Secure Messaging Usability Findings

Round 1 Research

VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Background and Goals

This project is part of the Digital Health Modernization strategy, which aims to create a centralized place for Veterans to access their health information. As part of this effort, My HealtheVet (MHV) will be replatformed to VA.gov.

1. Identify major usability or content issues with the current Secure Messaging concept
2. Understand how Veterans use Secure Messaging

How this research maps to the Veteran journey

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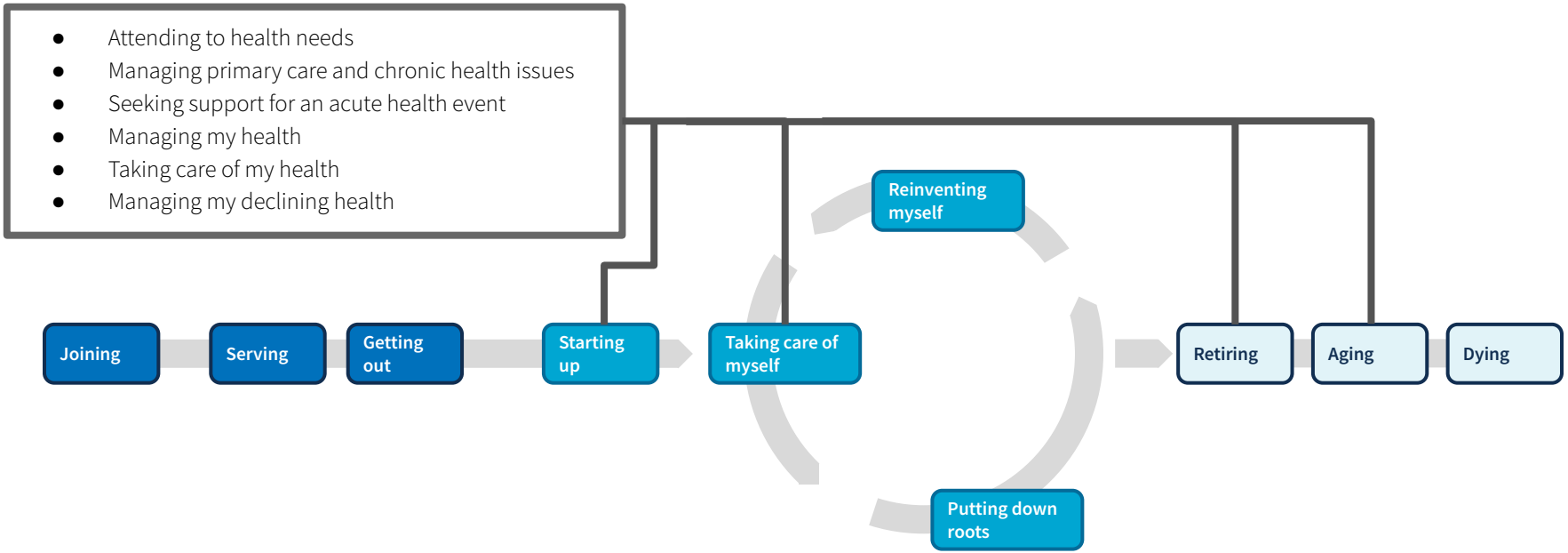

For a fully detailed Veteran journey, go to
https://github.com/department-of-veterans-affairs/va.gov-team/blob/master/platform/design/va-product-journey-maps/Veteran%20Journey%20Map.pdf

Serving and separation | Living civilian life | Retiring and aging

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OCTO-DE goals that this research supports

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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		

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Participant Demographics

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

- Veterans with a cognitive disability
- Veterans without a degree
- Veterans of immigrant origin
- Expat Veterans
- Hispanic Veterans
- LGBTQ+ Veterans
- Veterans who use Assistive Technology

We recommend studies with these underserved groups in the future.

A	B	C	D
2022-07 Secure Messaging Usability			
final # of participants		19	
Category	%	Target	Study
Veterans		Based on current	
Age 55-64+	50.00%	10	10
Cognitive Disability	50.00%	10	2
Mobile user	50.00%	10	12
Rural	25.00%	5	8
No degree	25.00%	5	2
Other than honorable	21.00%	4	
Immigrant origin	17.00%	4	1
Women	10.00%	2	5
Expat (living abroad)	0.40%	1	0
Race		Based on VA's pro	
Black	15.00%	3	4
Hispanic	12.00%	3	1
Biracial	3.90%	1	3
Asian	3.00%	1	2
Native	0.30%	1	1
LGBTQ+		LGBTQ+ Veterans	
Gay, lesbian, or bisexual	--%	1	0
Transgender	--%	1	0
Nonbinary, gender fluid, ge	--%	1	0

Participant Demographics, continued

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2022-07 Secure Messaging Usability_Round 1

final # of participants: 19 | # of AT users: 0 | # of no shows: 13

Category	%	Target	Study	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	32
Veterans		Based on current VA statistics																																	
Age 55-64+	50.00%	10	10	N	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	N	0	N	1	N	N	0	0	N	N	0	0	0	0	1	1	N	0	0	0	1	?	1	0
Cognitive Disability	50.00%	10	2	0	0	0	1	0	N	0	0	0	N	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mobile user	50.00%	10	12	0	1	1	0	0	N	0	0	0	N	0	1	0	N	0	0	0	N	1	0	1	N	1	1	N	N	N	1	1	1	1	1
Rural	25.00%	5	8	N	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	N	N	N	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	N	N	N	1	1	0	0	0
No degree	25.00%	5	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	N	0	0	0	1	N	0	0	N	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other than honorable	21.00%	4		Data not available																															
Immigrant origin	17.00%	4	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Women	10.00%	2	5	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	N	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	N	0	0	1	N	0	0	0	N	0	0	0	1	0	0
Expat (living abroad)	0.40%	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	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	4	0	0	0	0	0	N	0	0	N	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	N	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Hispanic	12.00%	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	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	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Asian	3.00%	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	N	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Native	0.30%	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	N	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	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	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transgender	--%	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nonbinary, gender fluid, ge	--%	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Other participant information

All of the participants except 1 had previously used My HealtheVet and about ⅔ used it at least monthly. Sixteen of the nineteen had previously sent messages in My HealtheVet.

Nine participants were shown the mobile prototype and ten were shown the desktop prototype.

Research Questions

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1. Based on the prototype, do Veterans understand not to use secure messaging for emergencies? What would they do in an emergency?
2. How do Veterans find and organize their messages?
3. Are Veterans able to compose and reply to messages?
4. Do they understand who they are corresponding with?

Key findings

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1. Participants would not use secure messaging in case of emergencies.
2. Participants understood who sent them the message, who would respond, and how long it would take them to receive a reply.
3. Participants prefer to view their messages in time/date order, from newest to oldest.
4. Participants could find past messages but rarely mentioned the “Expand All Messages” link.
5. Participants want confirmation that their messages have been sent.
6. Participants thought that the messaging experience was simple, which was desirable.

Details of Findings

1. **Participants would not use secure messaging in case of emergencies.** In case of an emergency eighteen said that they would call 911 or go to the emergency room; 1 said that they would go to urgent care.
2. **Participants understood who sent them the message, who would respond, and how long it would take them to receive a reply.** Most were current, regular users.
3. **Participants prefer to view their messages in time/date order, from newest to oldest.** This matches the functionality currently in the prototype and in Secure Messaging. Other sorting options that participants mentioned included alphabetical by sender's name (this was the other sorting option included in the prototype), alphabetical by subject and unread messages.

Details of Findings, cont.

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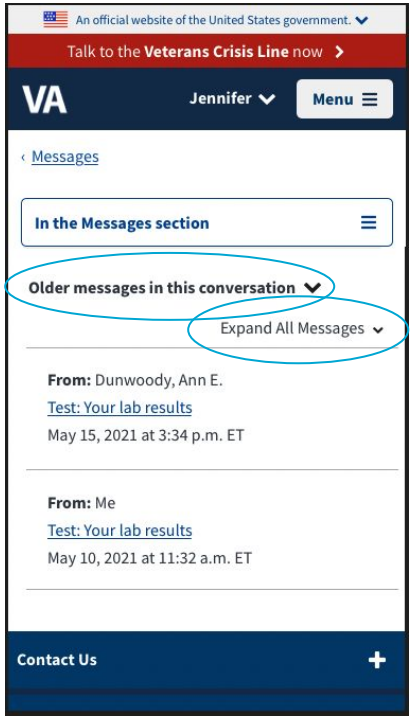
4. **Participants could find past messages but rarely mentioned the "Expand All Messages" link.**
   In the screenshot you can see two links. The users frequently commented on the first link "Older messages in this conversation" but not on the second "Expand All Messages" link.



Details of Findings, cont.

5. **Participants want confirmation that their messages have been sent.** Participants also mentioned that after sending a message they would like to go to the messages screen.
6. **Participants thought that the messaging experience was simple, which was desirable.** It was desirable because participants said that it was easy to use and easy to learn. They also understood that Secure Messaging would not be as fully featured as other messaging programs.

   "I'm not a technical wizard so if it's intuitive to me, Mr Joe Average Senior Citizen, it should be workable by just about everyone" -P8

Secondary findings

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1. Participants were **confused about where to go in the prototype for messaging help**. Eight of the nineteen did not find the “Messages FAQ” in the menu. Six looked in the VA.gov header or footer, especially at the “Contact Us” link. If they opened the menu they were able to find Messages FAQs.
2. The **Delete folder functionality** did not match participants’ assumptions. About half of the participants would delete their messages and none of those participants would expect their deleted messages to permanently remain in the Deleted folder.
3. Participants **did not know what the first screen that they came to was called**. Instead of Messages they called it the “inbox or “home”.

Recommendations

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1. It is unclear if participants' understanding of the messaging system was based on their previous experience or on the information displayed in or communicated by the prototype. **Test with non-users** to make sure that participants can understand these things based on context and not their previous experience.
2. Several participants requested the ability to **forward their messages or copy other providers** on their messages. Investigate the business and logistical implications of allowing secure messaging users to forward their messages.
3. Participants gave mixed feedback on the **"To" dropdown content and edit list functionality** so this should be emphasized in future tests.

Recommendations, cont.

4. Participants rarely mentioned the **“in this section” component of search**. This should be explored in future rounds of testing to make sure that users know what they are searching.
5. Participants didn’t know what the “Messages” screen was called. **Include a name for the Messages page** in the next round of research in a way that doesn’t require double links in the navigation.
6. The **functionality of the Delete folder** did not match participants’ assumptions. In the next round of testing consider how the design could better match expectations.
7. Six of the nineteen participants looked for messaging help in the VA.gov header or footer. Investigate how to **distinguish between VA.gov content and page/secure messaging content**.