

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Non-Veteran User Roles

Discovery Readout

Background & Goals

Background

As My HealtheVet and eBenefits move towards the VA.gov ecosystem, VA.gov will need to transition from exclusively serving Veterans to serving a wider audience, such as caregivers, spouses, partners, POAs, VSOs, etc.

Currently, what defines a “non-Veteran” and their use cases are not well understood across the VA. Each administration—VHA, VBA, and NCA—has their own unique definitions and nuances, which significantly increase the complexity of solving for the “non-Veteran” use case. Delegates, beneficiaries, caregivers, and dependents are a few terms used interchangeably that encompass many different user types relying on many different products and services across VA.

Research goals

- Understand the unique definitions and nuances each administration has for non-Veterans.
- Define tasks each non-Veteran user type may need to complete for each administration.

Methodology

Methodology

Who we spoke with

We spoke to Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) during 30-minute semi-structured interviews. We used Zoom and Microsoft Teams to run the sessions.

The SMEs we interviewed were from Veteran's Health Administration (VHA) and Veterans Benefits Administration; a specific list of individuals and areas of expertise is available [here](#).

We initially planned to learn about NCA user roles as well. Per OCTO leadership, we decided to hold off for the time being since we don't have tools relevant to NCA on VA.gov.

Research questions

1. What non-Veteran user roles does each administration serve?
2. What qualifies a person as a dependent or a beneficiary? How are those roles different?
3. What is the difference between POAs, CVSOs, VSOs, and claim agents, according to each administration?
4. What qualifies a person as a caregiver?
5. What are the tasks that each user type may need to do?

Research Findings

Key Findings

1. A **dependent** is someone who has a legal relationship with the Veteran, and is financially dependent on the Veteran. Dependents may or may not also be beneficiaries.
2. A **beneficiary** can be anyone who is the direct recipient of a benefit or service from VA. In VBA, the term is also used to refer to a person the Veteran has named to receive their benefit in the future.
3. A Veteran's **caregiver** is a person who provides support to the Veteran. Caregivers could be individuals who are officially recognized by the VA, self-identified individuals, or professional caregivers.
4. A **delegate** role exists in VHA to refer to people who have been assigned delegate authority per the request of a Veteran through the VA online health delegation program. VBA does not have a specific delegate role.
5. **VSO representatives, claim agents and attorneys** are accredited individuals who assist Veterans and their families with claims. VBA and VHA definitions of these roles are consistent.

Key Findings

6. A **fiduciary** is a person who manages financial affairs for a Veteran. VBA and VHA definitions of this role are consistent.
7. **Power of Attorney (POA)** refers to a person who the Veteran has given power of attorney to act on their behalf at the VA.
8. There are also 3rd-party organizations that receive payments from VBA, such as funeral homes, state cemeteries and nursing homes.
9. A person can have one or more of user roles defined in the previous findings.
10. Beneficiary and caregiver use cases are highest priority for the VA business lines we spoke with.

Research Findings

A **dependent** is someone who has a legal relationship with the Veteran and is financially dependent on the Veteran.

- Dependents may or may not also be beneficiaries.
- VHA and VBA recognize spouses, minor children, and adult children who are unable to live independently as dependents.
- VBA also recognizes parents as dependents; VHA does not.
- When a dependent's **only connection** to the VA is their dependent status, they wouldn't have a need to see information related to their Veteran (since the Veteran is the recipient of any benefits where the dependent is claimed), and they wouldn't have any benefits of their own to manage. Therefore, it's unlikely they would need their own login for VA.gov when this is the case.

Research Findings

A **beneficiary** is anyone who is the direct recipient of a benefit or service from VA.

- In VBA, the term is also used to refer to a person the Veteran has named to receive their benefit in the future.
- A beneficiary could be a Veteran, or a qualifying family member.
- Each benefit has specific qualifications to determine beneficiary eligibility.
- The tasks a beneficiary would need to do on VA.gov are the same for Veterans and non-Veterans. For example, a non-Veteran beneficiary receiving education benefits should be able to update their direct deposit information or view payment history the same way a Veteran would.
- A beneficiary isn't always a dependent. E.g. VA recognized caregivers who are not dependents.
- Beneficiary data currently lives in the VA Corporate Database (sometimes called CorpDB), and is correlated to the Veteran file number. Efforts are currently underway to add a beneficiary PERSON_TYPE to MPI.

Research Findings

A Veteran's **caregiver** is a person who provides support to the Veteran. Caregivers could be individuals who are officially recognized by the VA, self-identified individuals, or professional caregivers.

- VHA has specific programs to recognize caregivers; the programs have specific eligibility criteria.
- Caregivers participating in the VA Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers Program (PCAFC) would also be beneficiaries since they receive direct payments from VA.
- There are a couple of existing channels for self-identifying caregivers to have access to Veteran information: VA Online Health Delegate Program, and the VA Fiduciary Program
- There aren't any clear rules about whether a caregiver should be allowed access to a Veteran's information; it's generally determined on a case-by-case basis.
- [Read finding 3 in the full report](#) for additional details on caregivers

Research Findings

A **delegate** role exists in VHA to refer to people who have been assigned delegate authority per the request of a Veteran through the VA online health delegation program.

- VBA does not have a specific delegate role.
- A delegate does not have to be a dependent or a beneficiary.
- Delegates can directly access some Veteran health information online, such as upcoming appointments and prescription information, in MHV and participating VA Mobile Apps. More information can be found in [finding 3.4 from the first phase of our research](#). From a data perspective, the VA knows a person is a delegate based on information from the Identity and Access Management (IAM) program office, and the Master Person Index (MPI).
- A delegate cannot help a Veteran with offline health tasks, such as getting information over the phone.

Research Findings

A **delegate** role exists in VHA to refer to someone who has delegate authority per the request of a Veteran through the VA online health delegation program.

- VBA does not have a specific delegate role. There is a VBA process through [VA Form 21-0845](#) that gives a 3rd party access to information for a Veteran.
- A delegate does not have to be a dependent or a beneficiary.
- Delegates can directly access some Veteran health information online, such as upcoming appointments and prescription information, in MHV and participating VA Mobile Apps. More information can be found in [finding 3.4 from the first phase of our research](#).
- A delegate cannot help a Veteran with offline health tasks.
- A VA recognized Caregiver and a Delegate would likely need to be two different types of access on VA.gov since a VA recognized Caregiver is also a beneficiary that would need to see information about their own benefits.

Research Findings

VSO representatives, claim agents and attorneys are accredited individuals who assist Veterans and their families with claims.

- VBA and VHA definitions of this role are consistent.
- VSO representatives, claim agents and attorneys are accredited individuals who assist Veterans and their families with claims.
- They're vetted through a [VA accreditation process](#), managed by the Office of General Counsel (OGC).
- There are systems in place for these user types to access relevant Veteran data and complete tasks to help the Veteran; these would be good starting points for understanding user needs and tasks.

Research Findings

A **fiduciary** is a person who manages financial affairs for a Veteran.

- VBA and VHA definitions of this role are consistent.
- A Veteran can select their own fiduciary, but they need to be approved by the VA.
- VBA has a Fiduciary Program that assigns a Veteran a fiduciary if they have been deemed unable to manage their financial affairs and don't have a family member who can serve as a fiduciary.
- **VBMS FID** is a VA system that was recently expanded to meet the needs of fiduciaries, and would likely be a good starting point to understand tasks for these users.

Research Findings

Power of Attorney (POA) refers to a person who the Veteran has given power of attorney to act on their behalf at the VA.

- This is separate from a healthcare power of attorney, which gives a person authority to make decisions about a Veteran's medical care.
- This could be a private attorney or a VSO representative.
- Typically private attorneys only get involved during a claims appeal and a Veteran is seeking retroactive pay.
- POA information lives in the VA Corporate Database.

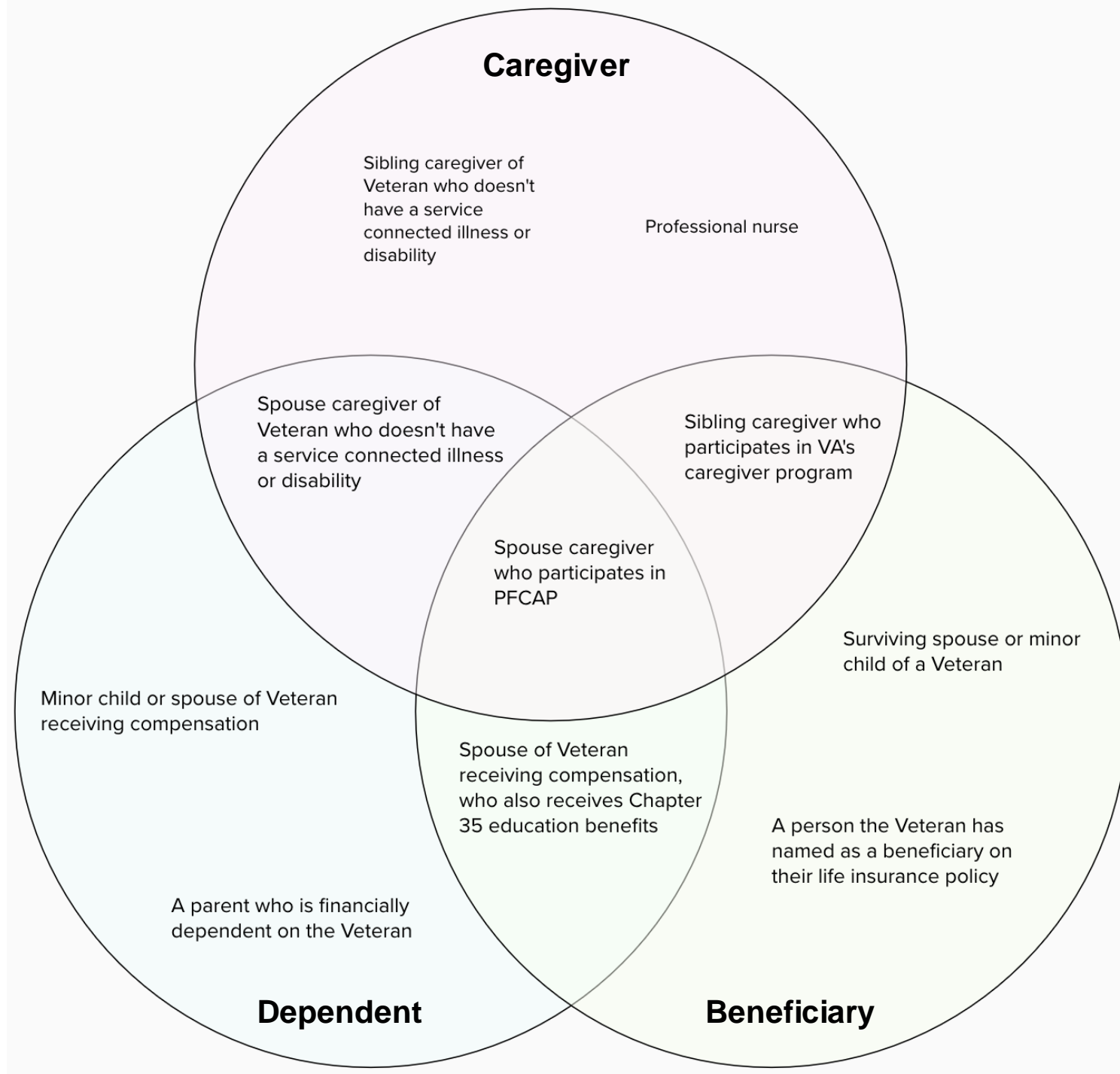
Research Findings

There are also 3rd-party organizations that receive payments from VBA and VHA, such as funeral homes, state cemeteries and nursing homes.

- Possible use cases for these users would be to see payment history and status, as well as file claims for reimbursement. However, the SMEs we spoke with all stated they couldn't see any need for these users to log into VA.gov.
- Burial claims can already be submitted electronically through eBenefits, so it would be worthwhile to look into how this is handled as we migrate functionality to VA.gov.

A person can have one or more of user roles defined in the previous findings.

- There can be overlap between any of the aforementioned roles.
- We'll need to consider how a person will be able to switch between roles with one login. Some examples are:
 - A Veteran who is a caregiver for their Veteran spouse, and is a fiduciary for their Veteran sibling.
 - A delegate who is also a beneficiary because they're receiving surviving spouse benefits.



Research Findings

Beneficiary and caregiver use cases are highest priority for the VA business lines we spoke with.

- MHV prioritizes the VA patient needs above all else, whether that patient is a Veteran or non-Veteran.
- VBA Pension and Office of Business Integration stated that providing survivors access to their benefit information was most important to their business lines.
- VBA Compensation stated managing VA education benefits for survivors and dependents (also called Chapter 35) is their most important non-Veteran use case.
- From the Caregiver perspective, giving caregivers the ability to complete health tasks is most important.

Recommendations

Recommendations

As a starting point, explore three primary non-Veteran user groups for VA.gov:

- Beneficiaries
- Caregivers
- Delegates

We recommend conducting additional research to identify use cases, tasks, and outcomes for each of these non-Veteran user groups. Since there are currently systems in place to meet the needs of VSOs, claims agents, attorneys, and fiduciaries, we don't recommend prioritizing those roles immediately.

Recommendations

Beneficiaries

- We'll need to further explore the beneficiary <> Veteran relationship as it relates to online interaction.
- This research focused on a person who already has benefits and didn't explore the initial application process or the process of applying for new benefits.
- Since non-Veteran beneficiaries are only eligible for certain benefits, it would be beneficial to provide guardrails to help prevent them from submitting applications for benefits they could never receive.

Recommendations

Caregivers

- There aren't any clear rules about whether a caregiver should be allowed access to a Veteran's information, so there will likely need to be a few different caregiver roles, or a combination of caregiver and access type.
- Some possibilities could be Caregiver - Full access (all benefits and actions), Caregiver - Health only (only health tasks), Caregiver - Other benefits.

Recommendations

Delegates

- A Veteran can already name an individual to have online access to their MHV health information through the delegation process.
- With more research, we can understand what this delegate experience is like today on VA.gov (if a delegate logs in with their MHV credential), and how it may be extended to non-health tasks such as managing compensation claims and appeals.
- The existing delegation process is managed at the higher VA level (not VHA or VBA), and our understanding is that it will require significant effort to expand it. Carnetta Scruggs has significant background information on this and is eager to work with our team on efforts to increase delegation tools.

Recommendations

Conduct additional research to understand existing needs and applications for VSO representatives, claim agents, attorneys and fiduciaries.

- From what we've heard so far, there are gaps in the current applications that cause these users to develop workarounds or just not use them at all.
 - Stakeholder Enterprise System
 - D2D
 - VBMS FIDS
- Interviews will be critical in understanding the current UX for these user roles and how we might be able to support them on VA.gov.

Appendix

Resources

- [Research plan](#)
- [Conversation guides](#)
- [Notes from sessions](#)