Profile: Notification Settings

Discovery Readout

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June 29, 2021

Background

The VA is ramping up digital communications efforts, specifically through email and text. As a result, Veterans need to be able to manage and customize the communications they receive.

The VA Profile team has built communications permissions engine that will integrate with the VA.gov profile frontend, and allow veteran-managed settings to be saved and shared across systems at the VA.

Through this research, we wanted to learn about the Veteran mental model around notifications, and evaluate our proposed design for a notification settings section of the VA.gov profile.

Research Goals

Specifically, we wanted to find out:

- What expectations do Veterans have about discovering, receiving, and managing notifications?

- Does our solution enable Veterans to manage notifications without encountering UX hurdles, especially when their profile is missing contact information?

- What kind of static content support might make sense for this section of profile?

- **Bonus research:** We included one task to evaluate an approach we're considering to remedy an a11y issue related to removing contact information.

Method

- 50-minute remote, moderated sessions over Zoom
- Warm-up interview, 5 tasks in a prototype, 2-3 post-task questions
- We spoke to a diverse group of 9 Veterans:
  - 3 women, 6 men
  - 4 participants who identify as Caucasian, 3 participants who identify as Black or African American, 2 participants who identify as American Indian or Alaska Native
  - Participants ranged in age from 34-74, with the most participants (3) falling into the 35-44 age range.
  - Participants live in Florida, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Ohio and Texas; 5 participants live in a rural area.
  - 2 participants had identified cognitive considerations of PTSD and/or TBI.
  - Education level ranged from high school/GED or equivalent to Master's degree, with the most participants (3) having completed some college (no degree).

GitHub Research Folder: plan, convo guide, and notes

Marginalized groups we didn't speak with

This study may not meet the needs of the following marginalized Veteran groups:

- Veterans above the age of 55
- Veterans with cognitive disabilities
- Mobile users
- Assistive tech users
- Transgender Veterans
- Veterans living abroad
- Other than honorable

Category	Target	Study	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Marginalized Group			MM/DD/YY								
Age 55-64+	50%	44%	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
Cog. Disability	50%	22%	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Mobile user	50%	22%	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
People of color	30%	44%	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0
Rural	25%	56%	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0
No degree	25%	33%	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Women	10%	33%	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Assistive tech user	10%	0%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Native American	10%	22%	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Transgender	10%	0%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Veterans abroad	10%	0%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Key Findings

1. It was not intuitive for participants to look in profile to manage notification settings, and most don't actively manage settings for notifications they currently receive.

2. Overall, our design provides a good solution for Veterans to manage notifications, but status messages and available notification channels were not clear to all participants.

3. Notification groups were clear to participants for the most part, but some wanted to see groups in a different order.

4. Some individual notification names would benefit from additional context.

5. Many participants expected they'd be able to get all notifications by email *and* text.

6. Leaving notification settings to add missing contact information caused confusion for participants.

7. 5 of 9 participants experienced concerns and confusion about their sign-in vs contact email address.

8. All participants easily understood how to remove contact information, but some wanted more information about the impacts of doing so.

9. Participants see value in notifications related to health care, claim status updates, applications-in-progress, and education benefits.

Findings Summary

It was not intuitive for participants to look in profile to manage notification settings.

Six participants first looked on the homepage under various sections such as health care and records. We prompted them to see if there was anywhere else they would look; responses included **using site search**, **the contact us link**, and **My Health eVet (MHV)**.

Once guided to the profile menu options (My VA, My Health, Profile):

- 5 of 9 participants stated they would expect to find
  notification settings under My VA
- 2 said My Health
- 2 said Profile
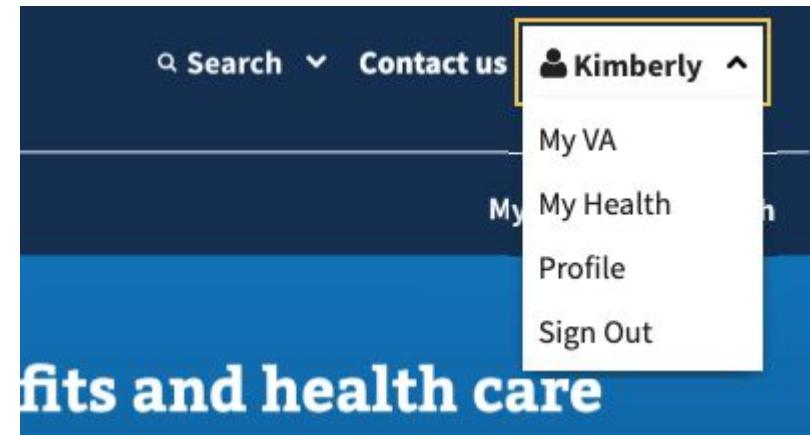
Part of the disconnect between profile and notification settings could be due to the fact that the **6 of 9 participants stated they don't update settings for notifications** they currently receive. One participant with TBI felt the concept of managing notifications was overwhelming.

"Computers is a lot. You have to click on it. You probably have to go to their website. I have to figure out how you're [company website] going to do all of this. And I can't figure it out. Then I'd have to go on Google and watch a Youtube video.
I leave it like how it is."

Findings Summary

Leaving notification settings to add missing contact information caused confusion for participants.

According to data provided by VA Profile, about **50% of VA.gov profiles have a mobile number on file, and fewer than that have an email on file**. Keeping this in mind, we needed to account for users who are a missing contact email or mobile number.

All participants **understood content telling them they needed to add missing information**, but leaving the notification settings page to do so caused confusion and a lack of confidence that the task had been completed.

Only 3 of 9 participants were confident about how to complete the notification opt-in task after adding missing contact information.

[Check out the prototype](#)

"I have not a clue. Because all you've done is added your email, you don't know whether the notifications are coming or not."

Next Steps

- Collaborate with team to prioritize recommendations

- Update FE documentation

- Continue FE work

- Mobile research study