

Chairman Daniel K. Akaka

Aloha and welcome to today's hearing.

Disability compensation is at the heart of what our Government offers to wounded warriors. Yet, many veterans and others believe that the VA compensation system is fundamentally broken.

To understand what significant changes, if any, are needed, the Committee will devote significant time and energy to disability compensation. No one on this Committee undertakes this endeavor lightly.

As I said at an earlier hearing on compensation, the Veterans' Disability Benefits Commission report is part of the roadmap that we are following to improve the system.

Today is the third hearing in a series. The first hearing focused on the overall findings and recommendations in the Commission's report. That report relied heavily on the expert work performed by the witnesses before us today.

There were two organizations that provided the bulk of the research used by the Commission - the C.N.A. Corporation and the Institute of Medicine.

I.O.M. did a series of studies, including a hard look at VA's system for evaluating military service and PTSD. The recommendations in these studies have tremendous ramifications for servicemembers who are right now in harm's way.

I.O.M. also looked at the way VA makes decisions about presumptive disabilities, and how disabilities are medically evaluated and rated. I.O.M.'s work has broad implications for VA's disability compensation system.

The Veterans' Disability Benefits Commission asked the C.N.A. Corporation for help on one essential question - whether the benefits provided to veterans and their survivors for disabilities and deaths are appropriate.

The recommendations made by I.O.M. and the C.N.A. Corporation could potentially impact millions of veterans and their survivors. I am pleased that we have representatives of both groups here today to help us better understand their findings.

In particular, there are some who question whether disability compensation serves as a disincentive for wellness. Given I.O.M.'s recent report in this area, I would like to know whether this view is supported by the literature I.O.M. reviewed.