

VA





U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs



Harassment Reporting Landing Page and Poster



Research Readout



Research Goal

Get **user feedback** on the new static landing page and poster about harassment reporting at VA

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Report harassment as a Veteran or visitor to VA

Everyone has the right to safety and respect at VA. Harassment is any unwanted behavior that creates a hostile space. It's not your fault. And it can happen to anyone. Read this page to learn how to report harassment and what to expect when you do. We'll support you, and respect your need for confidentiality, at every step of the process.

 **How to quickly get the help you need**

Report sexual assault or harassment as a Veteran or visitor to VA

 **Call 911 or the VA police if you've been sexually assaulted or you're at risk of harm right now.**

Everyone has the right to safety and respect at VA. If you experience or witness harassment at VA, you can report it by phone or in person.

We'll support you, and respect your need for confidentiality, at every step of the process.

 **To report harassment by phone**
Call our VA harassment prevention office at **800-488-8244**. If you have hearing loss and need help to make a TTY call, call **711**.

 **To report harassment in person**
Tell a VA patient advocate, police officer, or building security professional.

What harassment is and when to report it

Harassment is any unwelcome behavior that creates a hostile space. It can come in many forms:

- Verbal comments or threats
- Physical gestures or threats
- Images, emails, text messages, or written messages

Harassment is not your fault. And it can happen to anyone.

We encourage you to tell us right away — or whenever you're ready — if either of these situations happens to you:

- Someone makes you feel uncomfortable or unsafe at VA.
- You see or hear harassment of someone else at VA.

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03/02/2

Methodology

Remote moderated 1-hour sessions over Zoom

- Participants asked
 - how they'd report a hypothetical harassment incident
 - where they'd look for info about reporting harassment at VA
- Desktop participants *not* using a screen reader **look at poster**
- ALL participants **try out landing page**

Report harassment in person

You can also report harassment to us in person at these VA locations:

- **VA health facility:** Tell a VA patient advocate, police officer, or building security professional.
- **VA Vet Center:** Tell the center's supervisor. They'll connect you with the local VA harassment prevention coordinator.
- **VA regional office:** Tell a VA police officer or building security professional. They'll connect you with the local VA harassment prevention coordinator.
- **VA national cemetery:** Tell a VA employee in the cemetery office. If there isn't an office at the cemetery, you can call any cemetery district office by phone.

[Get phone numbers for VA national cemetery district offices](#) ▾

What harassment is and when to report it

Harassment is any unwelcome behavior that creates a hostile space. It can make you feel uncomfortable, unsafe, intimidated, or offended. It can sometimes be sexual in nature. And it can come in many forms:

- Verbal comments or threats
- Physical gestures or threats
- Images, emails, text messages, or written messages

Harassment is not your fault. And it can happen to anyone.

We encourage you to tell us right away—or whenever you're ready—if either of these situations happens to you:

- **Someone makes you feel uncomfortable or unsafe at VA.** This can include at a VA location, during a phone or video call, or in written communications. We'll support you through each step of the reporting and resolution process. And we'll connect you with any counseling or other support you may need.
- **You see or hear harassment of someone else at VA.** We're committed to making VA a comfortable and safe place for all. And we need your help.



Trauma-Informed Research

Harassment is a potentially triggering subject

What we did to be careful:

- Provided an **overview of the session** for Perigean to read to potential participants and then ask if they are comfortable participating
- Worked with VA contacts to find **social workers or other clinicians** to observe the sessions with the Veterans and provide support if trauma-triggering occurs
- **Limited the number of observers** in the session to one team member (+ moderator, clinician, and a notetaker for a total of 4 people in the Zoom room w/participant)

Participants

14 participants

- All Veterans
- 5 with cognitive disability
- 1 screen reader user
- 10 desktop
- 3 phone
- 1 tablet

Self-identification:

- 10 women
- 3 men
- 1 non-binary and transgender person
- 1 gay, lesbian, or bisexual

Key Findings: Feedback on landing page and poster

1. The **desired amount of content varies greatly** among participants (from "all the details" to "only the headers" to "just the phone number/link to report").
2. Some participants were **skeptical** that the harassment content reflects new change at VA.

"A bit more transparent than VA has been in the past...Honestly, it feels like 'nice try'. This is cool, but we've kind of seen this stuff before. I've been getting this since I was in the service--classes about sexual harassment, and nothing changes" (p9).

3. The **days/hours for reporting by phone were too limited** (M, Tu, W, F 9 am - 4 pm ET and Th 9 am to 1 pm ET).
4. Some participants expected to be able to **report online**.

Key Findings: Attitudes around harassment and reporting

1. **Much harassment isn't reported** for a variety of reasons, most commonly because it doesn't seem serious/bad enough or physical, and so many people just say something directly to the person and then try to forget about it.

"How bad did it make me feel--harmless or psychologically damaging?...Have I felt victimized enough to complain about it?" (p14).

2. Participants said they'd **decide how to report harassment based on their current location** (i.e., at a VA site vs. at home), their own preferences, and their past experiences. The most common way to report is in-person with a patient advocate.

Key Findings: The broader VA context

1. Participants reacted with varying degrees of **skepticism about whether harassment reporting would make a difference** at VA.

“Oh my goodness, the fact that you're even going to put it out there that these things exist at the VA--that's huge...because for years, nobody wanted to admit that any of this type of behavior was going on...It's the accountability--knowing that something's going on, and we're going to try to find a way to address it” (p6).

“I used to have some hope that it would be different, but no longer. With the VA, I don't expect anything because you'll only be disappointed” (p9).

2. **Harassment is pervasive at VA and in the military**, especially directed towards women. Participants shared their own stories of harassment by VA employees or others at VA.

Key Findings: Feedback on the trauma-informed research methods

1. One participant lauded the presence of a clinician during their research session.

“I'm impressed with you having Dr. L here for support in case something triggers me, which is huge for me” (p6).

2. None of the participants appeared to have been triggered during the carefully planned research sessions.

3. We had a **very low participant no-show rate**, which might have been due to the additional screening questions and session topic that Perigean shared with potential participants before scheduling them.

“I hold out hope the VA will change, and that's why I participate in this stuff” (p9).

Key Recommendations–What we can address with technology, content, and design

1. The landing page and poster need to **provide simple, clear instructions for everyone on how to report harassment or assault**, with easy access to optional information for those who want more detail.
2. We need to get people more comfortable with reporting harassment. **Providing an online form to report harassment** would help and was expected by many participants.

Key Recommendations–Talk about VA processes and services

1. **Simplify the harassment reporting process** to reduce the burden on the person reporting because they may be distraught and not know whether what happened is assault, sexual assault, or harassment.
 - a. To report harassment by phone, there needs to be **a single phone number that you can call ANYTIME day or night** so you don't have to choose from multiple numbers.
 - b. **Simplify the message of who to report to in person:** a patient advocate, any staff member you trust, or a security guard. Leave out the details about which kinds of employees at different VA facilities and the cemetery district office phone numbers because it's too much information.

Next Steps

- The **service design for reporting harassment at VA** should be discussed and **streamlined** from the Veteran/visitor perspective
- Then **simplify content** on the landing page and poster
- Additional user research on the revised landing page and poster
 - Participants should include more screen reader users

Questions?