

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Check-in Discovery Research: Remote Sessions

Discovery Readout

Background & Goals

Background

Our goal is to improve the Veteran check-in process for medical appointments by providing a digital option on mobile and/or va.gov.

This research is to understand Veterans' feelings, pain points, and value-gained by using the current ecosystem of check-in methods for medical appointments. There is a particular emphasis on understanding the current kiosk method, because it is being replaced by a digital check-in solution on mobile and/or va.gov. However, feedback from all check-in methods will inform the digital check-in solution.



Current kiosks

Research questions

- How do Veterans feel when interacting with each check-in method (focus heavily on kiosk workflows)?
 - How do Veterans feel about moving away from using kiosks?
 - How receptive are Veterans to utilizing other check-in methods?
- What are the Veteran-specified benefits for each method (focus heavily on kiosk workflows)?
- What are the Veteran-specified pain points for each method (focus heavily on kiosk workflows)?
 - Do any particular kiosk workflows cause more confusion or pain points for Veterans than others?

Hypotheses to be tested

- The VA kiosks are a familiar, simple experience for Veterans. Experience with the other methods will vary.
- Authentication could be a pain point for Veterans within the new check-in workflow due to how they currently authenticate when using a kiosk.
- The kiosks are not accessible for Veterans who are non-sighted.

Methodology

Method and detailed research questions

We conducted 11 remote moderated tests via Zoom using the Perigean contract. The Veterans were asked a series of interview questions about their check-in experiences. Certain visuals were presented in order to facilitate discussions on particular kiosk-based check-in workflows and methods.

The complete conversation guide with all the detailed research questions asked can be found on [VA's GitHub](#).

Who we spoke with: 11 Veterans

Gender

Male: 10

Female: 1

Age

25-34: 3

45-54: 0

55-64: 1

65-74: 5

75 or older: 2

Education

Unknown: 2

Some college: 4

Associate's/trade/vocational: 2

Bachelor's: 3

All participants must have had at least one...

- **in-person medical appointment at a VA facility within the last 6 months.**
- **in-person medical appointment at a VA facility before COVID.**

Research Findings

Key Findings

Appointment check-in

1. Checking in with a VA staff member was the most preferred and used method among the currently available methods for in-person appointments.
2. Checking in with a VA staff member can offer valuable human interactions for Veterans, but Veterans are sometimes made to feel unimportant or insulted during these interactions.
3. Using a kiosk is quick and easy as long as the machine isn't turned off or broken.
4. When verifying their identity at the kiosk, more Veterans utilized their VHIC card and entered their date of birth than entered their SSN and date of birth.
5. Most participants never updated their contact or next of kin information before. Even the participants who had experience updating this information talked about these tasks in a separate manner from check-in.
6. Updating contact or next of kin information was mostly completed by speaking with staff members.

Key Findings

Non-appointment check-in

7. More participants received their medications by mail and used the kiosk to check-in for lab tests than other methods.
8. Lab workflows vary from facility to facility. The most mentioned process is when the Veteran received a ticket and the number on the ticket is called.
9. Pharmacy workflows vary greatly from facility to facility.
10. At the lab and pharmacy, digital check-in solutions are preferred, wait time vary, and sometimes orders are missing.

Key Findings

Beneficiary travel mileage

11. Beneficiary travel mileage was most often filed via kiosks.
12. Veterans have multiple options when filing for beneficiary travel mileage: kiosk, travel office, online, and automatic reimbursement.
13. Veterans reported abandoning their attempts to file for travel mileage due to difficulties with multiple filing methods.

Virtual and other health system appointments

14. Overall, checking in for virtual appointments was described as a pleasant and very quick experience.
15. Veterans unanimously wished other health systems had check-in processes like the VA. Check-in at other health systems took longer, involved more questions, required more paperwork, and lacked the variety of check-in methods.

Key Findings

Feedback on the future with digital solutions

16. Digital (*particularly mobile phone solutions*) and in-person options are both extremely valuable to different types of Veterans.
17. Most Veterans were interested in a lightweight way of verifying their identity when checking in, such as the last 4 digits of their social security number and/or date of birth.
18. Half of the participants were interested in receiving notifications letting them know they could now check-in.

Appointment check-in

Research Findings

Checking in with a VA staff member was the most preferred and used method among currently available methods for in-person appointments.

Staff member

7 - preferred method
11 - have used

Kiosk

4 - preferred method
10 - have used

Text Message

0 - have used
(1 - *heard about it*)

11 participants total

Research Findings

Checking in with a VA staff member can offer valuable human interactions for Veterans, but Veterans are sometimes made to feel unimportant or insulted during these interactions.

Benefits	Pain Points
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Human interaction<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <i>“I like the human interaction, because I don’t get it elsewhere.”</i>● Friendly, familiar faces can help reduce anxiety<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <i>“If there is someone I know there, it helps bring my anxiety down, because I know them and they know me.” - Veteran with PTSD</i>● Can be short and to the point with only a few questions to answer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Bad customer service experiences (4 Veterans)<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <i>“They act like we are imposing...it is insulting and demeaning.”</i>○ <i>“They seem to be on the phone all the time, so you stand and wait to ask questions.”</i>○ <i>“Once in awhile they look around and see someone standing there, but they don’t do anything.”</i>○ <i>“How they speak to people is condescending.”</i>● Lines/wait time to check in

Research Findings

Using a kiosk is quick and easy as long as the machine isn't turned off or broken.

Benefits	Pain Points
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Quick and easy<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <i>"I don't think it could be any easier."</i>○ <i>"It is quicker than standing in line."</i>○ <i>"It is idiot proof."</i>● Don't have to talk to someone	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Are turned off or broken (4 Veterans)● Directs the Veteran to talk to a staff member at the end after completing most of the screens (3 Veterans)● Concern that the staff/providers don't know they are waiting after checking-in● Worried about entering personal information in a public area

Research Findings

When verifying their identity at the kiosk, more Veterans utilized their VHIC card and entered their date of birth than entered their SSN and date of birth.

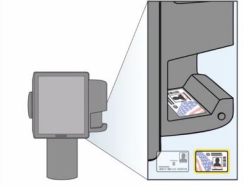


← Back

VET LINK

Welcome to VetLink

Please swipe or scan your VHIC to check in

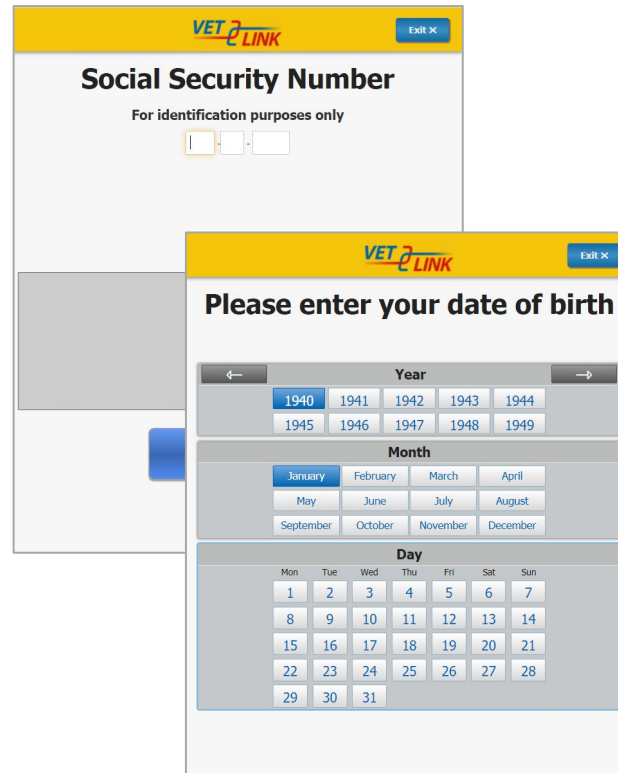


I do not have my VHIC

By using this kiosk you agree to the Terms of Use of this Government system

Used VHIC card: 6

- It's easy.
- *"I have it on me; it's the only time I have ever used it."*



VET LINK Exit X

Social Security Number

For identification purposes only

VET LINK Exit X

Please enter your date of birth

← Year →

1940	1941	1942	1943	1944
1945	1946	1947	1948	1949

Month

January	February	March	April
May	June	July	August
September	October	November	December

Day

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

Entered SSN/DOB: 3

- *"I don't have a card."*

9 participants total

Research Findings

Most participants had never updated their contact or next of kin information before. Even the participants who had experience updating this information talked about these tasks in a separate manner from check-in.

- Quote that summarizes a lot of the feedback:
“My next of kin hasn’t changed in forever.”
- Contact information was updated more often than next of kin.
- If needed, many participants stating that updating this information via digital methods would be convenient.
 - They were mostly talking about updating online, but a few participants meant via a kiosk.
 - Other participants saw this as too many clicks to do on a kiosk.

Research Findings

Updating contact or next of kin information was mostly completed by speaking with staff members.

Task	Method Used	# of participants
Contact information	Staff member	3
	MyHealtheVet	2
	Phone call	1
Next of kin	Staff member	1
	Kiosk	1
	MyHealtheVet	1

Non-appointment check-in

Research Findings

More participants received their medications by mail and used the kiosk to check in for lab tests than other methods.

Task	Method Used	# of participants
Lab tests	Kiosk	5
	Staff member	3
	Ticket machine, then staff member	1
	Computer	1
Pharmacy	Mail (<i>2 use MyHealthVet to request refills</i>)	7
	Kiosk	2
	Staff member	2
	Ticket machine	2

Research Findings

Lab workflows vary from facility to facility. The most mentioned process is when the Veteran receives a ticket and the number on the ticket is called.

Workflows

01

- Checked in at kiosk or with staff member, then received a ticket with a number on it
- Number called to complete the actual lab tests

02

- Checked in at kiosk or with staff member
- Number called to tell them why you are there
- Number called again to complete the actual lab tests

03

- Checked in at kiosk or with staff member
- Name called to complete the actual lab tests

04

- Checked in at a computer
- Name called to complete the actual lab tests

Pharmacy workflows vary greatly from facility to facility.

Workflows

01

- Took a number from a ticketing machine (non-kiosk)
- Called up to tell the staff member what they needed filled
- Called up again when the medication was ready

02

- Called in prescription ahead of time
- Took a number
- Picked up the medication when called

03

- Waited in line to talk to a staff member
- Called up by name or notified via a monitor in the waiting area when medications were ready

04

- The private room to talk to the pharmacist had an indicator on the door (Red meant the room was occupied.)
- Veterans just entered the room when the indicator is green

Research Findings

At the lab and pharmacy, digital check-in solutions are preferred, wait times vary, and sometimes orders are missing.

Benefits	Pain Points
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● The ticketing system was deemed easy and appropriate by most participants.<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <i>“The number was big and the type was large.”</i>○ <i>“It keeps it orderly.”</i>● Kiosks work well when there is a line at in-person check-in.● Fast	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Sometimes orders never transferred from their provider’s office to the lab or pharmacy.<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ The Veterans would wait for the lab/pharmacy to contact the provider’s office to get the orders.○ On a positive note, this seemed to be a quick process.● Long wait time (particularly pharmacy)

Beneficiary travel mileage

Research Findings

Beneficiary travel mileage is most often filed via kiosks.

Task	Method Used	# of participants
Beneficiary travel mileage	Kiosk	4
	Paper at the travel office	2
	Website	1
	Filed automatically	1

Research Findings

Veterans have multiple options when filing for beneficiary travel mileage: kiosk, travel office, online, and automatic reimbursement.

Workflows

01

- Used the kiosk
- Sometimes told to see a staff member at the end

02

- Went to the travel office
- Filled out the paper form

03

- Filled out form online

04

- Told that reimbursement was automatically filed following the appointment

Research Findings

Veterans reported abandoning their attempts to file for travel mileage due to difficulties with multiple filing methods.

- Questions on the online form were confusing or instructions weren't clear.
 - *"I wondered if I provided the right information."*
- 2 Veterans mentioned abandoning the kiosk workflow when it told them that they needed to speak with a staff member.
- Other Veterans said they won't go to the travel office to file, because it can be in a different building.
- While the kiosk workflow was considered fast and convenient, the kiosk were often not working.

Virtual and other health system appointments

Research Findings

Overall, checking in for virtual appointments was described as a pleasant and very quick experience.

- For video appointments, Veterans mostly “checked in” by clicking a link in an email.
- For phone call appointments, Veterans mostly stated that their providers called them.
- For 4 Veterans, a staff member, such as a nurse, called them right before their appointment to ask them questions about pain level, suicidal thoughts, and more.

Research Findings

Veterans unanimously wished other health systems had check-in processes like the VA. Check-in at other health systems took longer, involved more questions, required more paperwork, and lacked the variety of check-in methods.

- Veterans with experience at other health systems explained that their check-in processes were much more complicated than VA's.
 - They took longer, involved more questions, and required more paperwork.
 - These differences were the reason one Veteran stated *“I choose to use the VA.”*
- Veterans liked the variety of check-in methods available at the VA.
- Multiple Veterans did think checking for other insurance policies and answering COVID questions should be a part of the workflow prior to check-in.

Feedback on the future with digital solutions

Research Findings

Digital (*particularly mobile phone solutions*) and in-person options are both extremely valuable to different types of Veterans.

Preferred check-in method	# of participants
Mobile phone (general)	5
● App or website	4
● Text message	1
Kiosk	4
Staff member	3

- Three Veterans wanted the ability to complete as many tasks as possible ahead of time from home on their computers.
- Two Veterans interested in checking in with a mobile phone were worried about the cell reception and WiFi.

Research Findings

Most Veterans were interested in a lightweight way of verifying their identity when checking in, such as the last 4 digits of their social security number and/or date of birth.

Preferred authentication method	# of participants
Last 4 digits of their social security number and/or date of birth*	5
MyHealthVet log in	3
Fingerprint	1
VHIC card	1

*One Veteran suggested name instead of date of birth.

Research Findings

Half of the participants were interested in receiving notifications letting them know that they could now check in.

- The number of Veterans interested in different notification types varied.
 - Text: 3
 - Email: 2
 - Push notification: 2

Recommendations and Next Steps

Recommendations

- A variety of check-in methods need to be available to accommodate the variety of Veteran types and reduce lines/wait times to check-in.
 - A digital solution (mobile or web) will be welcomed by many Veterans, especially those who are technologically savvy or don't like to talk to someone.
 - Checking in with a staff member is important for some Veterans, those who don't get a lot of human interaction and/or like the personal connection.
- A digital solution is required that is available at VA facilities but doesn't require the Veteran to bring their own mobile phone.
 - This will assist the large group of Veterans who don't have/don't like to use a mobile phone, yet don't like to talk to staff members. *(These interactions cause anxiety for certain Veterans.)*
 - This will also provide a digital option if the cell reception or WiFi availability is minimal.
 - This will reduce lines/wait times to check-in.

Recommendations

- The check-in workflow should remain simple; this simplicity is a key reason why Veterans enjoy the current check-in processes. To maintain this simplicity, we recommend the following for the new digital solution:
 - Keep authentication lightweight, such as last name, last 4 of SSN, and/or phone number.
 - Move the contact and next of kin workflows out of check-in on the day of the appointment and into a pre-check in workflow that is completed a week to a few days prior to the appointment.
 - Show the Veteran confirmation they really are checked in, eliminating the Veteran's concern that staff won't know they are sitting in the waiting room.

Preliminary Veteran check-in flow

Pre-check in

- Confirm appointment
- Verify & update contact information
- Verify & update next of kin information
- Indicate any insurance information changes
- Complete forms or paperwork needed for appointments (e.g. Release of Information)

Check-in

- Indicate arrival for appointment

Post appointment

- Link to Patient Satisfaction Survey (TBD)
- Link to Beneficiary Travel

Next steps

- Present in-person observation research.
- Usability study of new check-in workflows.
- Wireframe the pre-check in workflow.
- Explore on-site solutions that don't require Veterans to use their own mobile phone, but who still want to check-in digitally.
- Complete more discovery research on non-appointment workflows.