

WHY PTSD CLAIMS ARE DENIED



Three missing service-connection elements accounted for the classified denial reasons in RateMyVSO’s PTSD Board-decision dataset.

RESEARCH POPULATION

34,720

Denied PTSD service-connection issues in published BVA decisions



PRIMARY REASON CLASSIFIED

30,585

88.1% of the broader denied service-connection population

READ THE DENOMINATOR

The percentages below use only the 30,585 decisions classified into one of the three primary reasons.

PRIMARY CLASSIFIED DENIAL REASON

WHERE THE CLAIM FAILED

NO CURRENT DIAGNOSIS

1

51.9%

15,874 DECISIONS

THE RECORD DID NOT ESTABLISH CURRENT PTSD

Symptoms, treatment, or another mental-health diagnosis did not establish a current PTSD diagnosis for the claimed issue.

CHECK THE RECORD FOR

- ✓ A current qualified evaluation
- ✓ DSM-5 diagnostic support
- ✓ Consistent treatment records
- ✓ Evidence addressing contrary findings

NO IN-SERVICE ELEMENT

2

40.5%

12,399 DECISIONS

THE STRESSOR OR IN-SERVICE EVENT WAS NOT ESTABLISHED

The evidence did not establish a qualifying event, injury, disease, or applicable stressor under the governing PTSD rule.

CHECK THE RECORD FOR

- ✓ The correct stressor category
- ✓ Official or alternative evidence
- ✓ Accurate dates, locations, and units
- ✓ Applicable corroboration exceptions

NO MEDICAL NEXUS

3

7.6%

2,312 DECISIONS

THE RECORD DID NOT ESTABLISH THE MEDICAL LINK

The evidence did not adequately connect the current PTSD diagnosis to the qualifying in-service stressor.

CHECK THE RECORD FOR

- ✓ A clear medical opinion
- ✓ The stressor the opinion relies on
- ✓ A reasoned explanation
- ✓ Conflicting medical evidence

THE PRACTICAL LESSON

BUILD ALL THREE SERVICE-CONNECTION ELEMENTS

A strong rating case cannot repair a missing service-connection element. First establish the condition, the in-service event or stressor, and the medical connection.

01

CURRENT PTSD DIAGNOSIS

Qualified, current, and supported.

+

02

QUALIFYING IN-SERVICE STRESSOR

Identified under the correct evidentiary rule.

+

03

MEDICAL NEXUS

A supported link between the two.



DO NOT COMBINE DIFFERENT QUESTIONS

SERVICE CONNECTION AND DISABILITY PERCENTAGE ARE SEPARATE DECISIONS

These denial classifications address whether PTSD was service connected. They do not measure whether symptoms supported 0%, 10%, 30%, 50%, 70%, or 100% after service connection was established.

HOW TO READ THIS RESEARCH

DESCRIPTIVE, NOT PREDICTIVE

Board population: Published BVA decisions are appeals, not all initial VA claims.

Unclassified remainder: 4,135 denied service-connection issues were outside these classifications or lacked a sufficiently clear classification.

Primary categories: Each classified denial was assigned to one of these three reasons.

No personal forecast: These frequencies do not predict the outcome of an individual claim.

READ YOUR OWN DECISION LETTER. The stated reasons, favorable findings, evidence list, and review options control what should happen next in a specific case.



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Research-backed VA claim education

Source: RateMyVSO analysis of published BVA decisions coded for PTSD under diagnostic code 9411. Data generated September 23, 2026. Educational use only. Not legal or medical advice.