

## All State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Call Transcript

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Thanks to all of you for joining today's All VR Call. We are appreciative of your time and we have a lot good information to share with you ight away. I think some overall really good news, given the unusual circumstances the pandemic has put us all in. We will share some more of that information during the latter part of the meeting. I want to give you an idea first of all how things are doing programmatically in terms of program participation, given the situation with the pandemic and folks working remotely and so forth. From what we see overall, as you can imagine, is a slight decrease in some aspects in terms of program participation. For example, in terms of the number of beneficiaries working with VR and the cost reimbursement, we've seen a decrease starting in January — from about 230,000 beneficiaries down to about 223,000 through June of this year. On the EN side, we have seen a slight increase from January —72, , 298 to 73, 615. There's been fluctuation in that number. That number has been higher and it did drop a bit from May to June, so we did see a decrease.

One area where we have seen an increase is the number beneficiaries assigned to VR agencies under Ticket to Work, and that number has gone from 35,000, to almost 38,000 beneficiaries; so overall, a slight general decrease in program participation. I don't think in terms of the levels that we would've anticipated given the severity of the pandemic, so people are still assigning Tickets and people are still working. VRs we are still making lots of payments. I would say generally the takeaway is it is business as usual, despite the fact that people are working remotely. That is where the program is.

With that in mind, I want to lean toward services toward veterans. We are interested programmatically. SSA would like to get some information from you. Folks from the VRs in terms of unique services or supports or materials that you use to work with the veteran population. In your area, there may be a military base, there may be veterans' facilities of some shape or form that you are engaged in. You may have some projects, local projects that you are involved in. We would like to know little bit more about those. And any materials or anything else that you could share — links or websites or social media — anything in that sort would be fantastic. We are trying to report back to Congress and our executive management those efforts in terms of outreach to the veteran population. I'm going to ask Ana before we turn it over to Katie, and if you could give us an email box that the VR people can use to send that information.

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You can send your emails and materials to EN operations at [enoperations@yourtickettowork.ssa.gov](mailto:enoperations@yourtickettowork.ssa.gov)

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Thank you, Ana. I'm going to turn it over to Katie. She will talk about some data we are collecting. I will tell you that we are paying a huge amount of money to VR agencies over the past several months for the first time that we have seen dating back to data we have captured back at 2015. We paid VRs over \$20 million, per month dating back to March. It has been an incredible amount of work and activity, and also not to steal Katie's thunder, but we have been very effective in working down the backlog, which has been a problem for us programmatically. I will turn it over to Katie Striebinger, our VR Manager.

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Hello everyone and welcome to our Quarterly VR Call. I want to give you some updates, but first like Rob mentioned, I do want to give you the status on our backlog. We currently have a little over 7,000 cases pending. But the great news is that less than 700 of those cases are more than 60 days old. We have just knocked our way through the backlog and we are no longer looking at four months out with those cases. We are really making our way through everyone's cases, and we have a large pending, but I would not say we have a backlog by any means. We are doing great and the team is working so hard to get through everyone's claims. Thank you all.

One report that we started distributing back in June was the new fiscal year-to-date VR reimbursement activity by state report, and that is a great way for everyone to see where we are. All the numbers I just said are on this report you can now see, so you can see based on this report, our current pending at the time of the report. You can see how many cases are pending and how long average time it takes for case to get worked. We are really pleased to be able to send this report to you. And be able to give it to you on a monthly basis. Some background on the report. This is a restart of report that we used to provide you before we moved over to the Ticket Portal and bridged our internal system from a standalone VERMS system to the iTOPSS system, which talks to the Ticket to Work Portal. When we made that change, we ended up losing this report. The report that you just got the last two months in June and July are an attempt to restart a report that we used to send you. I know that I have gotten some reactions on the report and some questions. I want to walk through some questions that I have already gotten. Hopefully this will maybe stop someone from asking something that I have already answered. We will have time at the end of the call, if you have any questions for something that I did not cover.

The report, unlike the other report this is broken down by region in state order, alphabetically as you can see. And this only includes states that have claims that were either received from October 1, 2019, to the present or we paid, or denied it, you know,

completed the case between October 1, 2019, and the present. So if your state is not on here, that is because you haven't sent us anything in the current fiscal year or we haven't had a claim processed from you. The same thing with the total Tickets. If you look at the total Tickets on the report, it's not only the total for all the Tickets that are currently assigned to the VR agency, because this report is already filtered to only states that have sent us claims. The report time period is October 1 to the present. I did put fiscal year date, but I do realize everyone doesn't have the same fiscal year, so the version that comes out in August will have a better header so it's clearer for everybody and you should be able to see all of the data on this report is from the same data that you have access to because the Ticket Portal connects to iTOPSS. So if you wanted to go back and look, it lists the claims allowed, if you go back and look and run a query in the Ticket Portal for claims allowed since October 1, you should get the same exact number. And if you ever get a mismatch, please contact me and let me know. That's how we are pulling the numbers. I'm not pulling any data that you shouldn't be able to pull yourself from the Ticket Portal, it should all match. The approved column, the total approved, versus total paid. If you are aware, once we approve a claim and the technician hits the pay button, it does take a few days for that payment to actually go to Treasury and get issued. That's the difference the total approved is the total that we approved for payments to SOARS but the total paid is the amount you should actually have in your bank account.

The claim amount pending in the final column is how much we have listed as pending from you. The dollar amount pending isn't obviously the amount that you're going to get paid. That is the amount that we have outstanding from you. This report does include reconsiderations. They are counted just as any other claim. They're not considered a special bucket, not a special column. It's all of your reconsiderations and being payments, you will see in the claims allowed column. Like I said, the report is ongoing. It is going to be a monthly report we will be sending out to you. If you have any questions or concerns about the data, please let us know so we can work with you on that.

One column that I know everybody has looked at is the column of the denial rate. You understand that this report starts from the beginning of the fiscal year. At the beginning of the fiscal year we were working really old claims. We were working claims before we made some policy changes, before we gave some recommendations to some states on how to submit claims better. I know the Ticket Tracker made some changes so that earnings weren't being sent too soon. This was causing a lot of denials. A lot of things are in this denial rates that many states have gone on to improve or fix or make better for us.

Don't take that denial rate to mean that we are going hold you to that denial rate that you are staring at today because we do realize that this denial rate is built on a lot of old things. But I did want to make sure we can include this denial rate so you can see the kind of data we are looking at when we made the decision back in the beginning of the fiscal year. The denial rates and the overall denial rates from all of the VR agencies that's some of the things we were looking at when we went in to and created the next thing I am going to talk about, the VERCER report. When we saw the denial rate and the fact that agencies were sending in claims early, we thought, what can we do to help them? One of the things that came out was VERCER. If we sent the agency the report showing them the earnings that we have in the system they can wait and not send them in early. This report helps us see that VERCER was something that was worthwhile doing. And we have a pilot and the most recent month, and back in May we sent it out to all of the agencies. Please take this report as a positive thing and a tool that we can use together to make decisions because that's what it's intended for. It's a check in for everybody on a monthly basis. Once again, please contact us if you have any questions.

So, the update I have on VERCER. VERCER went out the first week of May. It is a quarterly report. We sent reports to 59 agencies. So far, 39 out of the 59 agencies have sent us 2,522 claims based on VERCER. And that is based [on] if you put VERCER in the remarks section. So that's how we pull that report. We haven't gotten to May claims yet, so I don't have a breakdown for those claims and on those and how those VERCER cases are looking. But I will definitely have a report on the next quarterly call. You can expect, if you are signed up for VERCER, if you are one of those 59 agencies, the next quarterly report will be distributed to you the first week of August. Our most recent OXY File should be getting to us this week. So after we get the new OXY data, we can then send you the report. Expect that the first week of August. The final item I want to make sure I discuss is that we have an upcoming training for all VR agencies and anyone who is interested. The title is "Submitting Successful Claims to Improve VR Cost Reimbursement Allowance Rates." It is on July 23 from 1 pm to 3 pm. You should have gotten a GovDelivery message.

I am just going to read it to you: "Social Security, in collaboration with the Council for State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation and the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind, will present a webinar to address a mutual goal of improving the submission process for Cost Reimbursement claims. Vocational Rehabilitation agency staff who handle and/or oversee Cost Reimbursement functions should attend this webinar to learn from both Social Security staff and VR agency peers how to submit claims to increase approvals of initial submissions and decrease denials." You should get another GovDelivery this week with the dial-in information.

Please mark your calendar. We look forward to everybody attending.

I am going to hand it over to Raquel.

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Good afternoon everyone. I have a few quick reminders for you. First, beginning with the email blast. They do come via GovDelivery delivery system. If you are not receiving the email blast on a regular basis, the agenda for today's call for example, please email me at the VR help desk and I will make sure you get on the list. In regard to the email blast, we tried hard to send out all of the important information as soon as possible in regard to new policy changes, procedures, call formula, anything we feel that you guys need to know immediately. We send it out via the email blast. We will appreciate if you take time to actually read them. And save them in a file for you. Especially when it comes to different coding and denials and procedures. Save the information; it is really important.

The earnings, the new denial code is our 590 Code. Just want to emphasize exactly what we are looking for when you receive that denial in regard to earnings. The technicians and the analysts — the first thing they do before we even review your claim as we look at the earnings information that you submit. If you're looking at VERCER, you should be putting it on the remarks tab. If you are actually submitting documentation, we need to see three out of four quarters of earnings. At or above SGA level or Blind SGA Level. If that is not there, we are submitting claims with earnings, but they are below the SGA level, you will receive a 590. If we don't see any documentation from you will receive a 590. If you find that you are receiving a 590 in error, please email me at the VR help desk.

Next topic, PII. One thing we cannot do is provide you all with an SSN, no Social Security number. If you're trying to upload a claim and you having an issue with the name Social Security number did not match, you can email me the name that you show us the Social Security number you should come if your Social Security number is wrong, that is the only information I can provide you. I can only say it is wrong go back to the VR counselor to figure out the information that I can give you the person's name if you have their first name and they got married or divorced, that I can provide to you but I can never issue to you the Social Security number. For the beneficiary complaint, there are emails that I receive on a beneficiary contact the Help Line. And they just want to complain about the VR. The only action that I take on that, I forward it to the VR director and one of you as well just to give you the FYI that the person is complaining about maybe a counselor whatever the issue is. That's all I do. I take that action on my end I consider it closed. I let the VR director handle it. In regard to one thing that is not on here, but I want to talk about is reconsideration. A quick reminder that when you submit a reconsideration, when we review the information, we are using the initial submission date. You should never receive a 620 Untimely Filed Denial on your reconsideration unless the initial claim was just incorrect. If you are finding

your consideration was 620 Untimely Filed Denial, email me again. If I find a reconsideration or anything like that where it is a non-error on our part, I create another reconsideration right then and there, and we will process it immediately. I find that it is something that was the VR error then you will have to upload the new claim and wait for first in first out to get it processed. That is all that I have.

One more thing, for the Boston region, which is Region number 1, I was just informed that there is a new regional coordinator, her name is Sandy Rodriguez. That is my Connecticut General Blind, Massachusetts General Blind, Maine General Blind, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont. That is your new regional coordinator, Sandy Rodriguez. Her email address [Sandy.Rodriguez@ssa.gov](mailto:Sandy.Rodriguez@ssa.gov), again if you need her email address, contact me. That is all I have for today. You can open the line for questions.

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If you would like to ask a question, please signal on your keypad by pressing \*1.

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[ Pause ]

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One more time, \*1 if you would like to ask a question. We will pause for another moment. We have a couple of questions.

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[ Pause ]

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On the report that is sent once a month, what does column B, Receipts, is that just the number of claims that you have received?

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The number of receipts is the number of cases that your agency has sent since October 1, 2019. If you submitted through the portal. The first row had 45 so we have 45.

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Thank you.

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I couldn't understand the registration for the training on the 23rd.

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There is no registration. There is just the dial-in which will be provided this week. Did you receive the original GovDelivery?

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Yes.

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You got that message letting you know there was a training, this week you should see another message with the dial-in information.

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Thank you.

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I have a few questions on the chat. I didn't know if you are able to see that.

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[ Indiscernible ]

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I am logged in, but it says it hasn't started but you can ask questions.

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The first email you sent out has the chat verse in which those waste, welcome to the call. The questions that I have are one, when you have a claim pending, and before goes into payments made to me stare a period where the claimant isn't showing up because somebody is auditing it?

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[ Multiple Speakers ]

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The only case we know of is isolated. We submit the case for approval and then somehow SOARS makes the payment date a future date. And it is very rare. Today's the 14<sup>th</sup> and they make a payment date the 15<sup>th</sup> you might not see it because it makes a date in the future. It is very random and rare that it happens. We tried to get them to fix it. That would be the only time it would be in some sort of weird limbo. I tried to add them up. Sometimes there is some missing that they eventually show up and it is very brief. I thought that was kind of in limbo.

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The other question I've had people ask me about whether I submit self-employment claims, because we don't have wage information for those, and I know that you guys eventually get IRS records. Is there any magical way, it is hard to reach that when your timeline and you don't have any past records, and people are filing for extensions on the taxes and things like that. I tend to not send in self-employment claims, some not sure if there is anything because we don't have wage information that you get the information. Any suggestions?

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Only suggestions I have would be when you find you don't have any information to email me at the help desk, if I do go on there and able to see earnings of course I will let you know about it. If there is nothing there, there's nothing we can do about that and this you're able to reach out to the beneficiary get the W-2, which, of course, is very rare.

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How long is it before you guys see IRS records?

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It depends on when they file. Not everybody files in a timely manner so we obtained the ones when they file. I give you an actual day. That you might see it until it is past the one-year mark.

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Unfortunately, yes.

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I wanted to say that I also put on there that will tell, you respond quickly to all of my inquiries and I appreciate it.

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Thank you.

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\*1 if you would like to ask a question. Looks like we have no further questions.

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Thank you so much. I want to remind you that the fourth-quarter call will be October 20. It will be at 1 p.m. You will get the information I normally send out requesting any type of topics or issues you may have. The agenda will follow. Thank you everyone for calling in. Stay safe and healthy. Have a great afternoon.

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Thank you for your participation.

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