

Home Page Redesign Usability Testing

Research Readout

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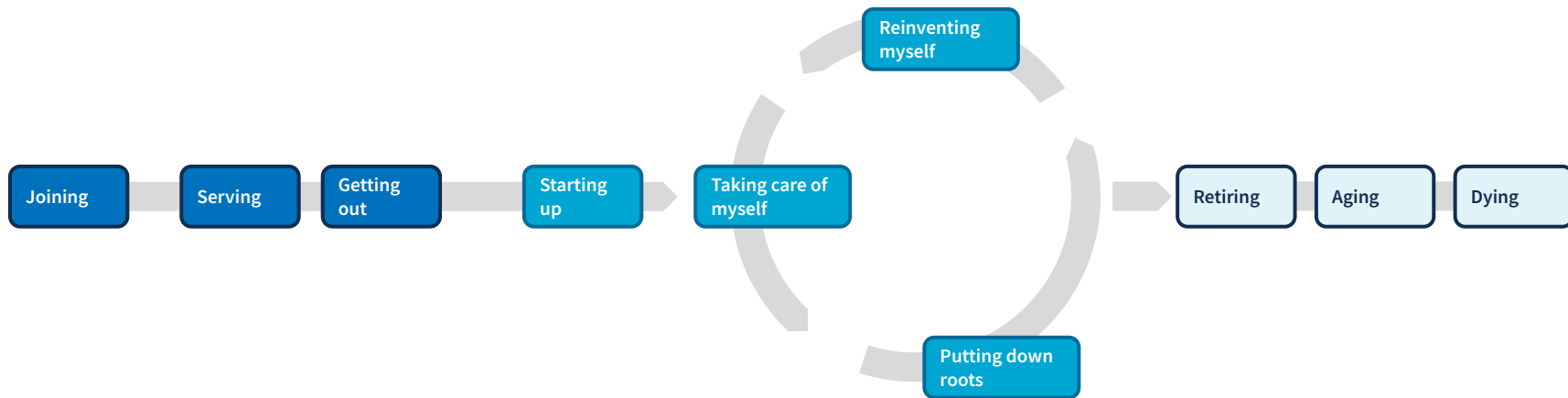


U.S. Department
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How this research maps to the Veteran journey

Veterans and others (caregivers, family members, survivors, and service members) use the VA.gov home page throughout

- Serving and separation
- Living civilian life
- Retiring and aging



For a fully detailed Veteran journey, go to

<https://github.com/departement-of-veterans-affairs/va.gov-team/blob/master/platform/design/va-product-journey-maps/Veteran%20Journey%20Map.pdf>

Serving and separation

Living civilian life

Retiring and aging

VA



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OCTO-DE goals that this research supports

Supported

Not supported

Veterans and their families can apply for all benefits online

Veterans and their families can find a single, authoritative source of information

Veterans and their families trust the security, accuracy, and relevancy of VA.gov

Veterans can manage their health services online

VFS teams can build and deploy high-quality products for Veterans on the Platform

Logged-in users have a personalized experience, with relevant and time-saving features

Logged-in users can update their personal information easily and instantly

Logged-in users can easily track applications, claims, or appeals online

Measures to increase

Completion rate of online transactions

Percent of applications submitted online (vs. paper)

Veteran satisfaction with VA.gov
Benefit use and enrollment, across all business lines

Benefit value (in \$) delivered from online applications or transactions

Number of VA.gov users as a function of total Veteran population

Usage of digital, self-service tools

Measures to decrease

Time to successful complete and submit online transactions

Time to process online applications (vs. paper)

Call center volume, wait time, and time to resolution

Time from online benefit discovery to benefit delivery

VA



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Research Goal & Focus

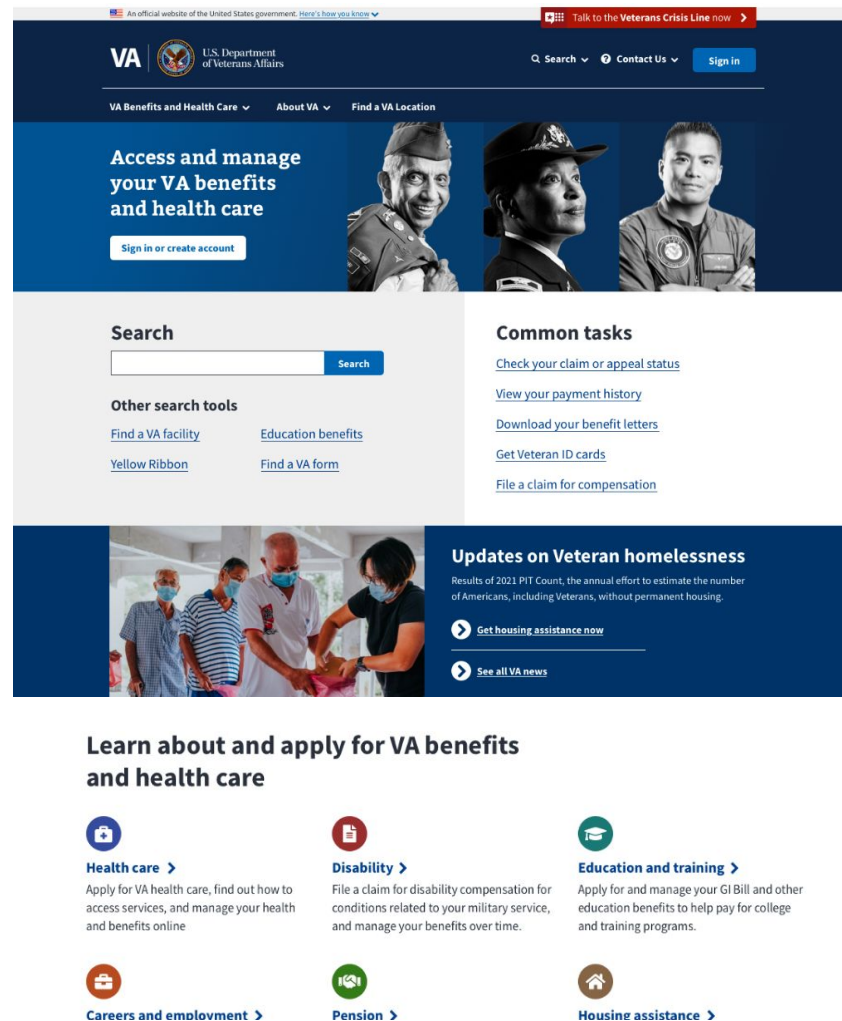
Goal: Get user feedback on the redesigned VA.gov home page and assess whether the design changes have improved the usability of the home page

Areas of focus:

Everything between header & footer–

- "Sign in or create an account" button
- New Search box
- Other search tools
- Common tasks
- VAntage Point blog promo
- Benefit hubs

NOT: header, footer, banner alerts



Research Questions

Research Questions:

1. Are participants **able to complete top tasks from the home page?**
 - a. For tasks that are the same as those from last year's baseline wayfinding research, how do success rates compare with last year?
2. **Which parts of the home page do participants use** to complete tasks and how?
3. **When do participants search** (typing into a box) **vs. browse** (clicking on links)?
4. What are participants' **expectations of the VAntage Point blog** promo content?

Learn about and apply for VA benefits and health care



Health care >

Apply for VA health care, find out how to access services, and manage your health and benefits online



Disability >

File a claim for disability compensation for conditions related to your military service, and manage your benefits over time.



Education and training >

Apply for and manage your GI Bill and other education benefits to help pay for college and training programs.



Careers and employment >

Apply for vocational rehabilitation services, get support for your Veteran-owned small business, and access other career resources.



Pension >

Apply for monthly payments for wartime Veterans and survivors with limited or no income who meet certain age and disability requirements.



Housing assistance >

Find out if you're eligible for a VA-backed home loan. If you have a service-connected disability, see if you qualify for a housing grant to help you live more independently.



Life insurance >

Explore VA life insurance options for Veterans, service members, and families. Manage your policy online, file claims for benefits, and access helpful resources.



Burials and memorials >

Get help planning a burial in a VA national cemetery, order a headstone or other memorial item to honor a Veteran's service, and apply for survivor and dependent benefits.



Records >

Apply for a printed Veteran ID card, get your VA benefit letters and medical records, and learn how to apply for a discharge upgrade.



Service member benefits >

Find out what benefits you may be eligible for during service and which time-sensitive benefits to consider when separating or retiring.



Family member benefits >

Learn about the benefits you may qualify for as a spouse, dependent, or survivor. And find out what you're eligible for as a family member caring for a Veteran with disabilities.

Veteran Programs and Services

[Homeless Veterans](#)

[Women Veterans](#)

[Minority Veterans](#)

[PTSD](#)

[Mental Health](#)

[Adaptive Sports and Special Events](#)

[National Resource Directory](#)

More VA Resources

[Find a VA Form](#)

[Get VA Mobile Apps](#)

[Careers at VA](#)

[Doing Business with VA](#)

[Grants Management Services](#)

[VA Claims Accreditation](#)

[Find a VA Health Care Provider](#)

[Veterans Service Organizations \(VSO\)](#)

[State Veterans Affairs Offices](#)

[Print Your VA Welcome Kit](#)

Get VA Updates

[VAntage Point Blog](#)

[Email Updates](#)

[Facebook](#)

[Instagram](#)

[Twitter](#)

[Flickr](#)

[YouTube](#)

[All VA Social Media](#)

In Crisis? Get Help Now

[Veteran Crisis Line](#)

Contact Us

[Find a VA Location](#)

[Ask a Question](#)

[Call MyVAS11:](#)

[844-698-7311](#)

[TTY: 711](#)



Methodology

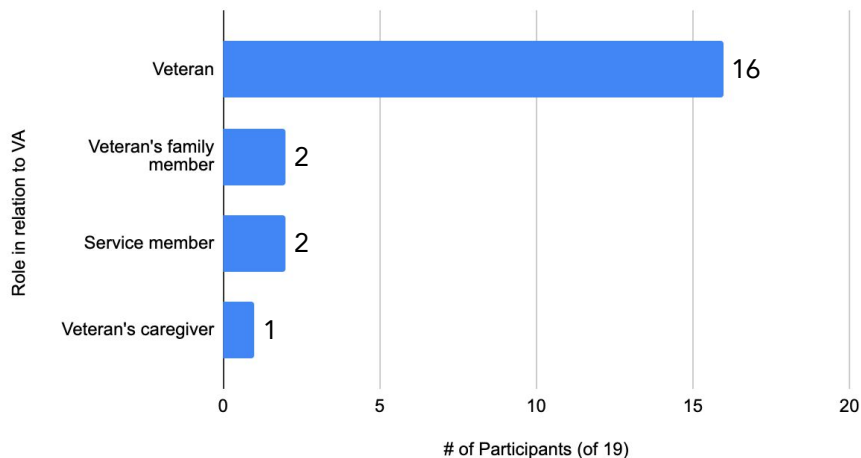
Remote moderated usability sessions via Zoom (**August 2022**)

- Asked about VA benefit experience
- Based on their benefit experience, **moderator posed top tasks to do (from 20 of the 25 Veteran top tasks)** as wayfinding prompts to explore the redesigned home page
- Some tasks were listed under "Common tasks", while others were not
- **Recorded success yes/no**, and participant's ease rating (1-5)
- Each task completed by ≥ 6 people

Top task in usability test	When asked
Learn/apply for education benefits	If <i>haven't</i> used education benefits
Compare VA education benefits by school	If <i>haven't</i> used education benefits
Learn/apply for disability compensation	If <i>haven't</i> used disability benefits
File for disability increase	If <i>have</i> used disability benefits
Find current amount of disability or education (payment history)	If <i>have</i> used disability or education benefits
Check current disability compensation rates	If <i>have</i> used disability benefits
Check/update education benefits	If <i>have</i> used education benefits
Message your doctor	If <i>have</i> VA health care
Travel expense reimbursement for medical appt	If <i>have</i> VA health care
Learn/apply for VA health care	If <i>don't</i> have VA health care
Find a VA hospital (Find a VA location)	anytime
Get VA medical history/records	anytime
Get proof of income from VA (benefit letters)	anytime
Add spouse (Review/update dependents)	anytime
Update your address with VA	anytime
Find mental health counselor/therapist	anytime
Learn if eligible for burial	anytime
Apply for home loan Certificate of Eligibility	anytime
Request your military records	anytime
Find a VA form	If participant said they'd look for a form...

Participant Demographics

Participants' Roles in relation to the VA



Findings may not include the perspectives of the following underserved Veteran groups:

- Use assistive technology (**no screen reader users showed up**)
- Identify as Asian, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or non-binary
- Other than honorable discharge
- Immigrant origin

Home Page Redesign Usability (Aug 2022)

final # of participants		19	# of AT users										# of no shows					
Category	%	Target	Study	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Veterans		Based on current VA statistics																
Age 55-64+	50.00%	10	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cognitive Disability	50.00%	10	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mobile user	50.00%	10	7	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Rural	25.00%	5	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
No degree	25.00%	5	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other than honorable	21.00%	4	unknown	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Immigrant origin	17.00%	4	unknown	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Women	10.00%	2	6	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Expat (living abroad)	0.40%	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Race		Based on VA's projected statistics																
Black	15.00%	3	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hispanic	12.00%	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Biracial	3.90%	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Asian	3.00%	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Native	0.30%	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
LGBTQ+		LGBTQ+ Veterans are 5 times as likely to have PTSD																
Gay, lesbian, or bisexual	--%	1	unknown	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transgender	--%	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nonbinary, gender fluid, ge	--%	1	unknown	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Assistive Tech (AT)		Ask an a11y specialist to help you complete this. Targets are for a gene																
Beginner AT User	50.00%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Experienced AT User	50.00%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

VA



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Key Finding #1: Most participants browsed w/o searching

Most participants browsed (clicked links on home page, header megamenu, benefit hubs, etc.)
without using the Search box at all, or searched only when browsing didn't work.

5 distinct usage patterns:

1. **Browsed exclusively**, never searched (7 participants)
2. **Started browsing, and later discovered the search box** and used it more (7 participants)
3. **Mostly browsed but tried search once** (3 participants)
4. **Tried search first, some success, then irrelevant results, so stopped using search** (1 participant)
5. **Searched exclusively** (only 1 participant, which was the youngest one)

WHY *did participants browse and avoid search?*

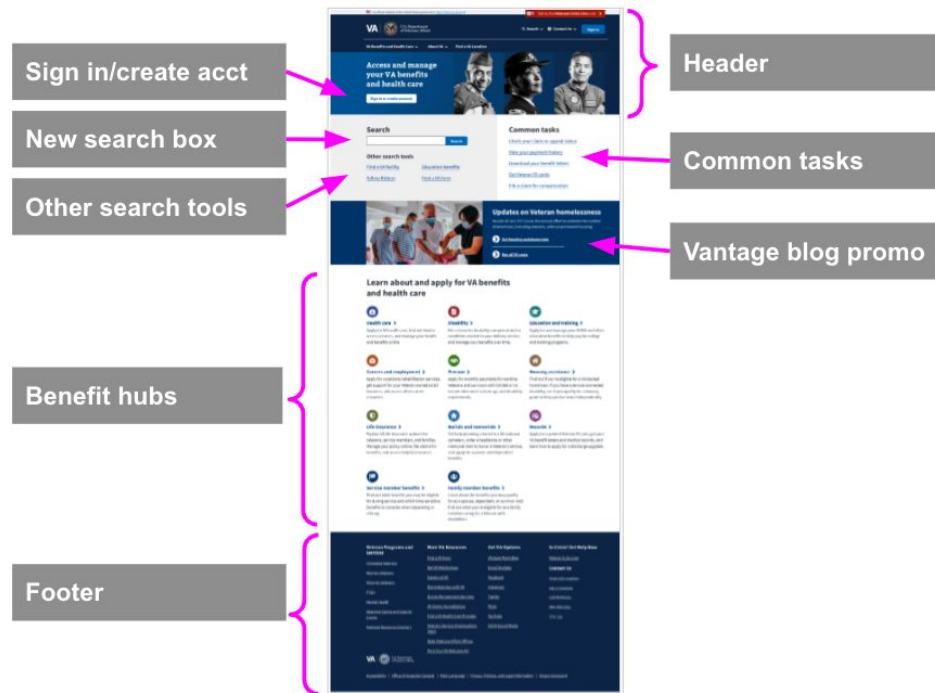
- Don't like to type into the search box (and have to spell correctly)
- It's easier to click on something
- Figured they can find what they need by browsing the topics shown

Key Finding #2: Most people's navigation didn't include the entire home page but only certain parts of it

Some participants found one way to navigate that worked for them, which they used for most tasks, ignoring other parts of the home page.

Browsing focus patterns observed:

- Only the *VA Benefits and Health Care* megamenu in the header
- Only *Common tasks* and *Other search tools*
- Only the benefit hubs
- Only the search box
- A combination of some of the above but usually not all



Key Finding #2: Most people's navigation didn't include the entire home page but only certain parts of it (cont'd)

% of 19 research participants who clicked in each area

Key:

70-100%

50-69%

25-49%

10-24%

0-9%



Where people clicked:

1. Header (74% = 14/19 participants)
2. Common tasks (68% = 13/19)
2. Benefit hubs (68% = 13/19)
3. Other search tools (63% = 12/19)
4. New search box (47% = 9/19)
5. Footer (21% = 4/19)
6. Sign in or create account button (16% = 3/19)

Most participants (79%) scrolled all the way down the home page to the footer.

*0% is OK because we didn't have any tasks that related to the Vantage part of the page



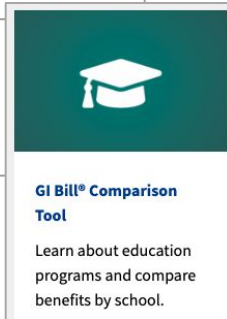
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Key Finding #3: 16 of 20 tasks were successfully completed by at least 70% of those who tried them

Task #	Task description	Participant Ratings (1 = difficult, 5 = easy)			Successfully completed task w/o assistance	Comparison w/Baseline	Baseline Wayfinding (4/2021)
		Avg	Min	Max	% Success		% Success
3	Learn/apply for disability compensation	4.9	4.0	5.0	100%		
8	Find a VA hospital (Find a VA location)	5.0	5.0	5.0	100%	Improvement from	83%
11	Travel expense reimbursement for medical appt	3.6	2.0	5.0	100%		
12	Learn/apply for VA health care	4.8	4.0	5.0	100%		
13	Get proof of income from VA (benefit letters)	4.5	3.0	5.0	100%	Improvement from	82%
15	Update your address with VA	4.3	3.0	5.0	100%		
17	Learn if eligible for burial	4.8	3.0	5.0	100%		
18	Apply for home loan Certificate of Eligibility	4.1	2.0	5.0	100%		
19	Request your military records	4.5	3.0	5.0	100%		
16	Find mental health counselor/therapist	4.1	2.0	5.0	90%		
1	Learn/apply for education benefits	4.6	3.0	5.0	89%		
9	Get VA medical history/records	4.0	3.0	5.0	86%	Improvement from	67%
20	Find a VA form	4.6	3.0	5.0	86%		
5	Find current amount of disability or education (payment history)	4.2	2.0	5.0	83%		
10	Message your doctor	3.8	1.0	5.0	83%	WORSE than	100%
7	Check/update education benefits	4.1	2.0	5.0	71%		
6	Check current disability compensation rates	3.1	1.0	5.0	60%		
2	Compare education benefits by school	3.1	1.0	5.0	56%		
14	Add spouse (Review/update dependents)	3.0	1.0	5.0	56%	WORSE than	78%
4	File for disability increase	4.5	3.0	5.0	50%		

Key Finding #3 (cont'd): Why were the 4 most difficult tasks challenging?

Tasks with lowest success rates	Why difficult
File for disability increase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Link goes to the application for a new disability that doesn't mention filing for an increase to what you already have
Add a spouse (review/update dependents)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Couldn't find by browsing (tried megamenu, benefit hubs > Family member benefits) ● Didn't recognize links with the word "dependent" as relevant
Compare education benefits by school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Didn't notice "GI Bill Comparison Tool" in right rail of megamenu > Education and training, on Education page
Check current disability compensation rates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Couldn't find by searching (tried "disability pay") ● Couldn't find by browsing (tried megamenu > disability, megamenu > pension, benefit hubs > pension)



Key Finding #3 (cont'd): Why were other tasks challenging?

Other challenging tasks	Why difficult
Message your doctor	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Couldn't find by browsing● Used to doing from MHV and not VA.gov
Get VA medical history/records	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Couldn't find by browsing (tried megamenu > health care)
Find mental health counselor/therapist	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Couldn't find by searching (tried "therapist", "counselor")● Couldn't find by browsing
Update your address with VA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Couldn't find by browsing (tried benefit hubs)

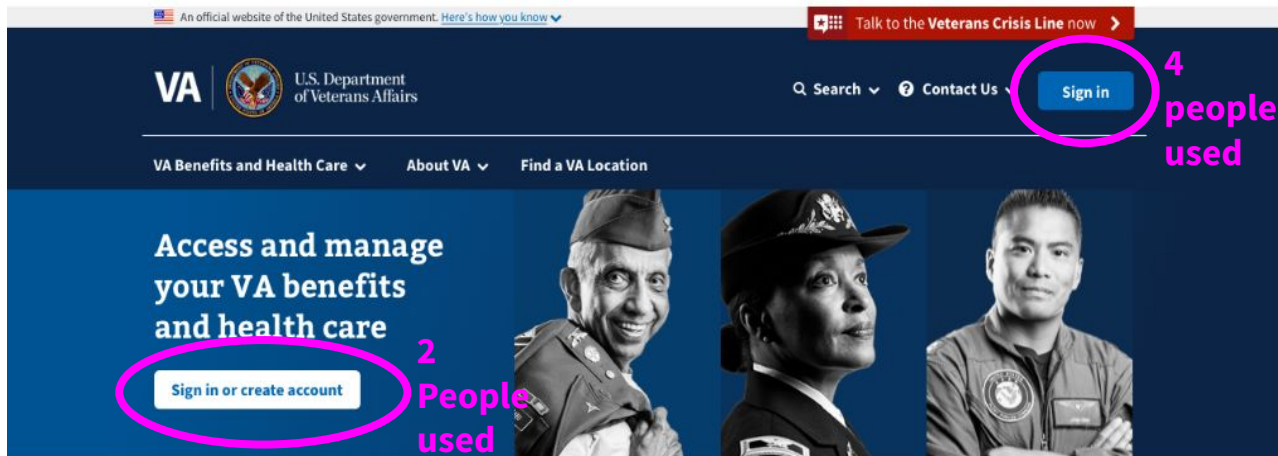
Key Finding #4: Most sign-ins happened *not* on home page

- **Most people used the "sign in" button on specific content pages, and so neither button on the home page was used much**
- A quarter of the participants (5 of 19) said that they'd normally sign in first.
- One participant said that they didn't think to sign in because they mostly use the VA mobile app (and stay signed in).
- 3 participants said that it was redundant or confusing to have two different sign-in buttons.

 **Sign in to see your claim or appeal status**

Sign in with your existing **Login.gov**, **ID.me**, **DS Logon**, or **My Health** account. If you don't have any of these accounts, you can create a free **Login.gov** account now.

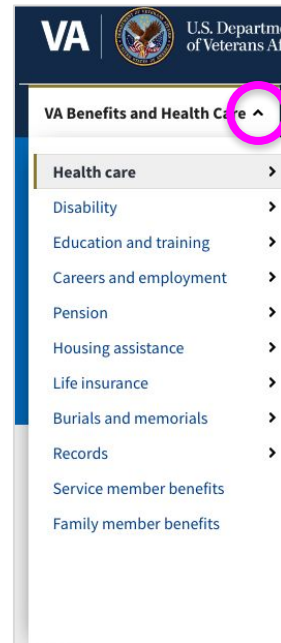
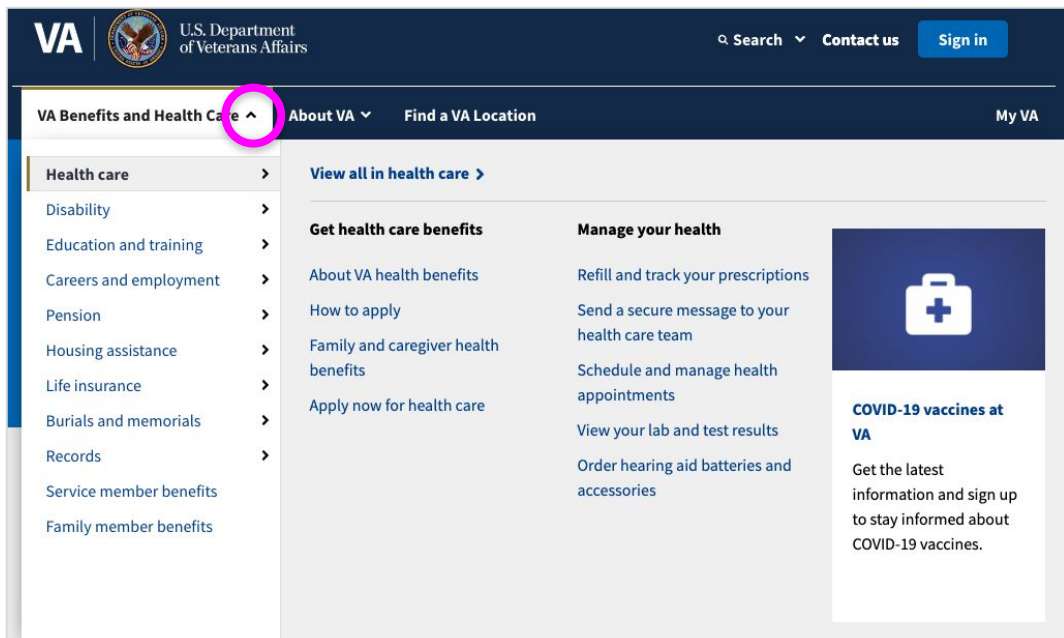
Sign in or create an account



Key Finding #5: Accessibility issues in megamenu on desktop–dropdown expansion

1. Difficulty using the megamenu because it didn't work as expected

- Affected both sighted participants and a pilot participant using a screen reader
- When dropdown opened, **one option is already expanded**:

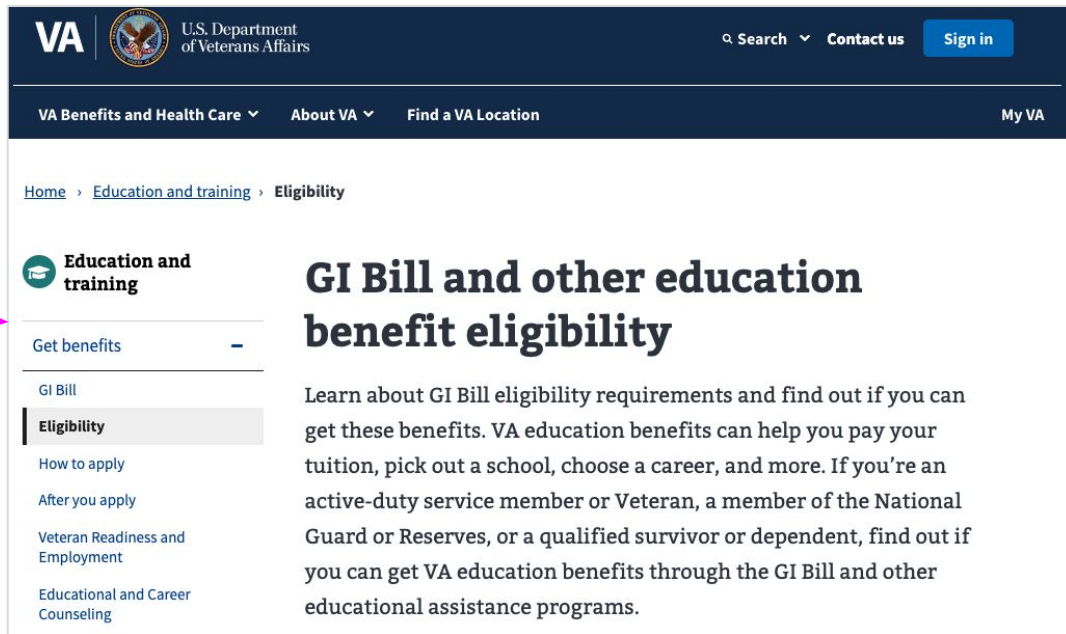
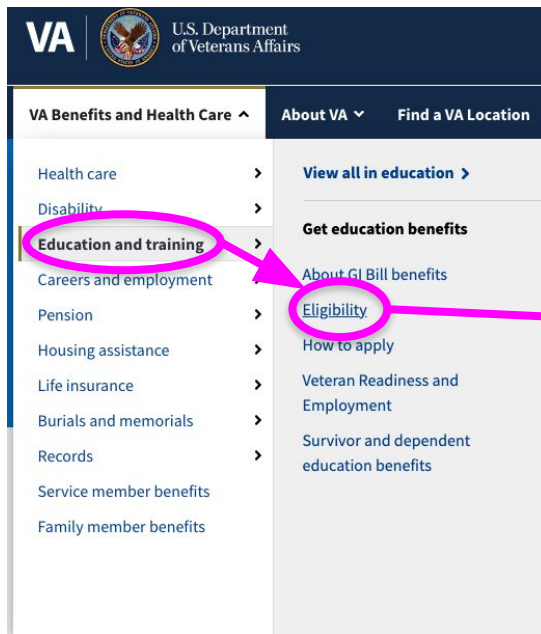


Expected
behavior:
no option
expanded
at first

Key Finding #5: Accessibility issues in megamenu on desktop–focus problem

2. Focus issue caused by the megamenu

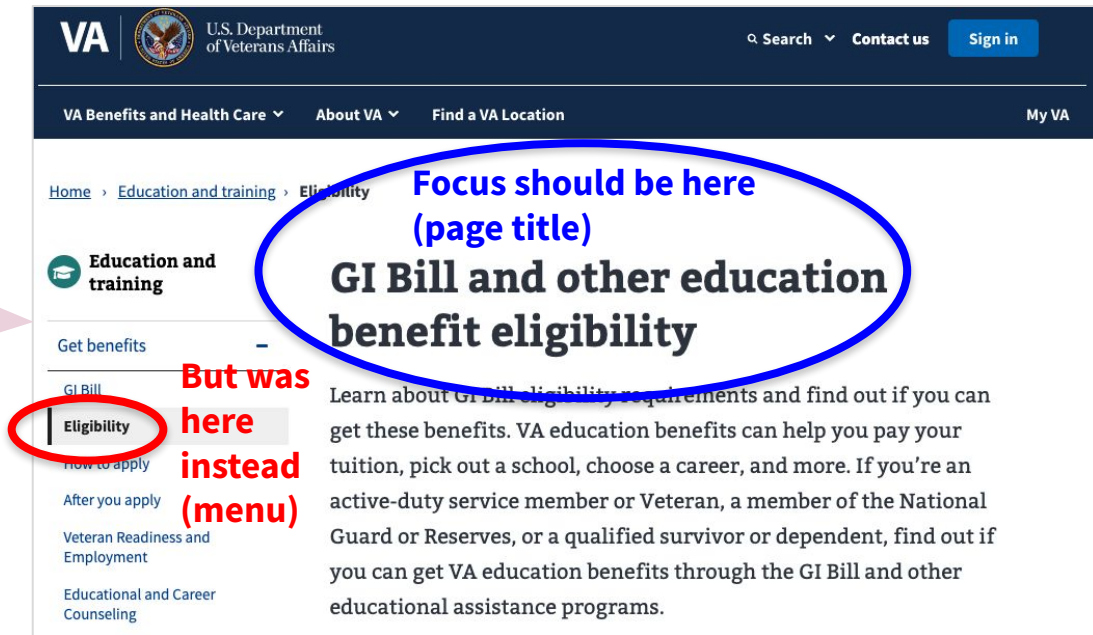
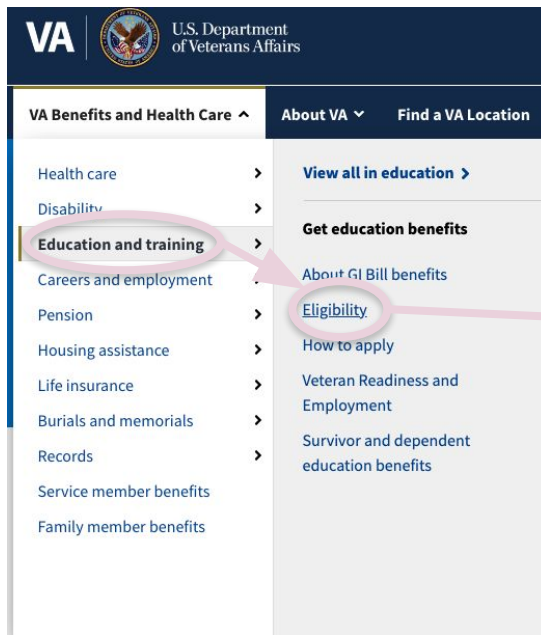
- Affected only the pilot participant using a screen reader
- **When navigating to a content page...**



Key Finding #5: Accessibility issues in megamenu on desktop–focus problem (cont'd)

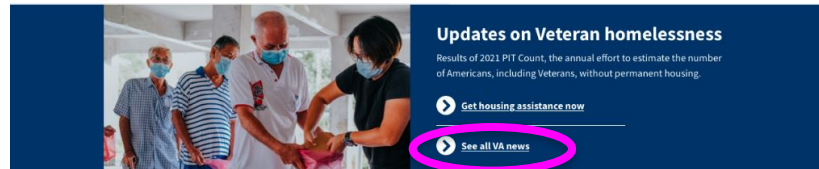
2. Focus issue caused by the megamenu

- Affected only the pilot participant using a screen reader
- When navigating to a content page, **focus was still in megamenu:**



Key Finding #6: Vantage blog promo box not seen as news

There were no tasks related to the Vantage blog promo box, and no one mentioned it until the moderator asked about it during the post-task interview. Participants' feedback:



- Many **didn't realize that the Vantage box entitled "Updates on Veteran homelessness" was a news article and thought it featured an important VA benefit for homeless Veterans.**
 - Those who noticed the **"See all VA news" link in the box questioned why it was there** because it had nothing to do with the homelessness benefit information.
- 2 recognized the Vantage box as **news, which they didn't care to look at.**
- 1 said they thought it was a **banner ad, and so ignored it.**
- When asked what other types of content should be shown in this section, several said they **wanted information about recent legislation enacted (e.g., burn pit registry), changes in VA benefits or procedures, or specific VA benefits** (e.g., education, disability/claims, housing loans, local Veterans homeless shelters or mobile assistance units).

Recommendations: For home page redesign

1. **Try to ensure that all top tasks can be accomplished via both searching and browsing** in order to support people who use the home page in different ways.
 - a. **Keep the new search box** because more participants found it (9) vs. using search in the header (6).
 - b. Work with the Content team to **make headings and link labels more intuitive** (e.g., Common tasks, Other search tools).
 - c. Consider **adding more top tasks to the Common tasks** section (e.g., Get mental health help, Update your address, View or change dependent, Manage your VA health care).
2. Consider **removing the 2 education links from Other search tools** (Education benefits, Yellow Ribbon), leaving only the actual search tools (Find a form, Find a VA facility).
3. Consider **renaming the "Sign in or create account" button** to "Create an account" to target people who don't yet have a VA account and reduce confusion with the "Sign in" button in header.
4. **Consider enlarging the font size** of some of the text of the benefit hub descriptions and the list of common tasks.

Recommendations: Beyond the home page

1. **Fix the two accessibility issues with the megamenu on desktop**
2. **Try to ensure that all top tasks can be accomplished via both searching and browsing** by considering **tweaks to the benefit hubs and the VA Benefits and Health Care megamenu**:
 - a. Add "Get your VA medical records" to the **megamenu under Health care**.
 - b. Add "mental health" to the **megamenu under Health Care**, to search **autocomplete suggestions**, to **search "top recommendation"** for "therapist", "counselor", and "therapy".
 - c. Add "Update contact info" to the **Records benefit hub**.
 - d. Add "View or change dependent" to **Family Member Benefits page**, a search autocomplete suggestion, and a search "top recommendation" for "spouse" and "dependent".
 - e. Add "View disability rates" to **megamenu under Disability**, as an search autocomplete suggestion, and a search "top recommendation".
 - f. Make clear on the **disability application page** that this form can be used to *increase your existing* disability rating (i.e., add to heading "or increase your current rating").
 - g. Change **GI Bill Comparison Tool link in megamenu and education content page** to make it look more like a hyperlink instead of an ad.
3. Consider whether **common misspellings could be handled gracefully by search**



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Next Steps

- **Present results** to Health Apartment team and any other interested teams.
- After the home page redesign is revised per this research feedback, conduct a **second round of usability testing**.
 - Recruit some screen reader users
 - Recruit more people who will use their smartphone during the session

Questions?

Link to [full research report on GitHub](#)

Reach out to Cindy Merrill on Slack