

VIReC Data Investigation: VETSNET File

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Main Points

- VETSNET File is a main source for information regarding VBA compensation and pension benefits paid to veterans and their beneficiaries as well as VBA disability ratings.
- The file has over 5 million records: 93% are Veteran records, 7% are beneficiary records.
- Demographic variables on the file are well populated allowing for linkage with other data sources (99.4% of Veteran records have SSN data, 97.6% have gender data, and approximately 88% have complete dates of birth).
- Of the Veteran records contained in the file at the time of this data investigation, 87.7% contained at least one disability diagnostic code and 18.8% had as many as nine codes. VIREC's [VETSNET Corporate Mini Master File](#) Web page provides information on obtaining diagnostic code descriptions.
- National Data Systems' Compensation and Pension/VETSNET Data Web page provides information regarding the contents of the VETSNET File and data quality issues.

Background

The Veterans Service Network (VETSNET) Corporate Mini Master File (VETSNET File) consists of selected fields from the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) Corporate Database. This database supports the VBA systems used to administer Veterans' benefits including compensation and pension benefits. The VETSNET File is created monthly at the VA Hines Information Technology Center by VBA personnel and is transmitted to the VA Austin Information Technology Center where it is made available to researchers. Information regarding the file is available on VIREC's [VETSNET Corporate Mini Master File](#) Web page. Useful research data contained on the VETSNET File include disability ratings (type of disability and percent disabled) and the amount of compensation and pension benefits paid to Veterans.

VIREC analyzed the contents of the VETSNET File to provide descriptive statistics that could be useful for researchers. The file created August 1, 2010, was used in this analysis.

Descriptive Statistics

The VETSNET File created on August 1, 2010, contained 5,061,671 records. There are two types of records in the VETSNET File: 1) Veteran records (PAYEE_TYP_CD = '00' or '99'), i.e., payment is made to the Veteran and 2) beneficiary records (all other PAYEE_TYP_CD values), i.e. payment is made to a beneficiary. The majority of records on the file were Veteran records (4,725,441 records, 93%) versus beneficiary records (336,230 records, 7%). The following statistics are based on the Veteran records only.

Demographics

Analysis of the fields commonly used to link Veteran information across data sources, SSN (SCRSSN), gender (VET_GENDER_CD) and date of birth (VET_BIRTH_DT), found that a small percentage of Veteran records do not have an SSN (29,424 records, 0.6%). Of the Veteran records with an SSN, 5,476 records (0.1%) did not have a date of birth. The month and day of birth were set to January 1 for 6.8% of the records when it was expected that only 0.3% (1 out of 365 possible days) would have a birth date of January 1. Thus, it appears that approximately 6.5% of records may be missing the month and day of birth. The day of birth was set to the first of the month in 16.0% of records when it was expected that only 3.3% (12 out 365 possible days) would have a birth date of the first of the month. Thus, for another 6.2% (16.0% - 3.3% - 6.5%) of records the day of birth may be missing and is set to the first day of the recorded birth month. The likelihood that the day or month of birth was set to the first increased with Veteran age. The gender distribution showed that 91.5% of the records with an SSN are for male Veterans and 6.1% are for female Veterans; the remaining 2.4% of records have no gender recorded.

The VETSNET File also contains death dates (VET_DEATH_DT). These death dates were compared to the death dates on the [VHA Vital Status File](#) (VSF) created on July 26, 2010, for SSNs found in both files. Almost all deaths on the VETSNET File were found on the VSF (99.6%), and the majority not found were deaths occurring in July 2010. It is expected that these deaths would appear in the next quarterly release of the VSF. The VETSNET death dates were compared to the death dates from the various mortality data sources on the VSF. The percentage of dates that matched by source varied from 95% to 99%. VSF death dates sourced from [BIRLS](#) had the highest percentage of exact matches with the VETSNET death date.

Awards

Award status (AWARD_CURNT_STAT_CD) indicates if the compensation or pension benefit or award is still being paid. Most of the Veteran records had an active award status (see table 1). All records had an award effective date (AWARD_EFCTV_DT) indicating the date the award became effective. And almost all of the records with an active status or suspended status had a last payment date (LAST_PAID_DT). But terminated records were unlikely to have a last payment date (less than 15%). Approximately 80% of terminated records contained a date of death. Awards may be terminated for reasons other than death.

Award Status	Number of Veteran Records	% of Total	Records with a date of death	% of Row	Records with a date of last payment	% of Row
ACTIVE	3,372,699	71.4%	109	0.0%	3,350,679	99.3%
SUSPENDED	10,320	0.2%	2,077	20.1%	9,744	94.4%
TERMINATED	1,342,422	28.4%	1,080,408	80.5%	193,657	14.4%
Total	4,725,441	100.0%	1,082,594	22.9%	3,554,080	75.2%

There were 6,781 Veterans with two records on the file and 12 Veterans with 3 records on the file; all other Veterans had only one record on the file. Multiple records for a Veteran are generated when the Veteran has received different types of awards (AWARD_LINE_TYP_CD). For example, a Veteran may have a terminated pension award and an active compensation award or a Veteran may be receiving both a compensation award and a Medal of Honor award. The 6,793 Veteran cases with multiple records were reviewed. And in all cases, the records had different award types, and no Veteran had more than one active award type. Most of the records contained information regarding compensation awards (83%) versus pension awards (17%).

Disability Ratings

Disability ratings for service connected and non-service connected disabilities are contained on the file. The diagnostic type code and level of impairment percentage for up to nine different disabilities are available (DIAG_TYP_CD1 through DIAG_TYP_CD9 and DSBLTY_PCT_NBR1 through DSBLTY_PCT_NBR9 respectively). If a Veteran has more than nine disabilities, only nine will be on the VETSNET File with service connected disabilities listed first by order of highest percentage followed by non-service connected disabilities. Each diagnostic type code corresponds to a specific disability. Most of the Veteran records contained at least one diagnostic type code (87.7%), and 863,350 records (18.3%) had nine diagnostic type codes listed. Diagnostic codes were found on both pension and compensation records. We reviewed the first listed diagnostic type code for compensation records (AWARD_LINE_TYP_CD = 'C') and found a small number of cases where no diagnostic code was entered (46,215 out of 3,938,967 records or 1.2%). This potential data issue is being reviewed by the VBA.

The percentage assigned to the disability indicates the level of impairment due to the disability. Non-service connected disabilities usually do not have an impairment percentage. The overall percentage of disability or combined rating is provided in the combined degree percent field (COMBND_DEGREE_PCT). We reviewed all nine impairment percentages on all Veteran records and found only 19 cases of service connected diagnostics with missing impairment percentages. This potential data issue is being reviewed by the VBA.

Conclusions

The VETNETS File contains useful information about Veterans receiving compensation and pension benefits. Demographic variables on the file are well populated and can be used to link the information contained on the VETNETS File to other data. But keep in mind when linking on date of birth that approximately 12.8% of the records may have a missing month or day of birth that is set to 1.

The VETSNET File will eventually replace the Compensation and Pension Mini Master File (C&P Mini File). The C&P Mini File is an extract of the legacy Benefits Delivery Network (BDN) which is being replaced by the VBA Corporate Database and a new system. Until the migration from the BDN is complete both the VETSNET File and the C&P Mini File must be used to identify Veterans receiving compensation and pension benefits.

In addition to the possible data quality issues noted in this update, NDS posts VETSNET File data quality issues and resolutions on their Web page, Compensation and Pension/VETSNET Data. This Web page should be consulted when using the VETSNET File.

Suggested Citation

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<http://www.virec.research.va.gov/DataSourcesName/VETSNET/DataInvest-VETSNET.pdf>