

VA



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# Medical Device Tool

Discovery Readout

# Background & Goals

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# Background

With eBenefits being sunsetted, many Veteran-facing products need to be migrated over to VA.gov; one of these products is a tool that allows qualifying Veterans to order prosthetic socks and hearing aid batteries online.

To prepare for the tool's transition, the DSVA conducted a discovery phase to learn about both the Denver Logistics Center's (DLC) multiple ordering paths and Veterans' experiences navigating through each one. Since the goal is to migrate as many Veterans to the online ordering path as possible, we focused on uncovering reasons why a majority of Veterans do not order online.

# Research goals

This study was meant to **reveal both successes and pain points as Veterans order hearing aid batteries and prosthetic socks** through the DLC.

- How might we make the online Medical Device Ordering Tool more accessible and user-friendly for all Veterans ordering hearing aid batteries and prosthetic socks?
- How might we create an experience that motivates Veterans to transition from other ordering methods towards online ordering?
- Learning about Veterans' experiences ordering prosthetic socks and hearing aid batteries provides an opportunity to improve the ordering process as it's migrated to VA.gov
- Understanding what is working or not in the ordering process is important as the DLC expands their catalogue

# Hypotheses to be tested

- Veterans are avoidant of the online form because it's difficult for them to sign in (from conversation with DLC IT Stakeholder)
- Veterans don't always know item details for their order
- Veterans would like more visibility into their orders
- Veterans would like to automate their orders more
- Veterans would like to be able to track their orders

# Methodology

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# Qualitative interviews

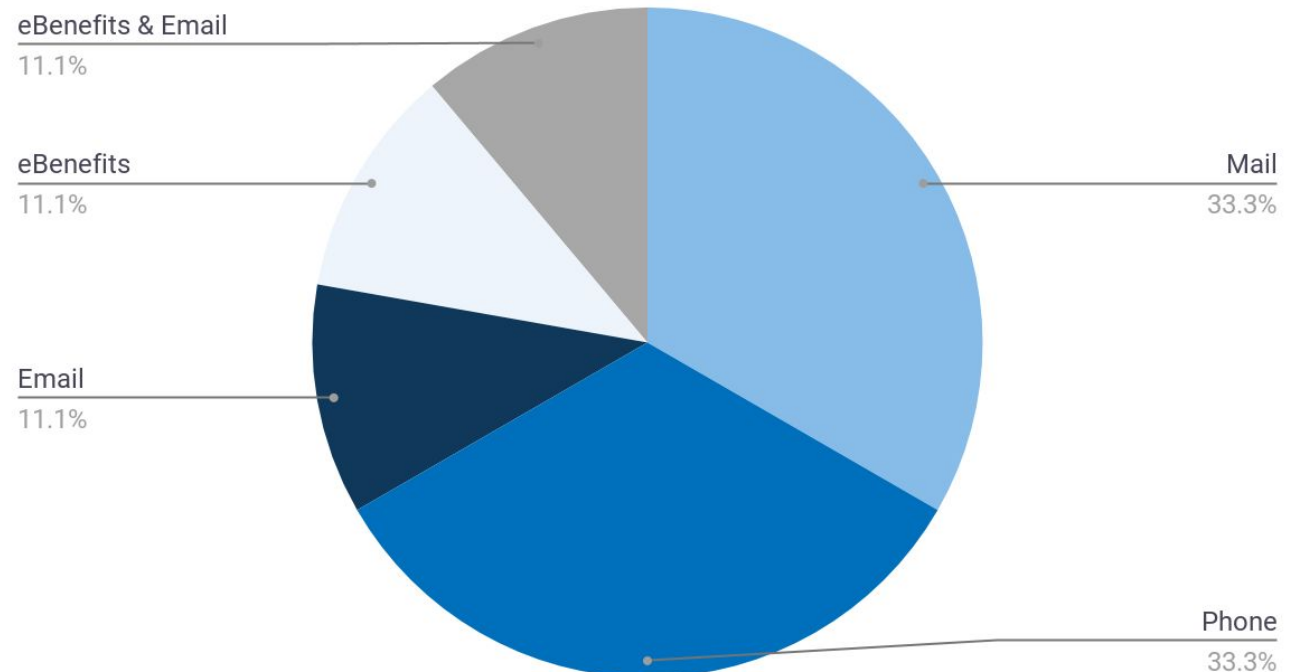
Qualitative interviews were chosen to uncover experiences, motivations, and views that Veterans have about the ordering process.

There are many different ordering paths to choose from, so it's important to learn why Veterans chose one ordering method over another. These findings will influence the design and be validated through usability testing.

# Who we spoke with

- 6 participants who have ordered hearing aid batteries
- 3 participants who stated they ordered both prosthetic socks and hearing aid batteries
  - All of these participants mistook diabetic/compression socks for prosthetic socks
- 2 participants thought they ordered prosthetic socks, but mistook diabetic/compression socks for prosthetic socks
- We were unable to recruit participants who order prosthetic socks, so we spoke with 2 DLC customer service representatives about their experiences assisting Veterans who order prosthetic socks

Participant Battery Ordering Preference





# Topics covered

- How participants learned about the medical device ordering benefit
- Why participants chose their ordering pathway versus other pathways
- How participants order their resupply items and their experiences doing so
- Actual and expected communications participants received about their order
- How participants remembered what to order and the frequency of those orders
- Experiences with technology, devices, and assistive technology
- Participants' concerns and expectations about online ordering
- Participants' Veteran-facing website usage

# Research questions

- Why do Veterans choose one ordering method over the other?
  - Are they consistently using the same methods? Why change methods?
  - Why is the online method underutilized by Veterans?
  - Is there significant interest in ordering through VA.gov?
- What pain points are Veterans experiencing when ordering resupply items today?
- What resupply needs do Veterans have that are not being filled currently?
- What is the average timeframe it takes for an order to be received?
- How do Veterans feel about any communication(s) once their order is submitted?
- When online ordering is launched, how do Veterans expect to learn about it?
- Are Veterans the ones initializing reorders? If not, who?
- Are Veterans returning orders? If so, how do they feel about that process?

# Research Findings

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# Key Findings

1. Although some Veterans believe the ordering process is tedious, overall sentiments about the benefit are positive
2. Prosthetic socks account for a very small percentage of orders and are highly-customized
3. Many Veterans are unaware of all the ordering methods available to them
4. Veterans are unable to order hearing aid accessories through more automated channels, so they resort to ordering via live phone agent
5. Veterans are interested in ordering their resupply items online, but the current process doesn't fit their needs
6. Recalling the details of the items they need to order is unnecessary effort for Veterans
7. Veterans have expressed interest in more automated resupply
8. Veterans expect to receive communications about their order
9. Several Veterans experience trouble accessing eBenefits or DLC's VOES applet
10. Many Veterans regularly use technology on a variety of devices, and some have adapted to challenges

# 1. Although some Veterans believe the ordering process is tedious, overall sentiments about the benefit are positive

- **Many Veterans were grateful for the benefit due to the cost of hearing aids and batteries**

*“It’s amazing and a lovely thing to have. Something you should take advantage of. Buying a hearing aid in the real world is insanely expensive so having the VA to provide that, the batteries and everything else was amazing. I feel very fortunate.”*

*“It’s over the top, it’s fabulous. I didn’t expect [to be provided batteries and accessories] when I got the hearing aid... Honestly, when I first got the hearing aid, it kinda popped into my head how much [supplies] cost.”*

- **Even though Veterans appreciate the benefit, they believe the ordering process is confusing and cumbersome**

*“I would describe it as difficult. So, I am pleased that I am able to get hearing aids from the VA. I am pleased that they offer the batteries at no cost, but I think the process is awkward and cumbersome at best.”*

## 2. Prosthetic socks account for a very small percentage of orders and are highly customized

- **DLC customer service representatives told us that prosthetic sock orders account for 1-3% of their workload, and most calls are forwarded to the customer service lead**

*“He’s always done it so I think mostly we need to be trained. We never had any formal training as far as ordering socks goes other than doing whatever they ask you to do on the phone.”*

*“He’s been doing it for so long that some of the veterans don’t even go through us, they just email Jeff directly.”*

- **Prosthetic socks sizing can change without the Veteran realizing, so they may order incorrect items and need to be redirected to their healthcare provider for new measurements**

### 3. Many Veterans are unaware of all the ordering methods available to them

- **Although all the Veterans we talked with aren't ordering through the same pathway, they are unaware of all the other ordering options available to them**
  - Only one participant knew about all the ways in which they could order
- **Most Veterans that order hearing aid batteries learned about both the benefit and the ordering process through their audiologist**

*“When I went in to get my hearing aids, they gave me a packet of information with the phone number, how to take care of your hearing aids, and reorder.”*

## 4. Veterans are unable to order hearing aid accessories through more automated channels, so they resort to ordering via live phone agent

- **Veterans are unable to order hearing aid accessories through either eBenefits or the automated phone menu, so many defer to ordering entirely through a DLC customer service representative on the phone**

*“Well, you can only order batteries through the automated system. So if you need other supplies like wax guards or dome pieces that go in your ear, you have to talk to a human. If you should be able to do an automated thing, you should be able to order the dome and the wax guards.”*

- **Veterans are frustrated with long wait times to speak to a live agent, which can be upwards of 45 minutes**



## 5. Veterans are interested in ordering their resupply items online, but the current process doesn't fit their needs

- **Veterans would like to be able to order online as long as they are either signing into a system they already use regularly, most mentioned My HealtheVet, or not signing in at all**

*“Well if I could, I would do it through My HealtheVet. Right now, the only source I know about is [the] eBenefits site.”*

- **Veterans currently aren't able to order hearing aid accessories through eBenefits, but are interested in ordering these items online**

## 6. Recalling the details of the items they need to order is unnecessary effort for Veterans

- **Veterans have different methods for keeping track of their order details, but all of the methods require manual effort:**

- Some Veterans write down the details of their order
- Some Veterans keep and reference the previous order's packaging
- One Veteran we spoke to orders through eBenefits and does not need to remember their order because the information is displayed

*“I find the previously sent email, and just copy what I need out of that email and paste it into a new email and off we go.”*

- **Veterans are requesting pre-filled cards and pre-populated forms so they don't need to remember their order items**

## 7. Veterans have expressed interested in more automated resupply

- **Some Veterans would like their orders to automatically ship every 6 months, while others are interested in subscription-based ordering similar to Amazon**
- **Veterans who order via mail thought it would be helpful if their order cards were pre-filled out for them**

*“It’s a little card you fill out. That would be nice if that was automatic. Like, you didn’t have to fill out the model number and make. It’s hard to make sure you write it on the next one. It doesn’t come pre-written out.”*

## 8. Veterans expect to receive communications about their order

- **Most of the Veterans we talked with do not receive any communication about their order between the time the order is placed and the package arrives**
  - 2 Veterans stated they received communication about their order; 1 Veteran ordered via phone and the other via email
- **Most Veterans would like to receive an order confirmation via email or text message**

*“There’s no text that says your hearing aid batteries are on the way. There’s no email that says the order has been shipped. This is nothing like what you and I are accustomed to in 2019. It’s a dark hole that it goes into and you just hope the person you’re speaking to executed the order.”*
- **Veterans expect to find out about new ways to order resupply through direct email or newsletters**

## 9. Several Veterans experience trouble accessing eBenefits or DLC's VOES applet

- **Although Veterans would like to order online and are currently able to, some experience difficulty accessing their eBenefits accounts**
  - One Veteran cannot order through eBenefits because they do not have a premium account
  - Some Veterans experience difficulty resetting their passwords

*“It says, “For security purposes, you must first apply for a premium account from the eBenefits website” Right there is your problem. Why do I need a level 2 account to get hearing aids and prosthetic socks?”*

## 10. Many Veterans regularly use technology on a variety of devices, and some have adapted to challenges

- Many Veterans we spoke with regularly used computers as part of their profession
- One Veteran stated that they reach out to their nephew for help when experiencing challenges using technology
- One Veteran uses a flip phone because they find smart phones difficult to use

*“I use a flip phone. I don’t go for all that other stuff. Takes too long for me to try to put things together in order to take pictures and all that stuff. All I use are text messages and phone calls.”*

- Some Veterans do not believe that other Veterans use technology very often

# Additional Insights

- Some Veterans would like to use rechargeable hearing aids so they don't need to worry about changing their batteries
- Veterans only reorder when they are running low on supply, even if they reach the 6 month mark allowing them to order more batteries - they are very conscious about the cost of batteries and don't order more than they need
- Veterans have expressed concerns that the small paper order form may be lost in the mail before reaching the DLC
- Although there's a range of delivery timeframes, most Veterans believe they receive their order in a sufficient time-frame

# Recommendations

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# Recommendations

**Based on the gathered research, the team recommends the following considerations as the Medical Device Tool is developed for VA.gov:**

- Write clear and concise verbiage defining prosthetic socks so Veterans who order diabetic and compression socks aren't confused why they are unable to order socks
- Allow Veterans to view their order history so they do not need to remember their order details
- Provide Veterans with both an order confirmation and tracking number to minimize anxiety
- Provide Veterans the option to order both hearing aid batteries and accessories so they don't need to go through two different order channels
- Work with the DLC on a marketing campaign to notify Veterans about ordering online through VA.gov
- Send Veterans an "order reminder" email every 6 months with a link to MDT's ordering page
- Collaborate with Jeff to design a successful prosthetic socks ordering experience given those orders are rare, custom-made, and require size updates regularly

# Next Steps

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# Next Steps

## **Ideation sessions to determine features to implement**

The insights gained from this research will influence the team's ideation sessions. Our team will work with the DLC to determine what the product's MVP looks like and uncover features that we would like to include. The design team will then begin creating wireframes and mockups following VA.gov design system's form template.

## **Co-creation with Veterans**

User research will continue to be woven into the design process so we may validate every step in the ordering process with Veterans who order hearing aid batteries and prosthetic socks.

# Appendix

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## Additional DLC Customer Service Rep. Findings

*“I think we service 3.5 million hearing-impaired Veterans.”*

- Veterans with amputated limbs may be moving away from prosthetic socks due to gel liners
- One of the greatest challenges is when a veteran’s record is not updated in VISTA/ROES
- The DLC receives quite a few calls from veterans claiming they never received their order

*“The population that we serve seem to move quite frequently for whatever reason.”*

- The DLC receives a dozen or more calls a month from customers who are unable to place orders through eBenefits with some of the issues being incorrect product information or not being in the system