

USER INSIGHTS

Improving veteran's online channels to
access their benefits

IN THIS PRESENTATION

BACKGROUND & PROBLEM

Framing the Design Challenge

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02

RESEARCH METHODS

Our action plan

RESULTS

03

04

KEY TAKEAWAYS

CONTEXT

Background and Problem

01

Our Team



Nelly Rousseau
Student at Harvard
Kennedy School



Lien Tran
Student at Harvard
College



A. Taylor Thomas
MD/MPH student
currently studying
Health Management at
Harvard



Jeremiah Hay
Student at Harvard
Kennedy School

Our Client



Charles Worthington
U.S. Department of Veterans
Affairs CTO



C.C. Gong
Presidential Innovation Fellow



Clarice Chan
Presidential Innovation Fellow

BACKGROUND

> **20 million**

US VETERANS

More than **9 million** receive benefits ranging from healthcare to professional development to home loans

OUR CLIENT

THE VA

- **1 in 10** government employees work for the VA
- The VA runs the **largest** healthcare system in the country



THEIR VISION

“VA will deliver self-service tools on par with top private sector companies, and will have the best online experience in the federal government. Every digital service will be personalized to the individual using it.”



BACKGROUND



VA.GOV REDESIGN (2018)

A significant improvement in user experience and service delivery



TRAFFIC FROM MOBILE

But the experience is not optimized for mobile users



14 DIFFERENT SERVICES

Ranging from healthcare, to housing to life insurance to employment

THE PROBLEM: OVERVIEW

User complaints range from the simply negative...

"It's terrible."

"[The web tools are] super unnecessary timesucks in an already brutal bureaucracy."

To the more constructive.

"Trying to navigate from point A to point C...you have to go through 5 or 6 different stages to get where you need"

"They have to have a lot of protections...you have all these passwords...every time I log in there is some password reset I have to do"

"There are numerous programs and benefits from the VA that are hard to navigate. Simplifying this process would be a huge help."

PROBLEM STATEMENT

How might we make it easier for **veterans** to access their **online services and benefits**, particularly in light of the increase in **mobile** users and non-optimized mobile experience?

RESEARCH METHODS

How we explore the
problem domain

02

RESEARCH METHODS

IN-DEPTH USER INTERVIEWS

See the VA through Veterans' experiences

SCOPING CLIENT NEEDS

Align our action plan with the client's real need

SECONDARY RESEARCH

Available public reports, website usage data

ONLINE SURVEY

Gather quantitative data

REACHING OUT TO THE VETERANS



BLACK HISTORY BOSTON
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 Rair Housing and Equity  City of Boston Veterans Services

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 **Veterans news and information**
r/Veterans

[Posts](#) [Wiki](#)

TYPICAL USER PATHWAYS

There is no typical user pathway due to...

...wide range of services

Different services - vocational training vs. housing vouchers vs. GI bill - have drastically different enrollment processes and timelines, and individual Veterans are eligible for (and take advantage of) different combinations of benefits.

and different modes of enrollment

Further, Veterans can complete parts of these processes in person, over the phone, or online - and different Veterans have different preferences (more on that later).

RESULTS

What we learn from our
research

03

WHO WE HEARD FROM

62 veterans

35 User Interviews

27 Survey responses



WHO WE INTERVIEWED

Age (years old):

13 < 40, 6 40-60, 16 65+



30 used healthcare services (86%)



30 have a smartphone (86%)



25 have visited the website (71%)



12 have visited the website from a mobile device (34%)



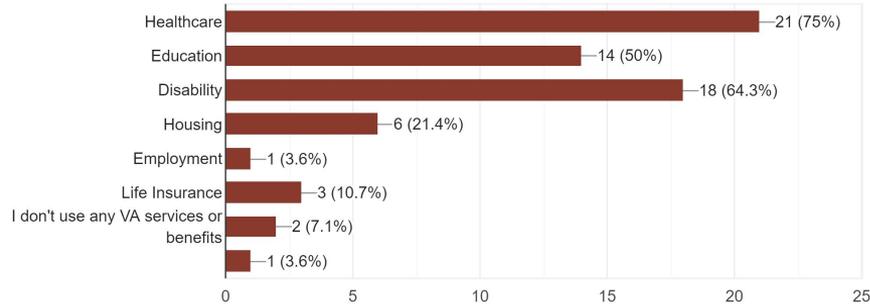
14 said they would use an app (40%)



DATA: ONLINE SURVEY

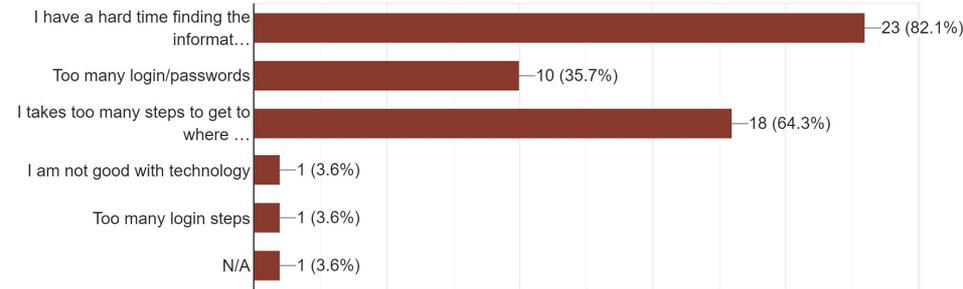
Which VA services/benefits do you use most often?

28 responses



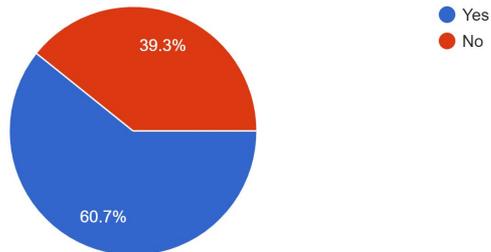
When you visit VA.gov, do you encounter any of the following difficulties?

28 responses



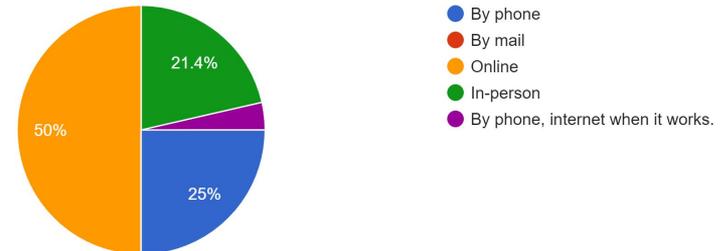
Have you ever gone to VA.gov on a mobile device like a smartphone or tablet (iPad)?

28 responses



What is your preferred method of contacting the VA (to access information, make appointments, etc.)?

28 responses



NO-APP NATE



NATE

Almost
certainly
won't use an
app.

USES WEBSITE

Never

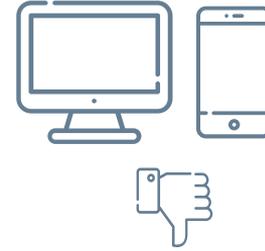
USER INSIGHT

Nate doesn't have any interest in digital interaction with the VA.

TECHNOLOGY

Doesn't have a smartphone, and either doesn't have a computer or doesn't like to use it.

"I'm bad with computers."



An **older** Veteran, Nate is a little new to this whole "internet" thing. He only communicates over the phone or in person, and has **never seen the website**.

"I will categorically not use an app."

May have had **bad experiences** with the VA in the past (long waiting times, long/frequent travel to doctors).

Nate might have pain points with the VA, but they're outside the digital realm.

CAREFUL CARL



CARL

Might be able to use app, but probably won't

USES WEBSITE

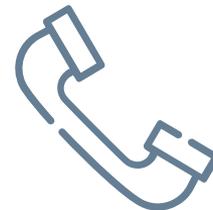
Sometimes

USER INSIGHT

Carl is very measured and careful in his interactions with the VA.

TECHNOLOGY

Might have a smartphone and basic tech literacy, but doesn't report complex digital behavior.

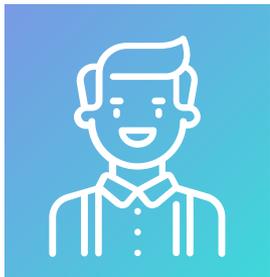


Carl might use website sometimes, but prefers to engage in **person** or by **phone**.

He might be able to engage through an app, but **only if it's very user-friendly**.

*"I've been on the website a couple of times. When I do something online, I like to create some time to really sit down at my desk and **do it carefully.**"*

AVOIDANCE ANDY



ANDY

The
Tech-Literate
Veteran Who
Prefers to Talk
to Real People

USES WEBSITE

Never

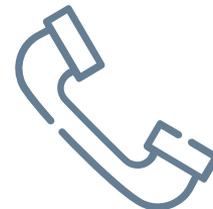
USER INSIGHT

Andy avoids the hassle of going to VA.gov and prefers to speak directly to an expert instead.

TECHNOLOGY

Andy has a smartphone and uses mobile applications. He grew up with computers and smartphones, and uses the most complex technologies with ease.

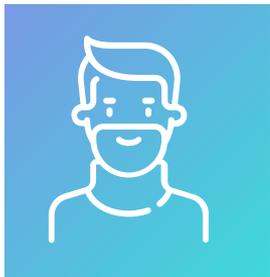
"I don't even bother."



Andy is a young veteran who prefers to interact with the VA over phone or in person. He went on the **VA website once** and found it confusing, so he prefers to go to the VA or a Veteran Service Organization in-person to **speak with an expert**, who he knows can quickly help him with anything he needs.

He would likely not use a mobile application because, when it comes to the VA, he prefers to **call** or go **in-person**.

SATISFIED STEVE



STEVE

The Low-Maintenance, Satisfied User

USES WEBSITE

Fairly often

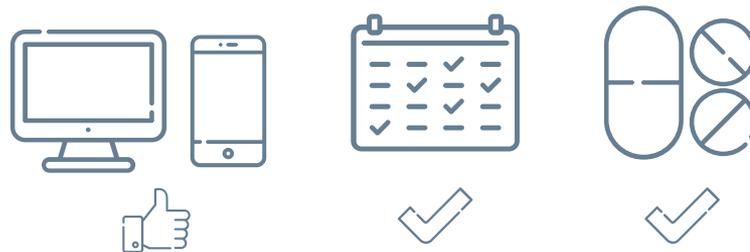
USER INSIGHT

Admits the website can be difficult to navigate at times, but is overall very pleased with the experience

TECHNOLOGY

Steve has a smartphone and uses mobile applications. He has learned everything he knows about technology from his grandson, and is in awe with what the world wide web can do.

"I'm really happy with what they have out there now [on the website]."



Steve is an older veteran who regularly logs on to his **"My HealtheVet"** portal through the VA website to complete tasks like **schedule appointments** and order **prescription refills**. He **loves** being able to manage his healthcare **online**, and **has no problems** navigating the website from his smartphone.

He doesn't think the VA needs a mobile app as he is already **in awe** of the current online experience.

LOW EXPECTATIONS LARRY



LARRY

The Tech Savvy User with Low Expectations

USES WEBSITE

Occasionally

USER INSIGHT

Larry has come to expect very little of the VA, so he is satisfied that the website outperforms his expectations.

TECHNOLOGY

Larry has a smartphone and regularly uses mobile applications. He grew up with computers and smartphones, and uses the most complex technologies with ease.

"[The website has] been pretty easy."

"It's easy to have everything right there."



Larry is a young veteran who will go on his "My HealtheVet" portal on occasion to **pay a medical bill** or **look-up appointment details**.

He doesn't think the VA needs a mobile app, as the current online experience surpasses his exceedingly low expectations.

EAGER ELLIOT



ELLIOT

The Tech Savvy User Frustrated by the Relatively “Clunky” Website

USES WEBSITE

Sometimes

USER INSIGHT

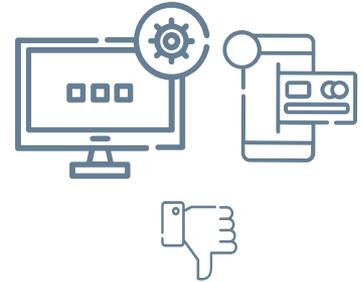
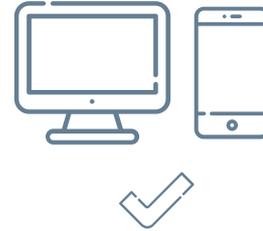
Navigating the “inefficient” and “clunky” website

TECHNOLOGY

Has a smartphone and reports regular complex digital behavior.

“[When trying] to navigate from point A to point C, you have to go through five or six different stages to get where you need.”

“[You don’t know] if you are going down the right path.”



Elliot is **always on** a computer or mobile device, and is frustrated by the VA **website’s relative inefficiency** as compared to other sites he frequents. He sometimes needs to schedule an appointment or check on benefits from his phone **while at work**, and is frustrated by the poor mobile experience.

He would like a mobile app, but only if it is functional and user-friendly.

KEY
TAKEAWAYS

04

INSIGHTS

PAIN POINTS OF POTENTIAL USERS

ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICES

*"...everything on the VA, you almost **have to talk to an expert** to get what you want"*

*"...you do get a case number and **somebody** individually does respond to you, but when they respond to you it generally **isn't that helpful.**"*

COMPLICATED NAVIGATION

"A lot of clicks"

"Miserable experience finding out who I needed to talk to!!"

"There was a lot of searching...you had to know where you were"

*"They have **a lot of protections** on [the website] which is kind of **irritating**"*

UNCERTAINTY RE: ELIGIBILITY

*"There is **most probably more** out there that I am eligible for that I am not taking advantage of."*

*"Determining benefits and what you are eligible for **should be easier.** That's something everyone wants to know and is kind of **hard to determine**"*

POTENTIAL GAINS

MANAGING APPOINTMENTS

“Appointment reminders/being able to schedule appointments” was the **most requested app functionality**.

Most Veterans with smartphones report complex app behavior (ie mobile banking).

COMMUNICATING WITH DOCTORS

Even older, less tech-literate Veterans reported a desire to **communicate directly** with their medical team.

Easy online communication could **prevent future frustration** over the phone or in person.

ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATIONS

Older and younger users alike reported that an online “eligibility check” would be extremely helpful.

*“An AI program that can look at my situation and **provide me a list of all available programs** and services would be great.”*

QUICK ACCESS & DOCUMENTS

Many current users of the mobile site were driven by a need to get documents and information **on the go**.

Document downloads were the second-most requested app functionality.

THANKS

ANY QUESTIONS?

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