
  - Conducting a question-and-answer session or interviewing the client in any form regarding specific symptoms, specific circumstances, specific social impacts, specific occupational impacts, etc.
  - Discussing what specific symptoms and specific circumstances are needed to obtain a specific rating for mental health.
  
- Only after an IMO is published, the mental health exam is completed, and no adjustments are needed by Telemedica, the SVC/VCs:
  - May reference the “Mental Health Symptoms VS Typical VA Ratings” document to give the client an **Idea** of what the VA may rate the client with if the IMO **Alone** was used.
  - Must ensure to discuss with the client that the IMO alone may not be used to rate, or service connect the client.
  - Must ensure that the client understands that the VA may service connect the client for a different MH condition that is not listed on the IMO.
  - SVC/VCs may discuss with the client that their IMO may be used for an appeal if the client believes they morally, ethically, and legally deserve a higher rating.
  
- The following documents are prohibited from being uploaded to the client’s folder and must be accessed through the EEP by the client:
  - “Insider’s Guide to the 31 VA Mental Health Symptoms Revealed and Explained” document.
  - “How to Prepare for your Psych Eval + 31 VA Mental Health Symptoms Explained” video from Brian Reese.
  
- The following documents are prohibited from being uploaded, used, or discussed with the client:
  - “Mental Health Symptoms Explained” document.
  - “Mental Health Disability Rating Scale” document.
  - “Color Coded- Symptoms vs. Occupational & Social Impairment” document.
  - “Symptoms vs. Occupational & Social Impairment-DBQ Training Guide” document.
  - “Color coded chart” document.
  - “DBQ Training Guide” document.
  - “Mental Disorder Ratings” document.
  - “Mental Health Disorders Rating Scale” document.
  - Any document that includes and information from the above listed documents.
  - Any unapproved document that is not specifically listed in this policy.



- The “Mental Health Symptoms VS Typical VA Ratings” document is an Internal reference document for VACI employees only. This document is not to be emailed, uploaded, or shared with any non-VACI employees under any circumstances.

## Policy Information Log

<b>Policy Name</b>	Mental Health Preparation (Prep) Call
<b>Effective Date</b>	03/09/21
<b>Review Date</b>	October 31, 2021
<b>Revised</b>	NA
<b>Policy Owner</b>	Director of Compliance
<b>Experience Owner</b>	Robert Nichols E: <a href="mailto:qualityassurance@vaclaimsinsider.com">qualityassurance@vaclaimsinsider.com</a>