

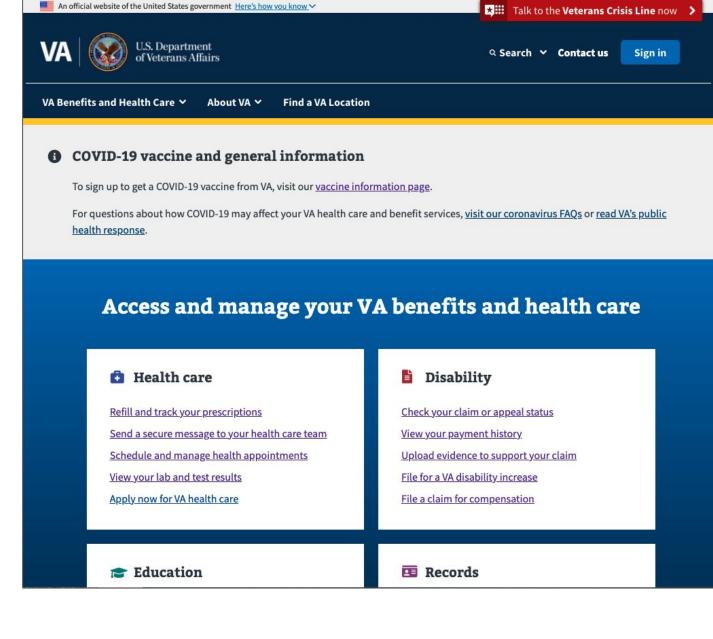
Baseline Wayfinding on VA.gov

Research Readout

Background

Veteran-facing user research on the VSA program

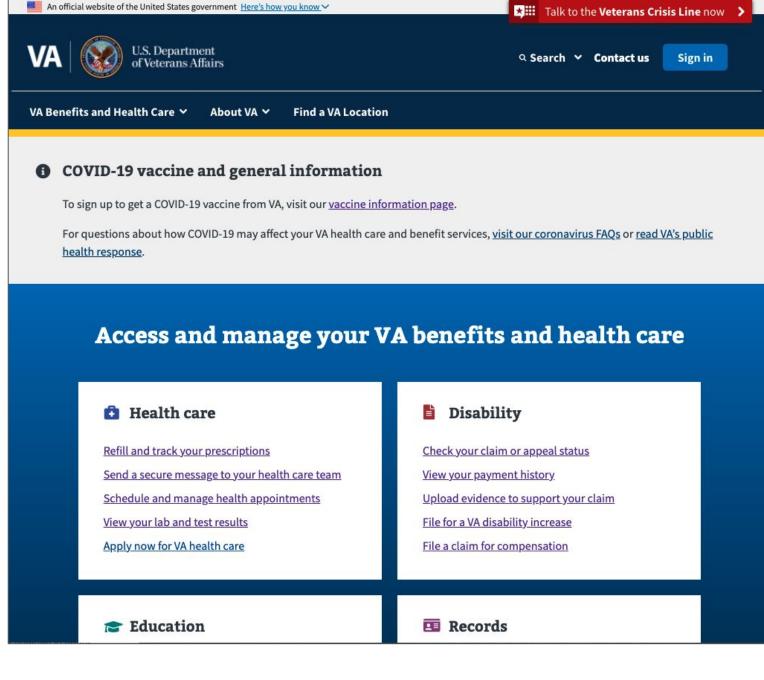
Not much user research on the **VA.gov home page** and global navigation since 2018 when it was designed and launched



Research Goals

After 2+ years of site growth, we wanted to know how effective VA.gov is in enabling Veterans to complete their top tasks:

- How is it being used by Veterans?
- What tasks are difficult to do?
- What works well?
- What pain points are there?



Methodology

Remote moderated 1-hour research sessions over Zoom

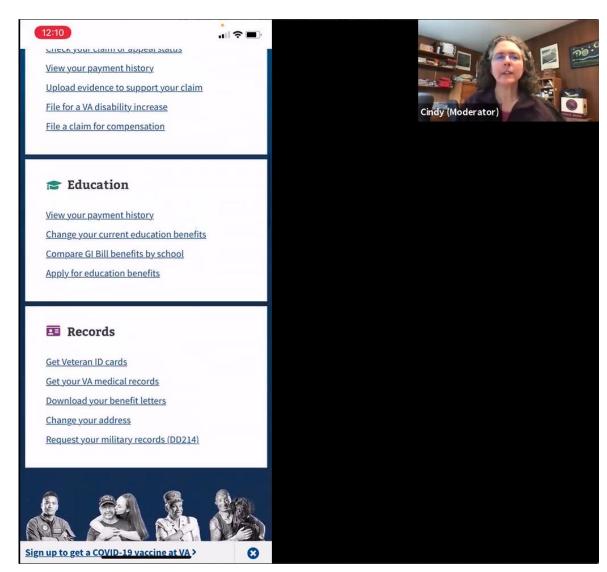
- Past usage of VA.gov
- 9 wayfinding tasks(Veteran top tasks)

User Task	Successful Wayfinding
Ask your VA doctor a follow-up question	Send a secure message
Find out if your disability claim has been approved	Track claim status
Find the form to fill out to specify that you want someone to be your representative in your disability claim appeal	Find form 21-22a Appointment of Individual As Claimant's Representative
Update your bank information for disability compensation	Change direct deposit
Set up your travel to medical appointments to be reimbursed by direct deposit	Direct deposit for VA travel pay reimbursement
Find nearest VA hospital to a city you're planning to visit	Find a VA location
Get a document that shows the income you receive from the VA	Download benefit letter or payment history
Share VA medical history with a doctor outside the VA	Get your VA medical records
Tell the VA about your new spouse	Add dependent 4

13 Participants

12 Veterans (incl. one caregiver for another Veteran), 1 family member of a Veteran

- 8 desktop, 5 mobile
- 7 w/o any post-high school degree or training
- 7 in rural/remote locations
- 6 were age 55-64 or older; 1 was under 35
- 4 were people of color
- 3 were female
- 3 had a cognitive disability
- 2 had never used VA.gov before
- 1 used a screen reader (with advanced level of experience)



What we learned...

Top Key Findings

- 1. Some Veteran top tasks were difficult to do on VA.gov, while others were easy
- 2. People tended to focus on only one part of the home page
- 3. Search was used as a last resort, if at all





More Key Findings

- 4. A few accessibility issues, but VA.gov worked fairly well for screen readers
- 5. No significant differences in wayfinding results for
 - mobile vs. desktop users
 - o participants with *vs.* without a cognitive disability
 - o participants familiar vs. unfamiliar with VA.gov
- 6. Some participants had difficulty searching on *Find a VA form* because too many words and/or misspellings in search query
- 7. Several participants complained about the COVID banner alert they kept seeing, including one using a screen reader



Key Finding #1: Some tasks difficult, others easy

All participants were able to successfully complete 3 of the 9 tasks, most completed 3 more of the tasks, but the other 3 tasks had lower success rates because navigation paths weren't straightforward

Task #	Task Description	Successfully completed task w/o assistance	Participant Ratings (1 = difficult, 5 = easy)						
		% Success	Avg	Min	Max				
2	Track claim status	100%	4.8	4.0	5.0				
1	Message doctor	100%	4.5	3.0	5.0				
4	Change direct deposit	100%	4.3	3.0	5.0				
6	Find VA location	83%	4.3	2.0	5.0				
7	Get proof of income	82%	4.1	2.0	5.0				
9	Add dependent	78%	3.1	1.0	5.0				
8	Get VA medical records	67%	4.0	2.0	5.0				
5	Travel reimbursement direct deposit	55%	2.9	1.0	5.0				
3	Form to appoint representative	8%	2.4	1.0	4.0				

Key Finding #1: Some tasks difficult, others easy

Compare GI Bill benefits by school

Apply for education benefits

When asked what they didn't like about VA.gov, almost half of the participants said it was difficult to find what they need, especially when it isn't in the "top 4" boxes on the home page

"A lot of things I can't find" (p1).



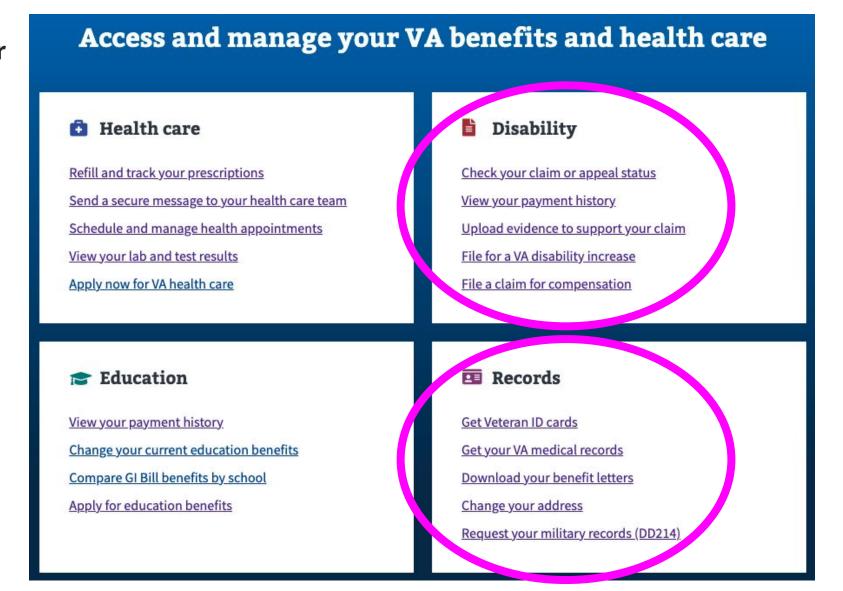
Download your benefit letters

Request your military records (DD214)

Change your address

Task: Find form to appoint representative

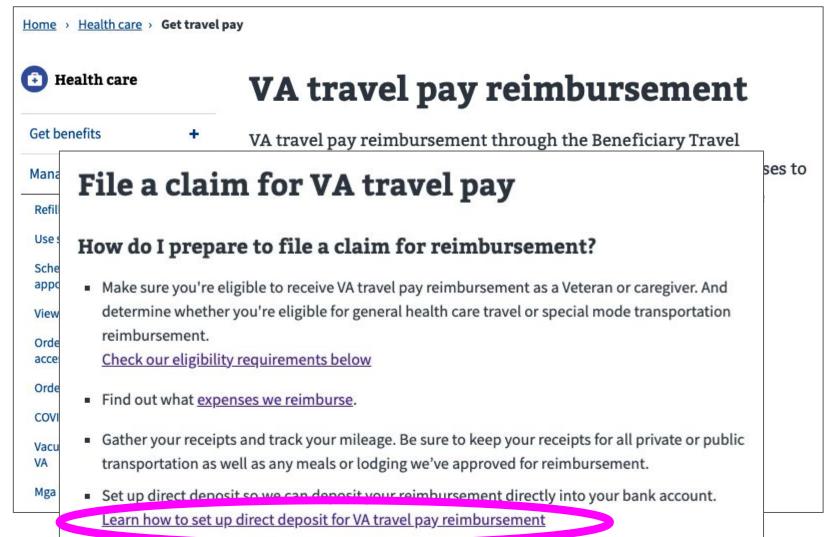
2 participants looked for forms in the disability or records boxes, but didn't see anything there



Task: Travel reimbursement direct deposit

4 participants looked for "travel" in the health care box or in the megamenu under health care

2 people who found the <u>VA</u>
<u>travel pay reimbursement</u>
<u>page</u> **didn't notice the target link** "Learn how to
set up direct deposit for VA
travel pay reimbursement"



Task: Get VA medical records

3 participants found the Get your VA medical records online

page but missed the button to sign in and got confused by

the content about the Veterans Health Information Exchange

info and opting out

2 participants
looked in the
health care box (vs.
records where it is)

2 people thought you couldn't get your VA medical records to an outside doctor or didn't know how

The Veterans Health Information Exchange

your health information with participance (VHIE) program lets us automatically and security your health information with participance of Defense.

What's VHIE, and how can it help me manage my health?

VHIE gives your health care providers a more complete view of your health record to help them make more informed treatment decisions. Through VHIE, community providers who are a part of your care team can safely and securely receive your VA health information electronically.

VHIE helps improve continuity of your care, reduce test duplication, and avoid clinical error. That's because you can see all your health care providers from different practices or networks in one place. Our secure system also eliminates the need to send paper medical records by mail, and to carry your records to appointments with community providers.

We share your health information only with participating community providers via VHIE when they're treating you. Visit the <u>VHIE page</u> to learn more about how the program helps your providers better understand your health history and develop safer, more effective treatment plans.

VHIE sharing options

If you don't want your community providers to receive your information via VHIE, you may opt out of electronic sharing at any time. And if you previously opted out but want to resume secure, seamless sharing, you may opt back in. Visit the VHIE Sharing Options page to learn more.

How do I opt out?

If you would prefer to opt out of sharing your health information electronically, you can do so at any time. You must complete and submit <u>VA Form 10-10164 (PDF)</u> to your facility's Release of Information

al records

Get your VA medical records online

Our online tools can help you review, organize, and share your VA medical records and personal health information. Find out if you're eligible and how to sign in to start using these tools.

On this page:

- VA Blue Button
- The Veterans Health Information Exchange (VHIE)

VA Blue Button

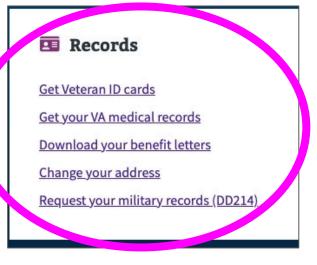
Please sign in to view your VA medical records

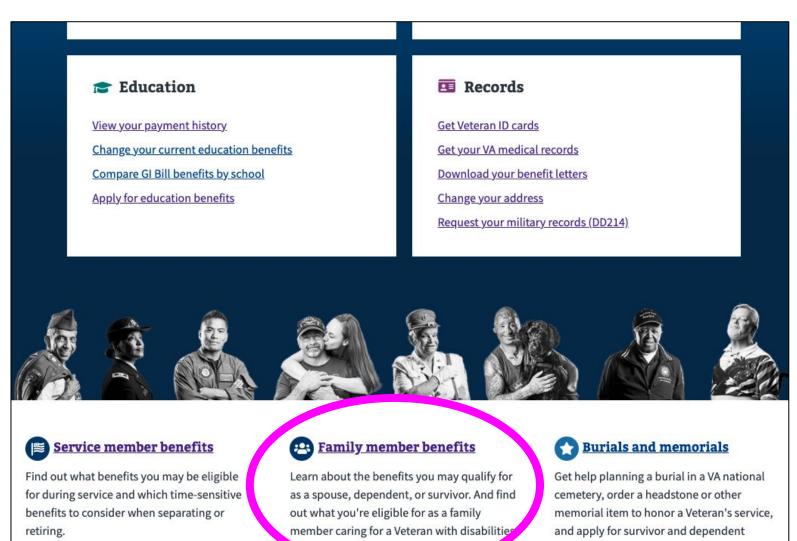
Try signing in with your **DS Logon**, **My HealtheVet**, or **ID.me** account. If you don't have any of those accounts, you can create one now.

Sign in or create an account

Task: Tell the VA about your new spouse

4 participants looked in Family Member Benefits or the records box



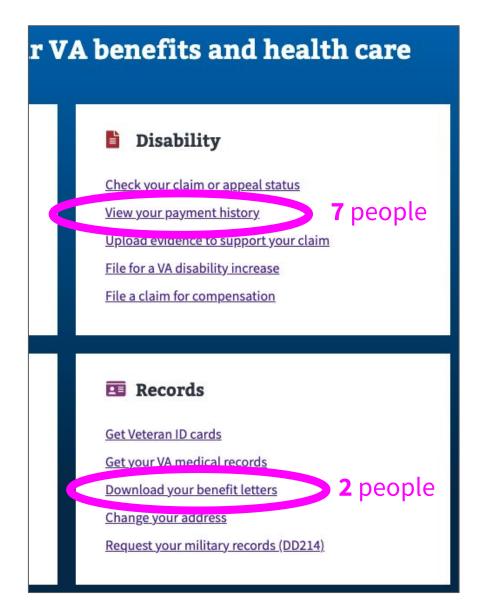


benefits.

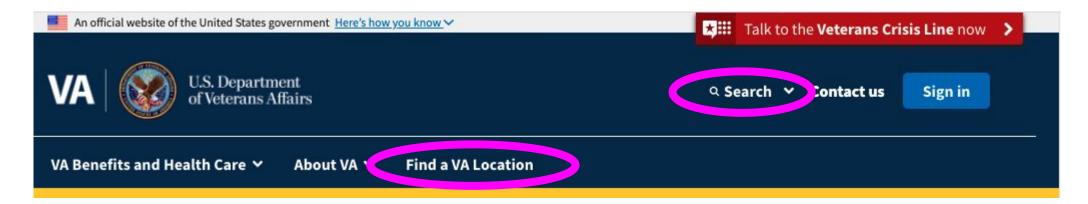
Task: Get proof of VA income

- 7 of 11 participants went to "View your payment history" (in the disability box) and said they'd print it out from there
- Only 2 people went to "Download your benefit letters" (in the records box)

 1 person said benefits letters wasn't the right place to go, and that "view payment history" sounds like what you pay the VA, not what the VA pays you, but they ended up going there anyway to complete the task



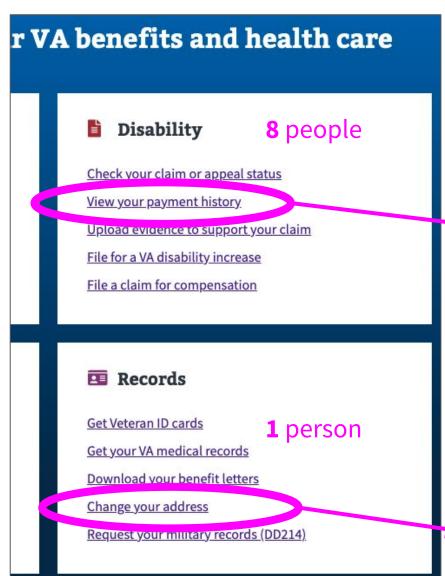
Task: Find a VA hospital near where you're going



Most participants used the facility locator on the home page, but 2 people didn't find it and instead used **site search**:

- One typed "VA in Cincinnati OH" and found results
- The other typed "Knoxville" and didn't see any relevant results (there was one clinic link amidst multiple cemetery links)

Task: Change direct deposit



View Your VA Payment History | Veterans Affairs

What should I do if I need to change my direct deposit or contact information?

Change your information in either of these ways

Change your information online, or

Contact your nearest varregional benefit office or eligibility office

Change Your Address In Your VA.gov Profile | Veterans Affairs

How to change other information related to your VA benefits

Update your health benefits information (VA Form 10-10EZR)

Use VA Form 10-10EZR to update your personal, financial, and insurance information after you're enrolled in VA health care.

Change your VA direct deposit and contact information

Change your girect deposits.

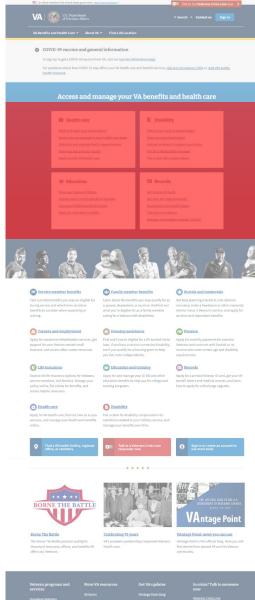
Key Finding #2: Focus in one place

A majority of participants focused on only one part of the VA.gov home page

- Usually the "top 4" boxes
 - Mostly didn't look at anything else on the page
- Half of participants never opened VA Benefits and Health Care megamenu
- Most participants didn't find Find a VA form or Resources and support
- A third of participants never scrolled down past the row of images on the home page; they stopped as if it were the bottom

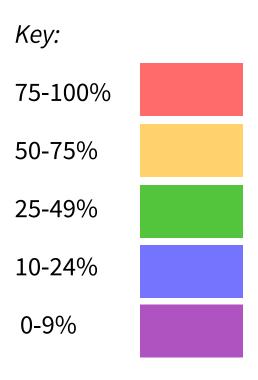
Both mobile and desktop users

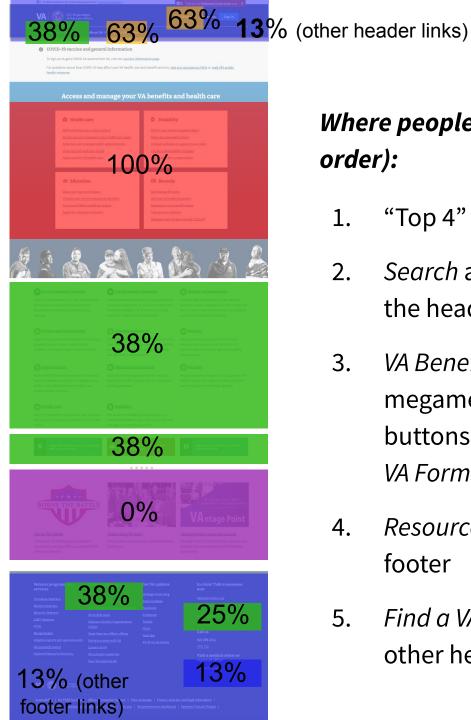
Findings consistent with analytics data





% of 8 research participants who clicked in each area (Desktop)

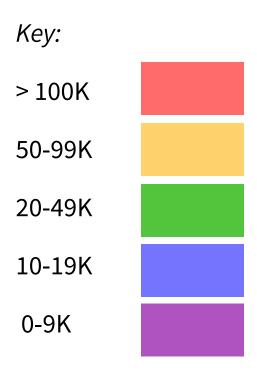




Where people clicked (decreasing order):

- "Top 4" boxes
- Search and Find a VA Location in the header
- VA Benefits and Health Care megamenu, topics and wide buttons below the row of pictures, VA Forms in the footer
- Resources and Support in the footer
- Find a VA Location in the footer and other header and footer links

of unique clicks in a month per analytics (Desktop)



Note: Data from unauthenticated navigation from 3/24/2021 - 4/22/2021 unique events (top # per screen area)

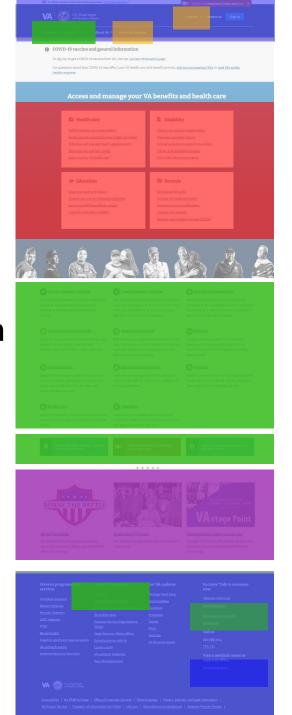


Where people clicked (decreasing order):

- "Top 4" boxes
- VA Benefits and Health Care megamenu
- Search in the header
- Other header links including *Find a* VA Location
- VA Forms in the footer
- Topics below the row of pictures
- 3 wide buttons below the links
- Footer links, including *Resources* and Support, Find a VA Location

Compare home page usage per research and analytics (Desktop) Research

- Similarly high usage in "top 4" boxes and header
- Lower usage farther down the page, except for VA Forms in the footer





Low

% of 5* research participants who clicked in each area (Mobile)

 Key:

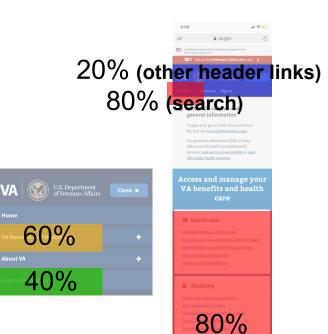
 75-100%

 50-75%

 25-49%

 10-24%

0-9%



0%



Where people clicked (decreasing order):

- "Top 4" boxes and Search in the header
- 2. *Menu > VA Benefits and Health Care*megamenu
- 3. Menu > Find a VA Location
- Other header links and wide buttons

^{*4} participants were on smartphones and 1 used a tablet

of unique clicks in a month per analytics (Mobile)



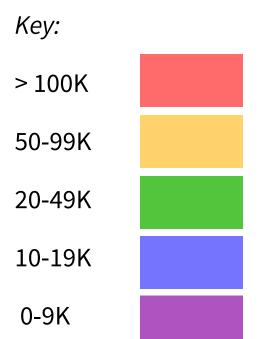
309K

9K









Note: The header isn't used much, except for the VA
Benefits and Health
Care megamenu and
Search

<1K 3K

1. "Top 4" boxes

(decreasing order):

Where people clicked

- 2. *Menu > VA Benefits and Health Care*megamenu
- 3. Search in the header
- Topics below the row of pictures
- 5. Menu > Find a VA
 Location
- 6. Wide buttons
- 7. Footer links including VA Forms, Resources and Support, Find a VA Location

Note: Data from unauthenticated navigation from 3/24/2021 - 4/22/2021 unique events (top # per screen area)

Compare

home page usage per research and analytics (Mobile)



Research

- Similarly high usage in "top 4" boxes, VA Benefits and Health Care megamenu, and Search
- Lower usage elsewhere



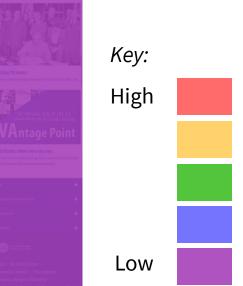








Analytics



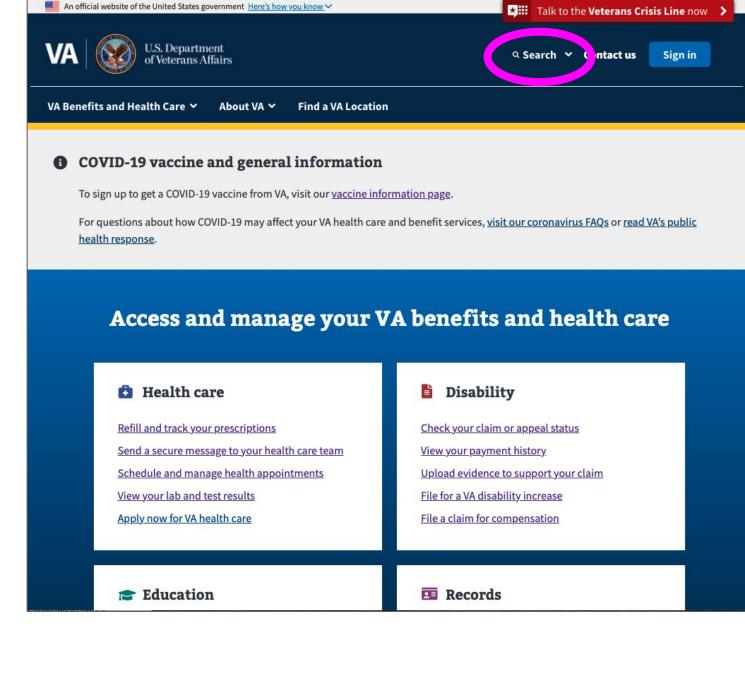
Key Finding #3: Search as last resort

No participants started with site search

 About half went there when they were unable to find any relevant links elsewhere on the home page

"It is an **option of last resort**. When all else fails, use the search function." (p16)

 Many didn't notice Search in the header at first, or at all (31%)

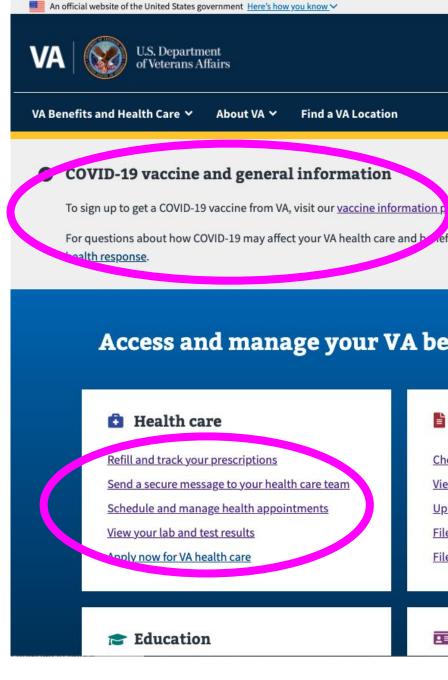


Key Finding #4: Accessibility issues

The VA.gov home page worked fairly well with a screen reader (1 participant + 1 pilot)

- Wayfinding takes longer because hearing text read aloud is slower than visually scanning
- Issue: Site search findability with screen readers
- Issue: Banner alert notification to screen readers

Issue (non-screen reader): Font readability of the links in the "top 4" boxes (1)



Key Finding #5: No differences in wayfinding

Given the limited diversity in participants, there were **no significant differences in wayfinding results** for

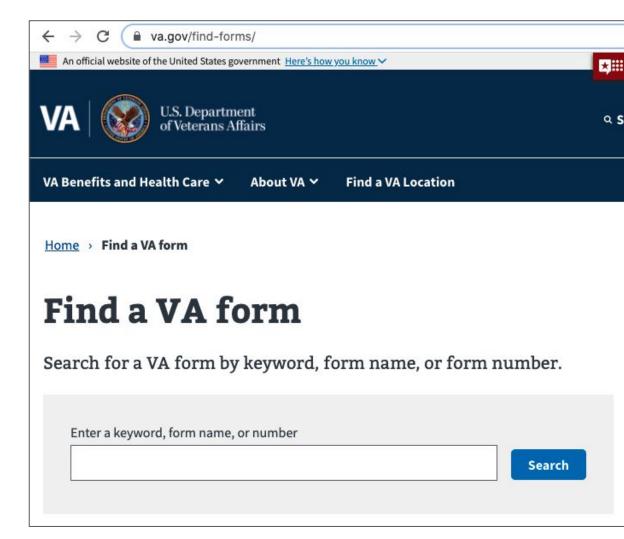
- People familiar with VA.gov (11) vs. not (2)
- Participants with a cognitive disability (3) vs. without (10)
- Mobile (5) vs. desktop (8) users
 - Mobile users have to use "Menu" button in header to see VA
 Benefits and Health Care megamenu and Find a VA Location
 - 3 mobile users used Menu, and 2 didn't



Key Finding #6: Difficulty searching on Find a VA form

4 participants had difficulty searching on *Find a VA* form because they included **too many words in the search query and/or misspelled a key word** ("representative").

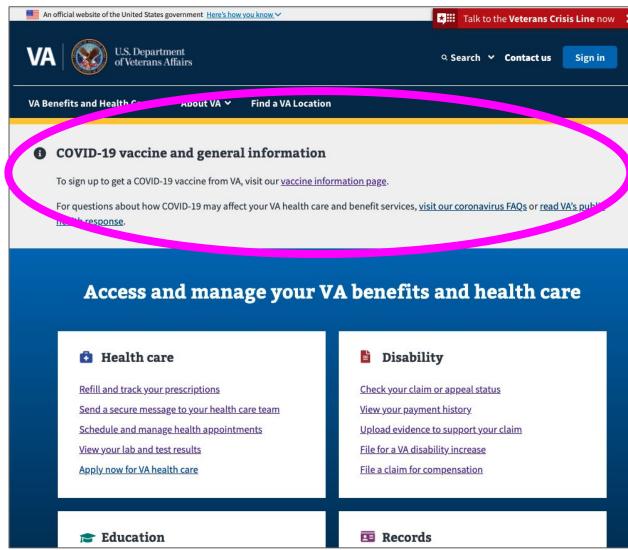
- Didn't work:
 - "assign a representive"
 - "assign a representative"
 - "va representative for appeals"
 - "how do I get a representative for va assistance"
- Worked: "assign representative",
 "disability representative", "representative appeal"
- Also didn't work:
 - "spouse" didn't return form to add dependent



Key Finding #7: Complaints about COVID banner

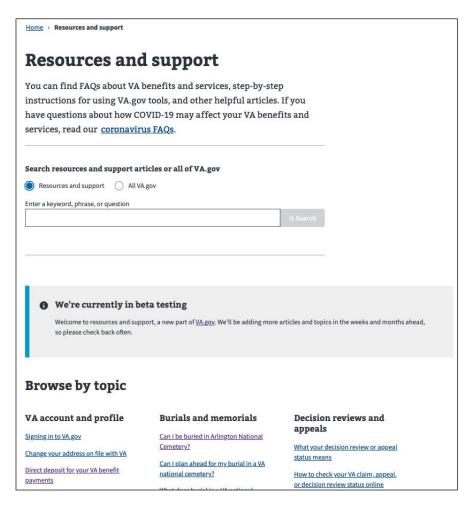
3 participants complained about the COVID banner alert on the home page

- "Yuck! Don't want to keep seeing it because I already hear about it constantly from the VA" (p8).
- 1 wanted to close it
- "Can't wait for the COVID popups to stop" (p19, who uses a screen reader).
 - Their screen reader was reading the alert aloud every time they opened the page, and so they couldn't ignore it
- 3 more participants acknowledged the alert but didn't comment on it



Successes with VA.gov

- 1. Most participants used **links in the "top 4" boxes** extensively, finding them useful to complete tasks
- 2. The VA.gov home page worked well with a screen reader
 - "This is user friendly for a screen reader...not a lot of graphics...works pretty good" (p19).
- 3. Half of the participants (all desktop users, not mobile) used the **links in the left nav** on content pages
- 4. All 5 participants shown *Resources and support* were able to use it to complete the relevant task by browsing topics or searching on the page
- 5. 2 participants noticed **typeahead prompts** while searching and used them.
 - One typed "loans" and then selected "loan eligibility";
 the other typed "add spouse" and then selected "dependent"



Additional Pain Points with VA.gov and the VA

- 1. Signing in
- 2. Needing to go back and forth between VA.gov and eBenefits because one links to the other and back, so you're unable to accomplish your task on just one website
- 3. Lack of two-factor authentication via email (from a participant in a rural/remote area without cell coverage inside his house)
- 4. **Calling the VA** (if can't find what looking for online)--long hold times, people unable to answer questions, frequent transfers to other people/departments

Next Steps

Discuss preliminary recommendations with relevant teams

Some high-level preliminary recommendations from this research include:

- Consider design changes to increase visibility of some tools on the home page and sitewide navigation
- Consider additional links for the "top 4" boxes, and maybe remove some not being used
- Consider changes to improve accessibility

Questions?

APPENDIX: Parts of the VA.gov home page

Header

Areas of the VA.gov home page (Desktop)

"Top 4" boxes

Topics below the pictures

3 wide buttons

3 pictures w/links

Footer





Some important links on the home page (Desktop)

VA Benefits and Health Care megamenu

Find a VA Location

VA Forms



Site Search

Find a VA Location

Resources & Support

Find a VA Location

Header

Areas of the VA.gov home page (Mobile)

"Top 4" boxes

Topics below the pictures



Topics below the pictures (more)

3 wide buttons

3 pictures w/links

Whotage Point is VA's official blog. Here you will find stories from around VA and the Veteran community.

Contact us

VAntage Point

BORNE THE BATTLE

Education and training

Records

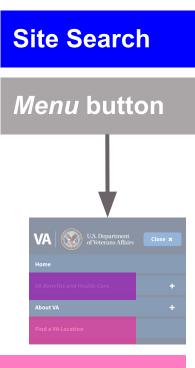
Health care

Disability



Footer

Some important links on the home page (Mobile)



Find a VA Location

VA Benefits and Health Care megamenu







Contact Us to see Resources & Support, Find a VA Location



VAntage Point

More VA resources to see VA Forms

BACKUP

Marginalized groups we didn't speak with

This study may not meet the needs of the following marginalized Veteran groups:

- Veterans age 55 or older
- Veterans with cognitive disabilities
- Mobile users
- Assistive tech users
- Native American Veterans
- Transgender Veterans
- Veterans living abroad

Category	Target	Study	1	2	5	8	9	11	12	14	15	16	17	18	19
Marginalized Group			04/26/21			- 05/05/21									
Age 55-64+	50%	46%	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1
Cog. Disability	50%	23%	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Mobile user	50%	38%	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
People of color	30%	31%	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0
Rural	25%	54%	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1
No degree	25%	54%	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1
Women	10%	23%	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Assistive tech user	10%	8%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Native American	10%	Θ%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transgender	10%	Θ%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Veterans abroad	10%	Θ%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0