

VA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) Hotline FAQ

Table of Contents

VA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) Hotline FAQ	1
Question 1: What is the OIG Hotline?.....	2
Question 2: What types of complaints does the OIG typically accept?.....	2
Question 3: What types of common complaints does the OIG not act on?.....	3
Question 4: How should VA employees and other covered entities securely convey protected information to the OIG?	3
Question 5: Can complainants choose to have their identities kept confidential or remain anonymous?	4
Question 6: What information and documentation should a complaint include?.....	4
Question 7: How may individuals report Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) 52.203- 13 issues?	5
Question 8: What happens with the complaints the OIG hotline receives?.....	6
Question 9: What privacy safeguards cover hotline case referrals from the OIG?	7
Question 10: Can individuals obtain the status and results of hotline complaints?.....	7
Question 11: Can you appeal a hotline complaint-related decision?	8
Question 12: What if I need more information?	8

This section addressed FAQs related to the VA OIG Hotline

Question 1: What is the OIG Hotline?

Answer: The Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended (IG Act) authorizes the OIG to receive and investigate complaints or information concerning the possible existence of an activity constituting a violation of law, rule, or regulation; gross mismanagement; gross waste of funds; abuse of authority; or a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety. Accordingly, the OIG hotline accepts complaints of such activity related to VA programs and operations.

The Hotline Division is a component of the OIG Office of Management and Administration and provides information for investigations, audits, reviews, and inspections performed by the OIG. As a result, the OIG hotline helps ensure the proper and efficient use of taxpayer dollars and government resources for the care of our nation's veterans, families, and caregivers. The results of the latest OIG hotline work are included in the OIG's [Semiannual Reports to Congress](#).

The OIG hotline is not meant as a primary crisis response line. If you are a veteran in crisis, or know of someone who needs immediate support, contact the VA's Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 (and press 1) or visit www.veteranscrisisline.net for additional ways to connect with a responder. Report other emergency situations involving potential crimes or harm to persons or property by calling 911 or VA police before contacting the OIG.

Question 2: What types of complaints does the OIG typically accept?

Answer: The hotline receives information and complaints on a wide range of potential misconduct, including the following:

- Allegations of unlawful activity
- Fraud, waste, and abuse
- Violations of VA policy
- Gross mismanagement involving VA programs and operations.

The OIG hotline staff work with experts from the OIG's oversight offices to triage the 30,000-40,000 or more contacts received each year. Together they determine the best course for disposition and identify the most critical and impactful issues for priority attention, particularly individuals at imminent risk of harm. Staff decide whether to develop allegations into cases based on factors including the potential risk to veterans or to VA programs and operations, and whether the OIG may be the only avenue of

redress. **Before submitting a complaint, please read the answer to the following question regarding which complaints the VA OIG does NOT accept.**

Note: The OIG has the sole discretion to pay cash rewards for critical information not previously known by the OIG that leads to a felony charge, a substantial civil monetary recovery, or significant improvements or savings for VA operations and programs. The information must be necessary to the effective administration and enforcement of laws within the OIG's jurisdiction. All non-anonymous complaints may be considered for potential awards.

Question 3: What types of common complaints does the OIG not act on?

Answer: The hotline does not act on complaints that are unrelated to programs and operations of the Department of Veterans Affairs or are more appropriately addressed in another legal or administrative forum. The following table provides information on common types of complaints and the appropriate contact outside of the OIG.

Note: The OIG does examine matters that relate to patient safety and timely access to quality care. Be aware, however, that VA's Patient Advocacy Program is a resource for all veterans and their families who receive care at VHA facilities and clinics. Patient advocates are available to assist with specific questions, concerns, or disagreements about medical treatment. To learn more and find a patient advocate, visit [VHA Patient Advocate](#).

For more information on who VA Employees should contact based on complaints, see the tables at www.vaoidg.gov/hotline/faq.

Question 4: How should VA employees and other covered entities securely convey protected information to the OIG?

Answer: Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) regulations specifically authorize whistleblowers' disclosure of protected information to a health oversight agency, such as the OIG (as described in 45 C.F.R. 164.512(d)).

If a VA employee needs to send information to the OIG, he or she must ensure compliance with VA policy regarding the transmission of any sensitive information, including personally identifiable information (PII) and HIPAA-protected information, regardless of whether he or she sends the information by mail, fax, or electronically. For email, this means using encrypted VA email. Please note, while the whistleblower protection laws shield employees from retaliation for providing protected disclosures, they do not allow an individual to violate laws, regulations, or policy in furtherance of such disclosure while engaging in such activities.

VA employees, VA contractors, and any other HIPAA-covered individuals or entities (e.g., private healthcare providers, insurance providers) should not submit PII, protected health information (PHI), or other VA-sensitive information (including patient names) via this web submission form. Please contact the OIG hotline at 1-800-488-8244 to determine how to submit such information.

Question 5: Can complainants choose to have their identities kept confidential or remain anonymous?

Answer: The complainant may remain confidential (i.e., known only to the OIG) or anonymous (i.e., unknown even to the OIG). If the complainant chooses to remain anonymous, the OIG cannot obtain additional information on the allegation (e.g., testimonial or documentary evidence and the identity of witnesses) and cannot update the complainant. Confidential status allows communication between OIG personnel and the complainant after the original complaint is received. It provides greater opportunities for both the OIG and the complainant to advance triaging and review that cannot occur with anonymous submissions.

The Inspector General Act (IG Act) protects a complainant who chooses to remain confidential. The IG Act prevents disclosure of that complainant's identity outside the OIG unless the Inspector General determines that disclosure is unavoidable during the course of the investigation. OIG staff endeavor to protect complainants' identities to the greatest extent possible. However, during the course of an investigation, an individual's identity may become discernable (for example, when a very limited number of people are positioned to have information about the particular problem reported). The OIG will attempt to contact a confidential complainant before releasing his or her identity. To help avoid disclosure, the confidential employee complainant should provide a contact address and telephone number unconnected to the VA facility or other work premises.

Question 6: What information and documentation should a complaint include?

Answer: Complaints should include sufficient information for the OIG to determine whether they warrant review or investigation by the OIG, such as:

- The particular VA facility or office involved.
- The identity of the wrongdoer(s) and victim(s).
- The alleged legal or policy violation(s) or other misconduct.

- The effect of the wrongdoing, such as dollars lost, individuals harmed, or delay produced.
- The date(s) the event(s) occurred.
- The identity of any witness(es) to the event(s).
- Copies of relevant documents that support the allegation.
- Notice as to whether another entity has already reviewed the allegation; and
- Contact information for complainants choosing to provide his or her name.

IMPORTANT: Please see the FAQ above for information on how to send information to the OIG in compliance with HIPAA and VA privacy requirements.

Question 7: How may individuals report Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) 52.203-13 issues?

Answer: To file a mandatory disclosure as required by FAR clause 52.203-13, the individual making the report must be a director, officer, employee, or independent contractor authorized to act on behalf of the organization. In addition, the individual must have evidence that a principal, employee, agent, or subcontractor of the contractor has committed a violation of the civil False Claims Act or a violation of federal criminal law involving fraud, conflict of interest, bribery, or gratuity violations found in Title 18 of the United States Code.

Mail disclosures to:

VA Inspector General Hotline (53H)
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Please provide the following information:

- Name and business contact information
- Alternative contact information
- Certification that they are authorized to act on behalf of the organization
- The company's status (prime contractor or subcontractor)
- Contract number and the number for all underlying task orders, blanket purchase agreements, purchase orders, or other procurement documents relating to VA

- The contracting officer's name and facility for each VA awarded contract, task order, purchase order, or blanket purchase agreement
- If another agency awarded the contract, the agency and contracting officer's name and phone number
- A detailed description of the facts and circumstances surrounding the reported activities, including the evidence forming the basis of this report, names of the individuals involved, dates, location, manner in which the matter was discovered, potential witnesses and their involvement, and any corrective action taken by the company
 - Please see FAQs above regarding submission of PHI and HIPPA protected information

Question 8: What happens with the complaints the OIG hotline receives?

Answer: Hotline staff log all complaints and may follow up for additional details if contact information is provided. Given limited resources, the OIG unfortunately cannot investigate every complaint. Cases are selected following a staff review, with priority given to matters having the most potential risk to veterans, VA programs and systems, or for which the OIG may be the only avenue of redress.

After the hotline staff determines that the matter is within the OIG's jurisdiction and has sufficient information to inform further action, in addition to meeting considerations such as those above, it considers whether to open a case or make a referral.

- **Open hotline cases.** The OIG opens cases for further review for serious allegations of criminal activity, fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement. The nature of the allegations determines which OIG division(s) will manage the case. Those cases may also result in the opening of audits, reviews, inspections, and investigations on a broader scale.
- **Refer cases to VA.** The OIG may refer certain matters directly to the appropriate VA office if the allegation appears to warrant some action on that facility or office's part to move forward. OIG staff endeavor to protect complainants' identities to the greatest extent possible and make the referral to a position at a level higher and more removed than that where the alleged problems occurred. A case referral requires that the VA office or facility to which the matter is referred reviews the matter and responds back to the OIG about its findings and any actions taken. The appropriate OIG directorate reviews that information and determines if it is responsive and appropriate. If so, the OIG will close the referral. If not, the OIG may ask for additional information and clarification or may decide to open its own review of the matter. This practice allows the OIG to

provide oversight of significantly more issues than if it relied solely on its own resources for all review activity.

- **Refer other matters to VA.** In a relatively small number of complaints, non-case referrals are made for less serious complaints, but the OIG believes some VA action appears necessary (such as confirming whether an item ordered for a veteran was properly approved and received or reviewing other types of documentation). The OIG does not require a response after facility staff have reviewed the matter.
- **Make referrals to non-VA entities.** The OIG directs allegations of serious misconduct involving another federal agency (such as Health and Human Services or Social Security) to that agency for appropriate action.

Question 9: What privacy safeguards cover hotline case referrals from the OIG?

Answer: Hotline cases and complaints are official records covered by the Privacy Act (5 U.S.C. §552a), the Freedom of Information Act (5 U.S.C. § 552), and the [OIG's system of records](#). The OIG releases hotline case referrals to VA offices for review on a need-to-know basis; VA offices must not further release the referrals.

Although the subject of a complaint may provide information for a response during the course of the review, as detailed in VA Directive 0701, non-OIG offices may not provide the subject with a copy of the allegations or the case referral. In addition, the response to the case referral is part of the OIG hotline file, and its release is subject to OIG approval.

Question 10: Can individuals obtain the status and results of hotline complaints?

Answer: The OIG attempts to provide a receipt for all complaints it receives in writing (as with online forms). OIG responses often provide additional information about what to expect following submission. The OIG cannot respond when no email, name, address, or return telephone number is provided with the complaint, as in the case of an anonymous complainant.

Due to privacy and identity concerns, the hotline cannot respond to telephone or written requests for the status of cases, including whether complaints and written materials have been received. If it does not accept the reported matter for further examination, the OIG may inform the complainant of more appropriate alternatives.

When possible, staff notify the complainant when the hotline case is closed. To determine the outcome of a closed case, individuals must submit a request under the

Freedom of Information Act. Information is available on the OIG's website ([FOIA requests](#)). Requests may also be made in writing to OIG Freedom of Information Act Section (50CI), 810 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC, 20420. Due to privacy concerns, complainants generally are not entitled to receive information on disciplinary or adverse action taken against subjects of their complaints.

Question 11: Can you appeal a hotline complaint-related decision?

Answer: The OIG has discretion on how to most effectively and efficiently process and review hotline complaints. Hotline staff conduct multiple checks and quality controls. No right of appeal applies to a decision by the Hotline Division regarding the actions taken on a particular complaint. The Hotline Division is not a statutory entity, court, or other administrative body.

Question 12: What if I need more information?

Answer: For more information call [1-800-827-1000](tel:1-800-827-1000).

(Hearing Impaired TDD line [711](tel:711)).

If you need an interpreter: Call [800-698-2411](tel:800-698-2411) and select 0.