

VA



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# Profile: Notification Settings

Discovery Readout

# 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.

The screenshot displays a web interface for a user's profile settings. On the left is a vertical sidebar with the following menu items: 'Profile', 'Personal and contact information', 'Military information', 'Direct deposit information', 'Your VA health facilities', 'Notification settings' (which is highlighted with a dark bar), 'Connected apps', and 'Account security'. The main content area is titled 'Notification settings' and contains several sections. The first section, 'Notification settings', has a light blue header and contains the text: 'To get notifications by email, first [add your email address](#) to your profile.' Below this, it says 'We'll use the contact information from your profile to send notifications:' followed by the phone number '(760) 340-7992' and a link '[Update your contact information](#)'. The next section, 'Applications, claims, decision reviews, and appeals', has a grey header and lists two notification items: 'Board of Veterans' Appeals hearing reminder' (set to 'Off') and 'Reminders to finish in-progress applications' (set to 'Notify by text: on'). Each item has an 'Edit' button. The 'Benefit payments and debts' section also has a grey header and lists 'Scheduled payment updates' (set to 'Notify by text: on') with an 'Edit' button. The 'General VA information and updates' section has a grey header and lists 'COVID-19 updates' with the instruction 'To get these notifications, first [add your email address](#) to your profile.' The final section, 'Your health care', has a grey header and lists 'Appointment reminders' (with the same email instruction) and 'Prescription shipment and tracking updates' (set to 'Off'). Each item in this section also has an 'Edit' button.

<b>Profile</b>	<b>Notification settings</b>
Personal and contact information	To get notifications by email, first <a href="#">add your email address</a> to your profile.
Military information	We'll use the contact information from your profile to send notifications:
Direct deposit information	(760) 340-7992
Your VA health facilities	<a href="#">Update your contact information</a>
<b>Notification settings</b>	
Connected apps	
Account security	

<b>Applications, claims, decision reviews, and appeals</b>	
Board of Veterans' Appeals hearing reminder Off	<a href="#">Edit</a>
Reminders to finish in-progress applications Notify by text: on	

<b>Benefit payments and debts</b>	
Scheduled payment updates Notify by text: on	<a href="#">Edit</a>

<b>General VA information and updates</b>	
COVID-19 updates To get these notifications, first <a href="#">add your email address</a> to your profile.	

<b>Your health care</b>	
Appointment reminders To get these notifications, first <a href="#">add your email address</a> to your profile.	<a href="#">Edit</a>
Prescription shipment and tracking updates Off	

# 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).



# 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.

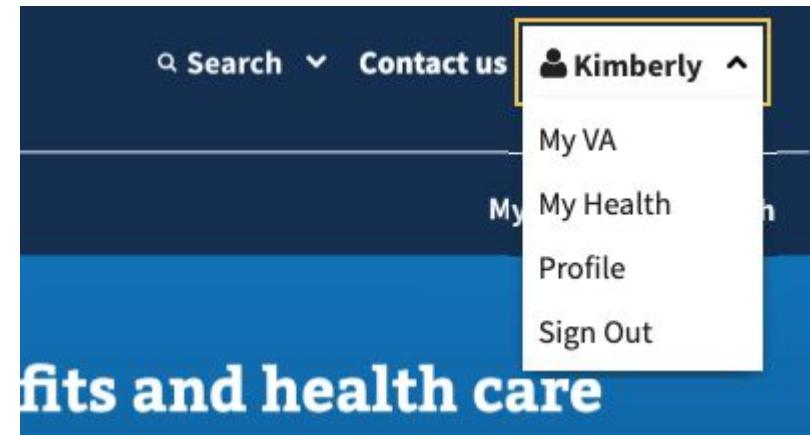
# Findings Summary

## 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.

The screenshot shows the 'Notification settings' page in the VA Profile interface. On the left is a sidebar menu with options: Profile, Personal and contact information, Military information, Direct deposit information, Your VA health facilities, Notification settings (highlighted), Connected apps, and Account security. The main content area is titled 'Notification settings' and contains several sections. A red oval highlights a light blue banner at the top stating: 'To get notifications by email, first [add your email address](#) to your profile.' Below this, a red arrow points from the 'Notification settings' menu item in the sidebar to the banner. Another red arrow points from the banner down to a red oval in the 'General VA information and updates' section, which contains the text: 'To get these notifications, first [add your email address](#) to your profile.' A third red arrow points from the banner down to another red oval in the 'Your health care' section, which contains the text: 'To get these notifications, first [add your email address](#) to your profile.'

**Profile**

- Personal and contact information
- Military information
- Direct deposit information
- Your VA health facilities
- Notification settings**
- Connected apps
- Account security

### Notification settings

To get notifications by email, first [add your email address](#) to your profile.

We'll use the contact information from your profile to send notifications:

(760) 340-7992

[Update your contact information](#)

#### Applications, claims, decision reviews, and appeals

Board of Veterans' Appeals hearing reminder  
Off [Edit](#)

Reminders to finish in-progress applications  
Notify by text: on

#### Benefit payments and debts

Scheduled payment updates  
Notify by text: on [Edit](#)

#### General VA information and updates

COVID-19 updates  
To get these notifications, first [add your email address](#) to your profile.

#### Your health care

Appointment reminders  
To get these notifications, first [add your email address](#) to your profile. [Edit](#)

Prescription shipment and tracking updates  
Off

“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