

SECONDARY SERVICE CONNECTION CLAIM DEVELOPMENT FLOWCHART



Map the direction. Choose the theory. Build the medical link.



START

A CONDITION MAY BE RELATED TO ANOTHER DISABILITY

Confirm the direction before relying on a graph, article, prior decision, or medical opinion.

DECISION 1

IS THE PRIMARY DISABILITY
SERVICE CONNECTED?

NO OR NOT YET

ESTABLISH OR CLAIM THE PRIMARY DISABILITY

The claims may be filed together, but secondary service connection depends on the primary disability becoming service connected.

THEN RETURN TO DECISION 1

YES

2

NAME THE RELATIONSHIP ACCURATELY

WRITE THE CLAIM IN THE CORRECT DIRECTION

Identify the service-connected primary condition first and the newly claimed secondary condition second.

DECISION 2

IS THERE A CURRENT
SECONDARY DIAGNOSIS?

NO OR UNCLEAR

OBTAIN A QUALIFIED EVALUATION

Document persistent symptoms and seek an accurate diagnosis. Exposure, risk, pain, or a suspected relationship is not always a ratable disability by itself.

THEN RETURN TO DECISION 2

YES

DECISION 3

WHICH THEORY FITS THE
EVIDENCE?

CAUSED BY

The primary disability caused the secondary condition.

AGGRAVATED BY

The primary disability increased the secondary condition's severity.

TREATMENT EFFECT

Medication, surgery, inactivity, or treatment contributed.

INTERMEDIATE STEP

Another medically supported step connects the conditions.

MULTI-CONDITION CHAIN

More than one established link may be needed. Develop every link separately.

4

4

DEVELOP THE MEDICAL EXPLANATION

CONNECT THE MECHANISM, TIMELINE, AND INDIVIDUAL RECORD

Address onset, worsening, treatment effects, relevant risk factors, alternative causes, and why the relationship applies to this veteran.

5

DECISION 4

DOES COMPETENT EVIDENCE
EXPLAIN THE MEDICAL LINK?

NO OR INCOMPLETE

DEVELOP THE NEXUS EVIDENCE

A reasoned opinion should identify both conditions, use the correct direction, address the supported theory, and explain the conclusion with the relevant record.

ASSOCIATION ALONE IS NOT AN INDIVIDUAL NEXUS

YES

DECISION 5

IS AGGRAVATION PART OF
THE CLAIM?

IF YES

ADDRESS BASELINE AND INCREMENTAL WORSENING

Identify the secondary condition's severity before aggravation when possible, its current severity, and the medically supported increase attributable to the primary disability.

DO NOT SUBSTITUTE A PERMANENCE REQUIREMENT

CAUSATION OR DEVELOPED AGGRAVATION THEORY

6

BUILD THE RECORD

FOUR EVIDENCE LANES SHOULD POINT IN THE SAME DIRECTION

01

PRIMARY STATUS

Rating decision, diagnostic code, treatment history, and current status of the service-connected disability.

02

SECONDARY DIAGNOSIS

Current diagnosis, testing, treatment, severity, onset, and functional effects of the claimed condition.

03

MEDICAL NEXUS

A theory-specific explanation that addresses causation and aggravation separately when both are raised.

04

CHRONOLOGY AND CONTEXT

Medical records, medication history, credible lay evidence, relevant literature, and competing risk factors.

7

BEFORE FILING

CHECK THE DIRECTION

- Primary condition identified
- Secondary diagnosis documented
- Every supported theory raised
- Weak or missing links recognized

SUBMIT

FILE THE CLAIM

State the primary and secondary conditions clearly. Include the evidence and keep a complete copy of the submission.

EXAMINATION

ATTEND THE C&P EXAM

Describe the actual timeline and worsening. Confirm that causation and aggravation are each addressed when raised.

8

VA DECISION

GRANTED

REVIEW THE SCOPE, RATING, AND EFFECTIVE DATE

For aggravation, review how the baseline and compensable degree of worsening were handled.

DEFERRED

MORE DEVELOPMENT IS PENDING

Monitor examinations, medical opinions, record requests, and later decisions.

DENIED

IDENTIFY THE DISPUTED LINK

Read whether VA disputed the diagnosis, primary status, direction, nexus, theory, baseline, or credibility before choosing review.

38 CFR 3.310(A)

Disability caused by a service-connected disease or injury

38 CFR 3.310(B)

Incremental disability from aggravation and baseline analysis

WARD V. WILKIE

Aggravation is not limited to permanent worsening

INTERMEDIATE STEP

Each medically supported link in the chain must be developed

THE GRAPH FINDS POSSIBILITIES. THE EVIDENCE PROVES THE CLAIM. A historical Board pairing does not establish causation, create a nexus, or predict an individual result.