



Welcome to VA!

VA 101

Key info about Veterans, VA, and Vets @ VA

What do we cover?

1. Veteran Demographics
2. VA basic info
 - a. Budget & staffing
 - b. Benefits & services
 - c. Key policies
3. Veteran experience at VA
 - a. Benefit utilization
 - b. Vet personas & journey
 - c. Common painpoints

Veteran Demographics

There are approximately

18M

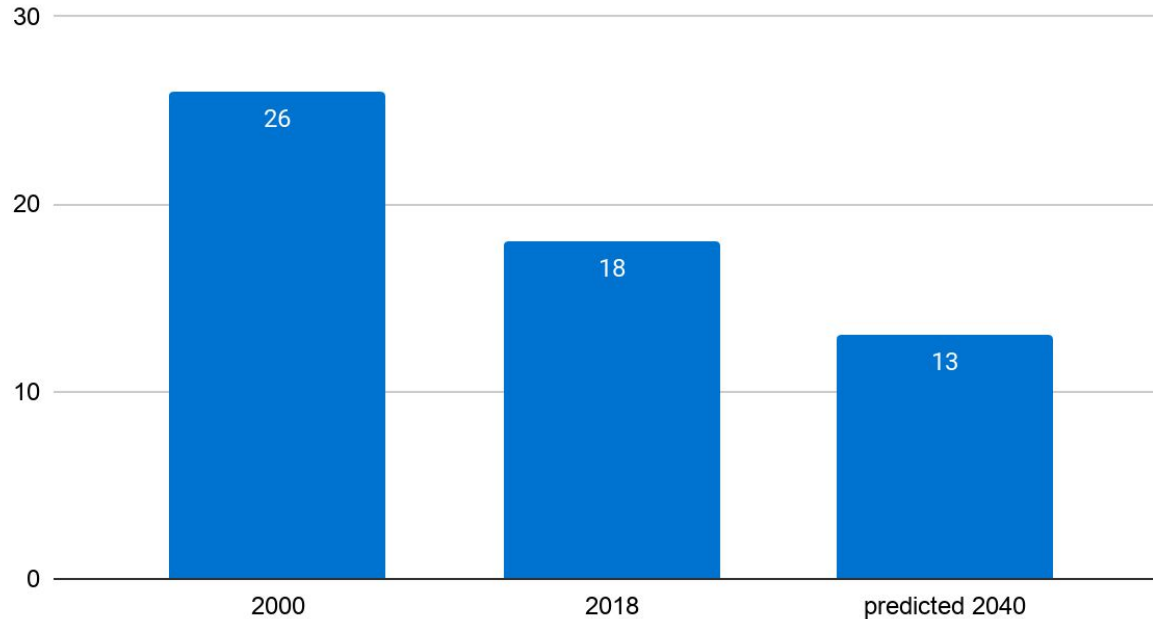
Veterans in the US (2018)

Half of these are considered VA Veterans
(ie, receive benefits through VA)

Source:
<https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2020/demo/acs-43.pdf>

The number of Veterans is declining

Number of Veterans in the US (in millions)



Source:
<https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2020/demo/acs-43.pdf>

Women are a small but growing minority

9%

of Veterans are women (2018)

This proportion is expected to increase to 17% by 2040.

- Female veterans, compared to the broader population of women in the US, are more likely to have a college degree and work full time.
- Compared to male veterans, they are more racially diverse, have lower median incomes, and higher poverty rates, despite higher education attainment levels.

Source:

<https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2020/demo/acs-43.pdf>

<https://www.va.gov/oei/docs/VA2018-2024strategicPlan.pdf>

Vet pop will get younger over time

65

Median age of all Vets (2018)

51

Median age of female Vets (2017)

- The largest cohort of veterans alive today served during the Vietnam Era (1964-1975)
- Vets are predicted to start to skew younger: 33% of Veterans will be younger than 50 in 2045, compared to 27% in 2016

Source:

https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/Profile_of_Veterans_2017.pdf

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/10/the-changing-face-of-americas-veteran-population/>

Race

77%

white (non Hispanic)

12%

Black

7%

Hispanic

4%

other

Source:
<https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2020/demo/acs-43.pdf> (2018)

Economic Status

Median Income

\$41,560

Median Income for Veterans (2018)
Compared to \$63,179 for the general population

Poverty levels

9.4%, 6.7%

of female and male Veterans, respectively,
are living in poverty (2017)

Homelessness

37,085

Veterans experienced homelessness in
January 2019 (out of 567, 715 total
people experiencing homelessness)

Homeownership

78%

of Veterans are Homeowners
Compared to 64% of the general population
(but 78% for ages 65+)

Sources:

Income:

<https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2020/demo/acs-43.pdf>

<https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2019/09/us-median-household-income-not-significantly-different-from-2017.html>

Homeownership:

<https://www.census.gov/housing/hvs/files/qtr218/Q218press.pdf>

<https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2018/08/homeownership-by-age.html#>

Homelessness:

https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/pit_count.asp#

https://www.hud.gov/press/press-releases-media-advisories/HUD-No_19_177#

Poverty:

<https://www.va.gov/oei/docs/VA2018-2024strategicPlan.pdf> pg 53

Disability

24%

of Veterans have a [service-connected disability](#) (2018). This is an injury, disease, or disability that active duty either caused or aggravated.

- 30% of Veterans have an American Community Survey-defined disability. There are likely many more disabled Vets that are not identified, in part due to military culture
- 43% of [Post-9/11 veterans](#) have a service-connected disability – significantly higher than Veterans from other periods. Advances in battlefield medicine and rapid evacuations have resulted in more Veterans surviving wounds, but an increase in invisible injuries like Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
- The most common disabilities include hearing loss, PTSD, scars, back and neck pain, and migraines
- There are 158,000 legally blind veterans, with 7000 veterans newly blind or visually impaired each year

Source:

<https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2020/demo/acs-43.pdf>

Common disabilities:

<https://militarybenefits.info/most-common-va-disabilities/>

Visually impaired:

<https://visionaware.org/everyday-living/essential-skills/information-for-veterans-coping-with-vision-loss/>

<https://visionaware.org/everyday-living/essential-skills/information-for-veterans-coping-with-vision-loss/blinded-veterans-association-bva/>

Rural

25%

of Veterans live in rural areas (compared to 19% of the general population)

These veterans face challenges such as higher poverty rates, more elderly residents, poorer health, fewer healthcare facilities nearby, and fewer transportation options to access care

Source:
<https://www.ruralhealth.va.gov/aboutus/ruralvets.asp>
<https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2017/08/rural-america.html>

Suicide & Military Sexual Trauma

Suicide

20

Veterans, on average, died by suicide each day in 2014. This constitutes 18% of all deaths by suicide among US adults (with Vets only making up 8.5% of the adult population)

Sexual Assault

20,500

Service members in 2018 were sexually assaulted or raped (13k women, 7.5 men). The rate of sexual assault jumped by almost 40% from 2016 to 2018, and for women veterans, it jumped by more than 50%

Source:
<https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2020/2020-National-Veteran-Suicide-Prevention-Annual-Report-11-2020-508.pdf>

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32037020/> (note that this study was conducted amongst Veterans enrolled in VA healthcare, which may skew the results)

VA: Org Structure, Services, Policies

Budget & Staffing

In FY 2021, VA will have an annual budget of

\$243B

- For reference, Apple's FY 2019 sales was \$260B
- See [slide 20](#) for a breakdown of this budget by department

Source:
<https://www.va.gov/budget/docs/summary/fy2021VAbudgetInBrief.pdf>

<https://www.investopedia.com/apple-s-5-most-profitable-lines-of-business-4684130#:~:text=In%20fiscal%20year%202019%2C%20Apple.net%20income%20of%20%2455.25%20billion.>

There are approximately

390,000

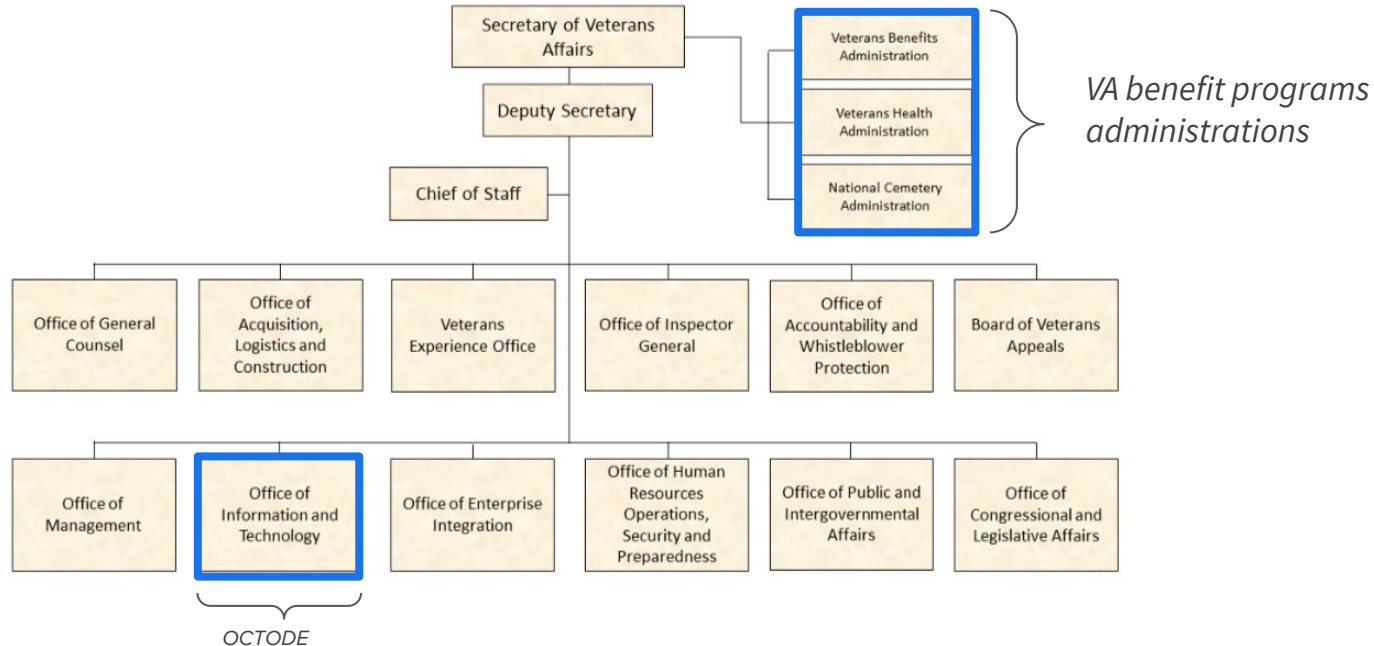
Full time employees at VA. And another ~350,000 contractors.

- For reference, Apple has 135,000 employees. General Electric has 200,000.

Source
<https://www.va.gov/budget/docs/su/mmary/fy2021VAbudgetInBrief.pdf>
<https://fortune.com/fortune500/2020/search/>

VA Org Structure

In 1930, what had been 3 separate agencies were merged. National Cemetery Administration joined VA in 1975. And in 1988, VA became a cabinet-level department



Source:
<https://www.va.gov/FOM-5-Final-July-2019.pdf>
<https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/13477/25-years-of-va-25-facts-you-may-not-know-2/>

Benefits & Services

What services does VA provide?



Health Care

- Basic and Specialty Care
- Mental Health Care
- Long-Term Care
- Crisis Support



Finances

- Monthly Disability Payments
- Life Insurance
- Burial Allowances



Housing

- Short-Term Housing
- Home Loans
- Refinancing Options



Employment

- Skills Training & Counseling
- Online Career Tools



Education

- GI Bill
- Training Programs



Memorialization

- Burial and Committal Services
- Headstones and Markers
- Burial Flags

Source: VEO Welcome Kit

Employees & Budget

Division	Appropriations (FY 20)	Benefits Administered	Employees (FY 20)
Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)	\$128B (mandatory + discretionary)	Disability compensation, pension, education, life insurance, home loans, vocational rehab	24,590
Veterans Health Administration (VHA)	\$79.8B (\$83.7B if you include collections)	VA hospitals and clinics, Primary Care, Specialty Care, Mental Health, Pharmacy, medical research, Caregiver support	346,662
National Cemeteries Administration (NCA)	\$0.33B	Headstones, memorial certificates, cemetery infrastructure, grave maintenance	2,008
Office of Information & Technology	\$4.37B	Technology support in critical areas like: customer service, MISSION act and Blue Water Navy act implementation, infrastructure readiness, business transformation	7,890

VA Healthcare - Key Facts

- VA runs the nation's largest integrated health system and only nationalized* healthcare in the US, aside from the military and Indian Health Service
- Serves 9.3M enrolled Veterans each year
- 1,255 healthcare facilities; 170 VA Medical Centers (VAMCs); 18 Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) - regional care networks.
- “Study after study has found that the ‘quality of care delivered by VA is generally equal to or better than care delivered in the private sector” - *Washington Post*
- Stated areas of focus for FY 2021:
 - Mental Health
 - Homelessness
 - Telehealth
 - Caregiver Support
 - Gender-specific care
 - Opioid Treatment
 - Rural Health
 - Precision Oncology

Source:

<https://www.va.gov/budget/docs/summary/fy2021VABudgetInBrief.pdf>

Quality of care:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/five-myths/five-myths-about-va-health-care/2018/04/13/e5834d1e-3d9a-11e8-974f-aacd97698cef_story.html

Rand literature review:

https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR11654.html

NCBI meta study:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5215146/>

VBA - Key Facts

Sources:
<https://www.va.gov/budget/docs/summary/fy2021VAbudgetinBrief.pdf>
<https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/abr/docs/2019-compensation.pdf>
<https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/abr/docs/2019-pension-fiduciary.pdf>
<https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/abr/docs/2019-loan-guaranty.pdf>
<https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/abr/docs/2019-insurance.pdf>
<https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/abr/docs/2019-education.pdf>
<https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/abr/docs/2019-vocational-rehabilitation.pdf>

Benefit	Description	# Recipients (FY 2019)	Total disbursed (FY 2019)	Avg disbursed per person
Life Insurance	Various types of life insurance (SGLI, TSGLI, VGLI, S-DVI, VMLI) for Veterans, mostly linked to disability	5.68M people insured; 60,000 death or traumatic injury awards paid	\$2B death awards paid out to beneficiaries of insurance programs; \$1.2T in coverage	\$29,553 (for death or traumatic injury awards)
Compensation	Monetary benefits to Vets and survivors based on Service connected disability rating. Benefits include: Disability Comp, DIC (Dependent and Indemnity Compensation, also called Death benefit), SMC (Special Monthly Comp)	5.38M	\$96.3B	\$16,175/year
Education	6 active programs including the post 9/11 GI bill, which helps pay for education for Veterans: college degrees, vocational programs, apprenticeships, entrepreneurship courses, GED	909K	11.9B	
Home Loan Guaranty	VA loan to buy a home or refinance existing loan. Borrow up to \$450K without a down payment. Grants to adapt a home for disabilities	624K loans	\$175.6B total loan amount	\$281,226 (avg amt per loan)
Pension & Fiduciary	Pension: Monetary benefit for low-income Vets or survivors. Esp for older Vets. Doesn't need to be SC disabled. Fiduciary: Designated fiduciary receives payment of Vet's benefits to disburse in their best interest. Benefits: veteran and survivor pension	409K	4.52B	\$11,058/year
Vocational Rehab	Job training, help finding a job, resume development, coaching. SC disability connected.	122K enrolled in a plan	1.39B for subsistence allowance, books, tuition, supplies, fees	

VA OIT - Budget & Priorities

- For FY 2021, OIT requests appropriations of 4.9B (12.4% increase from FY 20). Major investments include:
 - \$309.4 million to support implementation of the MISSION Act
 - \$250.6 million for Infrastructure Readiness Program
 - \$59.5 million for the VA Enterprise Cloud solution
 - \$35.0 million to support Blue Water Navy implementation
 - \$111.1 million to support the replacement of the Financial Management System
 - \$111.5 million to support the Supply Chain Management LogiCole Enterprise Solution
- FY 21 focus areas:
 - Migrating to the cloud
 - Improving cybersecurity
 - Digitizing business processes
 - Decommissioning legacy systems
 - Recruit and retain world-class workforce

Source:
<https://www.va.gov/budget/docs/summary/fy2021VABudgetInBrief.pdf> (pages 29-30)

Key Digital Services at VA

Property	Description	Monthly users
VA.gov	Central front door for VA services: learn about, apply for, and manage* VA health and benefits (*sometimes links out to MHV and eBen)	3M to 4M
MHV (MyHealthVet) https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-port-al-web/home	Manage health: refill prescriptions, message your doctor, view test results	2M - 3M
eBenefits https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/homepage	Manage disability comp, pension, education, vocational benefits	1M
Lighthouse https://developer.va.gov/	Public API platform, for developers	1K to 2K
VAMF (VA Mobile Framework) https://mobile.va.gov/	Assortment of apps, mostly health and condition-focused	

Digital Modernization Principles

- 1** Every VA service will have a single, high quality digital version, designed with direct input from users. All VA digital services will have a consistent look and feel.
- 2** Top services will be accessible from a single customer-focused homepage on VA.gov. This homepage will be organized around the primary actions people are trying to take when they visit VA. The homepage will be optimized for quickly connecting users with the tool or information they are seeking. VA's internal org chart will be invisible to customers.
- 3** Whenever possible, services will be personalized for the individual using the tool.
- 4** All existing VA account holders, regardless of which account they have, will be able to use that account to access all of VA's digital tools.
- 5** VA's customer support channels will be equipped to assist Veterans with digital tools, and Veterans will be provided the same information about their situation regardless of whether they use a digital tool or a different customer support channel.
- 6** Every service will be equally available in desktop and mobile environments.
- 7** Customer information will be protected with best-in-class security.

Source:
<https://github.com/department-of-veterans-affairs/va.gov-team/blob/master/products/va-gov-relaunch-2018/va-gov-strategy/digitalmodernizationstrategy.pdf>

Recent Key Policies & Priorities

GI Bill(s)

Since 1944, the **GI Bill** has helped qualifying Veterans and their family members get money to cover all or some of the costs for school or training.

The **post-9/11 GI bill (2008)** includes payment of tuition and fees, a monthly housing allowance and a stipend for textbooks and supplies for up to 36 months for Vets who served on active duty after September 10, 2001.

The Forever GI Bill (2017), also known as the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act, enhances the Post-9/11 GI Bill to expand eligibility and time recipients have to use the benefit

Sources:

<https://www.va.gov/education/about-gi-bill-benefits/>

<https://www.va.gov/education/about-gi-bill-benefits/post-9-11/>

<https://www.militarytimes.com/education-transition/2019/07/20/gi-bill-benefits-guide/>

Blue Water Navy Act

Signed in 2019, effective January 1, 2020.

Blue Water Navy Veterans who served aboard ships in the open waters off the coast of Vietnam during the Vietnam War are now presumed to be exposed to Agent Orange.

These Vets (~90,000) are now eligible for higher disability ratings from to injuries relating to this exposure, and therefore likely to receive higher compensation/benefits

Source:
<https://www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/hazardous-materials-exposure/agent-orange/>

MISSION Act

Signed in 2018, went into effect in June, 2019. Priorities include:

- Caregivers: Expanding eligibility through the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers, which gives stipends, insurance, and mental health counseling to primary and secondary caregivers of Veterans
- Community Care: Expands access to receiving medical care from approved non-VA providers, using VA health insurance. Includes new urgent care and walk-in clinic access.
- Nationwide healthcare access: Eligible Veterans can use VA health services across state lines, including with mobile clinics and via telehealth

Source:
<https://missionact.va.gov/#access-health-care>

<https://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm>

Electronic Health Record Modernization

Medical records at VA are currently stored in VistA, a health information system developed by VA in 1994. VistA was considered very innovative for its time.

In 2018, Cerner was awarded a no-bid contract to revamp EHRs at VA (\$10B originally, since expanded to \$16B). A selling point was that DoD would also be using Cerner records, allowing for greater interoperability between the two systems. The planned 10 year rollout has been subject to delays.

Source:
<https://www.fiercehealthcare.com/tech/va-cerner-restart-16b-ehr-overhaul-planned-october-go-live>
<https://www.kansascity.com/news/business/article211343244.html>

Veteran Experience at VA

Benefit Utilization

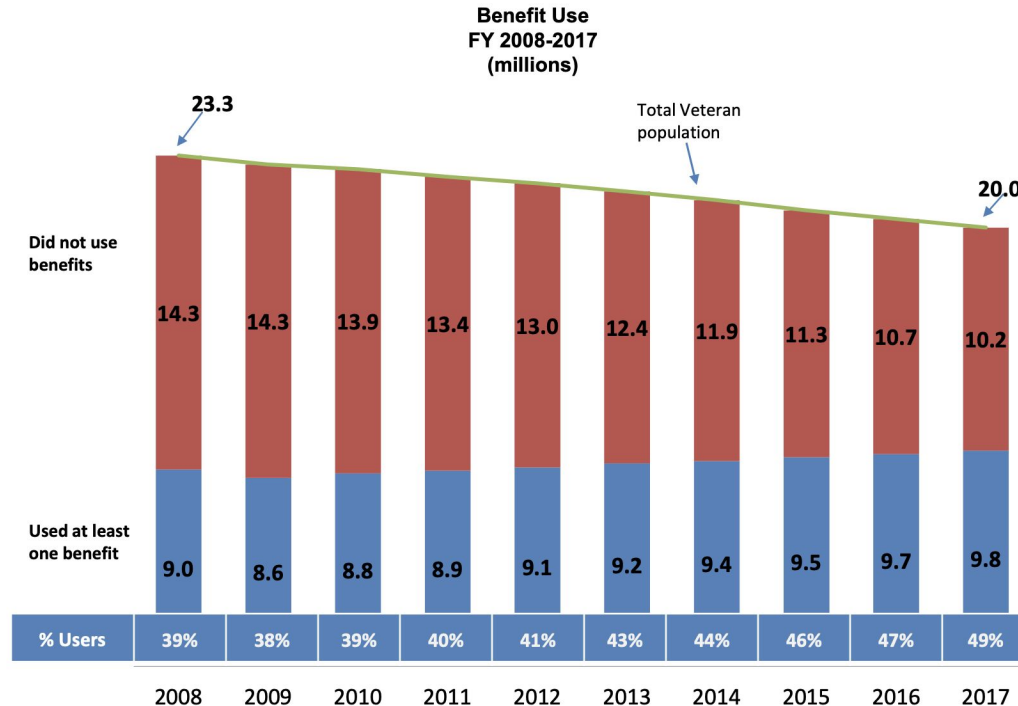
50% of all Veterans use VA services

9.8M

Veterans are enrolled in at least one VA service = 50% of all Vets

Source:
https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/Quickfacts/VA_Utilization_Profile_2017.pdf
(slide 6)

The number of Vets using VA services is increasing, despite a decline in overall Vet population



Source:
https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/Quickfacts/VA_Utilization_Profile_2017.pdf
(slide 6)

VA Veteran Demographics (enrolled in VA services)

Gender

9.6%

of VA users are women. Of female vets, 50% use VA services (compared to 49% utilization for male vets)

Age

64, 48

Median age of male and female VA veterans, respectively. Vets between the ages of 25-34, and 65+, are most likely to use VA benefits

SC Disability

707,000

Veterans have an SC-disability rating of 100%

Rural

27%

of VA Veterans live in rural areas, 2.7M.

Source:
https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/Quickfacts/VA_Utilization_Profile_2017.pdf

<https://www.ruralhealth.va.gov/aboutus/ruralvets.asp>

Service Connected Disability Rating

A Veterans service-connected disability rating impacts their eligibility for benefits and priority group for healthcare. To receive a rating, Vets undergo a C&P (compensation & pension) exam at a VA Medical Center.

This exam determines to what extent the VA considers the Veteran to have a disability caused by, or exacerbated by, their time in the military. An individual may receive separate SC ratings for each disability, which can be added together into a combined disability rating.

The degree of disability is rated from 0 to 100 percent, in increments of 10 percent.

Source:
<https://www.va.gov/disability/about-disability-ratings/>

Disability Prevalence

The most prevalent SC disabilities amongst all disability compensation recipients are:

- Tinnitus (8%, 2.17M)
- Hearing loss (4.8%, 1.3M)
- Limitation of flexion, knee (4.3%, 1.17M)
- PTSD (4.1%, 1.12M)
- Lumbosacral or cervical strain (3.9%, 1.06M)
- Scars, general (3.8%, 1.03M)
- Paralysis of the sciatic nerve (3.3%, 899K)
- Limitation of motion of the ankle (2.6%, 705K)
- Migraine (2.2%, 609K)
- Limitation of motion of the arm (2.1%, 567K)

Source:
<https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/abr/docs/2019-compensation.pdf> 2019
(page 31)

The most used VA benefits are healthcare and disability comp

76%

of VA users receive healthcare and/or disability compensation

Source:
https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/Quickfacts/VA_Utilization_Profile_2017.pdf

Many VA vets use multiple services

Source:
https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/Quickfacts/VA_Utilization_Profile_2017.pdf

45%

of VA users receive multiple benefits

25%

of VA users *only* receive VA healthcare (and not other benefits)

70%

of VA users receiving disability comp also received VA healthcare

Benefit Utilization - healthcare

Source:
<https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2020/demo/acs-43.pdf>
<https://www.va.gov/health-care/eligibility/priority-groups/>

36%

of all Veterans have ever received VA healthcare

- Veterans applying for VA healthcare are assigned into 1 of 8 priority groups which determine who gets access to care most quickly.
 - These groups are based on military service history, disability rating, income level, whether a Vet qualifies for Medicaid, and whether they receive other benefits.
 - Highest priority groups are Veterans with service-connected disabilities. Lowest priority are Veterans who earn a higher income and who don't have any service-connected disabilities qualifying them for disability compensation (monthly payments).

Post 9/11 Vets use more VA services

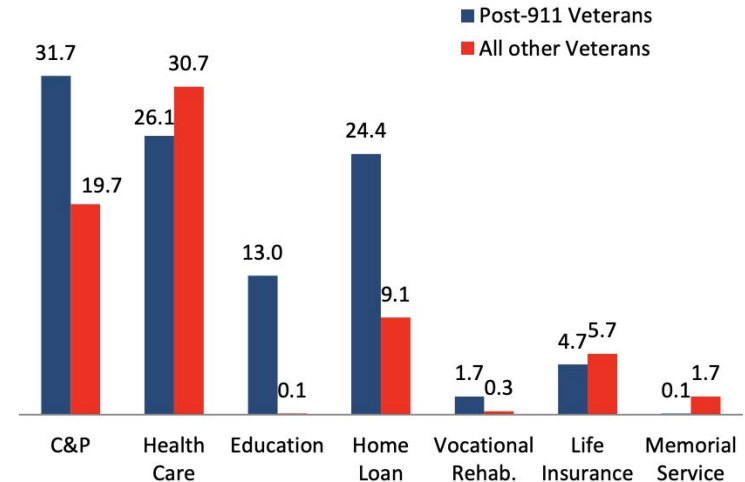
The youngest Vets served by VA, the post-9/11 cohort, is more likely to apply for VA benefits right after leaving the military. They are more likely to have a service-connected disability, have that disability be rated higher, and use VA benefits at a higher rate compared to other cohorts.

Health and Disability of Veterans by Service Period: 2018

Veterans of the All-Volunteer Force Era
(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	All veterans		Post-9/11	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	17,960	100.0	3,764	100.0
Health Characteristics				
Disability: ¹				
Has ACS-defined disability	5,382	30.0	569	15.1
Has service-connected disability ²	4,349	24.2	1,460	38.8
0 to 20 percent rating	1,360	7.6	314	8.3
30 to 60 percent rating	1,253	7.0	487	12.9
70 percent or higher rating	1,527	8.5	595	15.8
Insurance and VA health care:				
Uninsured	525	2.9	202	5.4
Ever received care through VA	6,614	36.8	1,464	38.9

VA Benefit Use by Program - FY 2016 (in percentages)



Source:
More likely to apply for benefits sooner:
<https://www.va.gov/oei/docs/VA2018-2024strategicPlan.pdf> (page 49)

Higher disability rating:
<https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2020/demo/acs-43.pdf>

Use more VA benefits:
https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/Post_911_Veterans_Profile_2016.pdf (slide 13)

Top VA.gov digital services accessed

On VA.gov, the services with the highest usage (pageviews, Nov 2019 - Nov 2020) include:

- Claims & Appeals status/tracking (combined multiple pages): 59M
- Facility Locator: 23.5M
- Covid 19 screener: 5.5M

Note this does not include usage data on myHealtheVet (MHV) or eBenefits

Source:
Google Analytics report on VA.gov,
November 2019 - November 2020

Vet Journey & Touchpoints

VA Personas - Veterans (Part 1)

Source:
VA Customer Personas Research Report,
May 2016

Persona	Description	VA Opportunities
Still Serving	<p>Veterans who serve in active duty, Reserves, or National Guard and navigate competing civilian and military systems, cultures, and providers</p> <p>These servicemembers are doing their best to balance the responsibilities of serving in active duty, Reserves, or National Guard, establishing their careers and (re)engaging with their families and community networks. All of this balancing can easily take a toll on these servicemembers as they do their best to balance demanding professions and parenthood.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Connect them with a local mentor- Help them understand how VA can serve them now and in the future (e.g. vA Home Loan)- Meet them where they are by understanding the constraints on their schedule
Fast Tracker	<p>Veterans who seek best-in-class services, often from non-VA providers</p> <p>These Veterans successfully leverage their military training, especially their discipline and work ethic, to navigate life after active duty, Reserves, or National Guard successfully. They are proud of their service and continue to maintain a strong network of military friends. These veterans are willing to go the extra mile to answer VA benefits questions for their military friends, and although they know what VA has to offer, they do not let VA's shortcomings slow them down. They have no issue utilizing the best that private care has to offer.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Offer specific ways for them to help other Veterans with transition-related questions- Tailor access to digital services and touchpoints to enable quick and effective interactions- Communicate VA can support them if times get tough or their health declines
Day by Day	<p>High-need, low-income Veterans struggling with addiction, homelessness, incarceration, or Long-term unemployment</p> <p>These Veterans have had a difficult journey throughout their lives, often struggling with addiction, homelessness, incarceration, or unemployment. Their number one priority is finding stability in their lives and they often look to VA to provide structure and support. These Veterans are frequent users of VA services to help them find shelter, recover from addiction, or secure a job.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Expand accessibility of successful high-touch, wrap-around services such as homeless PACTS- Continue to integrate with social service providers (e.g., Medicare or Social Security) across Veterans' networks- Track high-risk individuals early in their military careers, paying close attention during transition
Forging Ahead	<p>Resilient, self-sufficient Veterans who have Life-planning and health needs related to mental, physical, and/or sexual trauma</p> <p>These Veterans are doing their best to move past negative experiences from their time serving in the military. Although the dark moments in these Veterans' lives remind them they need to access healthcare services (including VA), they often feel self-sufficient enough to create their own paths and live life without support and guidance from others.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Acknowledge MST and create better support programs- Provide flexible Vocational Rehabilitation services for non-traditional careers- Tailor care to meet women Veterans' needs

VA Personas - Veterans (Part 2)

Source:
VA Customer Personas Research Report,
May 2016

Persona	Description	VA Opportunities
Proud Patriot	<p>Veterans, often low-income or in poor health, who identify as Veterans and have positive feelings about VA's comprehensive care</p> <p>These proud Veterans are most likely in later stages of life, doing their best to manage with a fixed retirement income. Although they are heavy users of VA services, which they believe to be their best option for health care, these Veterans' abilities to access the care they need is relatively low.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Develop programs with third parties to deliver on the social inclusion needs of the elderly- Schedule appointments smartly to enable patients to see multiple doctors in one day
In Transition	<p>Veterans separated from service, but still strongly connected to military friends and culture and not yet on a firm civilian footing</p> <p>These Veterans recently left military service and are transitioning back into school and civilian life. Although many are likely to make it through transition successfully, some Veterans find it difficult to translate their military skills to civilian life. In particular, these Veterans have witnessed many of their friends using drugs or alcohol to self-medicate for depression, PTSD, TBI and/or MST.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Develop programs with partners to tackle the complex path of military-to-civilian transition, particularly for high-risk Veterans- Look at Veterans holistically i.e., family needs as well as individual needs}- Pair Veterans training in mental health fields with VA professionals for mentoring
Unaffiliated	<p>Veterans who have little interaction with, awareness of, or interest in VA services or Veteran issues</p> <p>These disengaged Veterans, for whatever reason, have little connection with VA, its services, or its community. Few of their coworkers are Veterans, they do not keep up with anyone from their unit, and they do not belong to any Veteran-related groups or organizations. They are relatively uninformed about the opportunities available to them and are somewhat reluctant to explore VA further because they do not identify as Veterans.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Develop outreach programs through community and professional organizations to inform Veterans of VA services and benefits- Create financial empowerment programs, perhaps in affiliation with banks, to assist Veterans with retirement and college savings

VA Personas - Supporters

Source:
VA Customer Personas Research Report,
May 2016

Persona	Description	VA Opportunities
Front-line Provider	<p>Administration staffers or medical professionals with whom Veterans interact with when seeking benefits or care from VA or third-party services</p> <p>These people, although not veterans, want to do meaningful and impactful work for the veterans they serve. They are usually administration staffers or medical professionals who feel the system's constraints force them to prioritize operational metrics over optimal veteran care. They are vaguely aware of resources and programs to assist their patients, but they do not have much access to formal professional development or networks of other medical administrators that could provide the information they need.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create opportunities for peer- to-peer learning for VA staff (e.g., administrative personnel) - Train staff how to refer Veterans for specialized care, specifically how to share appropriate information with Veterans and their colleagues - Develop systems of care to support providers maintaining relationships with Veterans
Knowledge-able Buddy	<p>Trusted friends and mentors who help Veteran peers access the services and benefits they need</p> <p>These supportive Veterans are trusted friends and mentors to their peers, often hiring them into their organizations and helping them gain access to the care and benefits they need. These knowledgeable Veterans know how hard it can be to get help, which is why they take extra responsibility to steer their peers into treatment. Despite all this, the system does not formally recognize these Veterans' important, self-selecting roles.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide information about benefit and care options that are targeted directly to supporters, as well as to Veterans - Create follow-through systems that give supporters confidence to "deliver" a Veteran to VA for care, knowing VA will not fail
Family Member	<p>Spouses, parents, siblings, or other close family members of a Veteran, particularly those in a caretaking or support role</p> <p>These family members are closely tied to a Veteran who likely has physical and mental-health needs related to their time in service. Family members play a critical role in the Veteran's daily life, often taking the lead in getting benefits and care for them, as they are sometimes unable or unwilling proactively to find their own care. Too often, this family member feels isolated, guilty, or that they are the only one who is trying to care for their Veteran loved one. They want to be heard and to trust the system will provide the care their families' need.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offer support to primary caregivers of Veterans with physical or mental-health challenges - Provide targeted benefit and care information directly to supporters, as well as to Veterans - Create follow-through systems that give supporters confidence to "deliver" a Veteran to VA for care, knowing VA will not fail

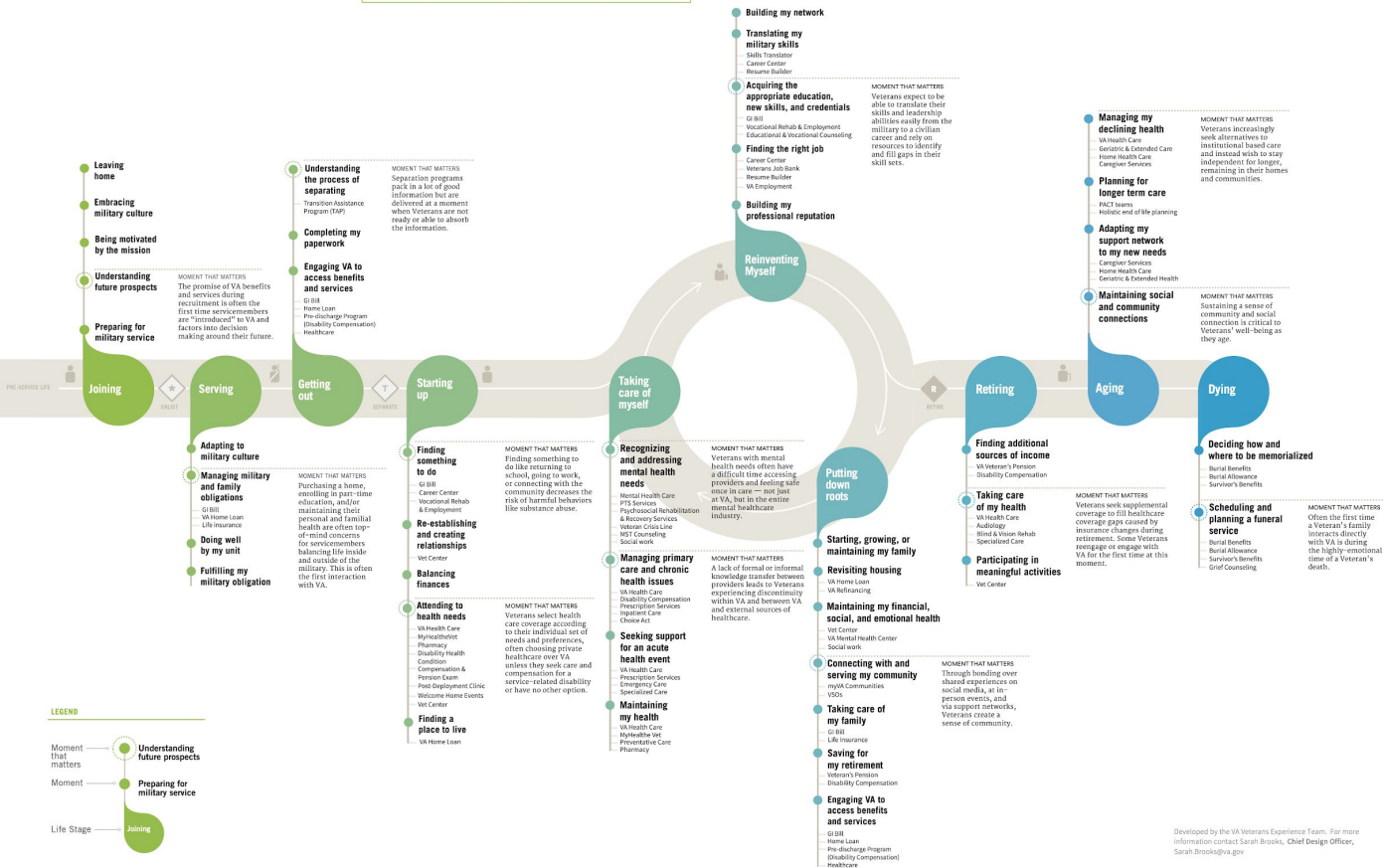
JOURNEYS OF VETERANS MAP

This map covers ten life stages any Veteran may encounter, from pre-service to end of life. These life stages are organized in three phases in which Veterans' goals and aspirations are distinctly different. Each life stage lists out moments Veterans typically experience and associated VA services, and calls out key "moments that matter" which may have significant impact on Veterans' experiences.

Not all Veterans are the same and there is no "one" veteran. There are, however, a broad set of shared moments many Veterans will encounter and live through. Different Veteran personas will experience and navigate these moments in varied and disparate ways. Using this journey as a guide to organize and align around, VA can plan for and design better experiences for Veterans.

Life events impact individual goals and change priorities. Events like marriage, divorce, widowhood, birth of a child, obtaining a new degree, loss of housing, empty nesting, major illness and so on have profound effects on people's priorities and how they approach their lives—as well as how they interact and perceive services. These events are unpredictable and may happen at any point across this journey.

Source:
Veteran Experience Office
<https://www.va.gov/welcome-kit/>



Developed by the VA Veterans Experience Team. For more information contact Sarah Brooks, Chief Design Officer, Sarah.Brooks@va.gov

Veteran Service Organizations - VSOs

VSOs are VA-accredited nonprofit organizations who help Veterans and their families find, apply for, and manage health and benefits, usually free of charge. VSOs are empowered to submit claims paperwork on behalf of Veterans, and often have access to internal VA tracking systems that Veterans do not.

There are over 100 VSOs. The “Big 6” include:

- VFW: Veterans of Foreign Wars
- American Legion
- DAV (Disabled American Veterans)
- AMVETS
- Paralyzed Veterans of America
- Vietnam Veterans of America

Vet Centers

Vet Centers are community-based counseling centers that provide a wide range of social and psychological services to eligible Veterans and their families to help with a smooth readjustment from military to civilian life.

Vet Centers guide Veterans and their families through many of the major adjustments in lifestyle that often occur after a Veteran returns from combat. Services for a Veteran may include individual and group counseling in areas such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), alcohol and drug assessment, and suicide prevention referrals.

Source:
<https://www.vetcenter.va.gov/>

Common painpoints

Fragmentation and inconsistency

Source:
<https://github.com/department-of-veterans-affairs/va.gov-team/blob/master/products/va-mobile-app/ux-research/user-interviews/research-summary.md>

There can be lots of touchpoints a Veteran needs to interact with to complete a task.

Vets who used Community Care or went to multiple VA facilities express that it can be difficult to ensure their information was getting to all the right people at different locations.

Digital services: Despite the vision of VA.gov as the central front door to all of VA, Vets also must navigate multiple digital properties, like eBenefits and myHealtheVet.

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“It was like a merry go round going from one person to the next.”

“I would always get somebody new or different who didn’t understand and I’d have to go through the process again of explaining why.”

Long wait times

“...most veterans explained that appointment wait times were unreasonable, especially for urgent services like mental health or cancer treatment. Sometimes even veterans who had positive experiences to share about the care they received from VA would add the caveat that appointment wait times can be long.”

- VFW report (Sept 2014)

Source:
<https://github.com/department-of-veterans-affairs/va.gov-team/blob/master/products/va-mobile-app/ux-research/user-interviews/research-summary.md>

<https://vfworg-cdn.azureedge.net/-/media/VFWSite/Files/Advocacy/VFW-Report-on-State-of-VA-2014.pdf?la=en&v=1&d=20160830T211953Z>

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“[There is] anticipation that you don’t want to miss anything...a couple months go by and you’re like, what the heck?”

— Air Force, Female, 25–34

Lack of transparency

Veterans voice feeling frustration at not knowing if and how their claim or healthcare question or request is being handled by VA or moving forward in the process, and express a desire for more transparency into the process.

Source:
<https://github.com/department-of-veterans-affairs/va.gov-team/blob/master/products/va-mobile-app/ux-research/user-interviews/research-summary.md>

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“Once it goes to the VA it goes into a black hole and can take awhile”
— Marine Corps, Male, 35–44

Signing into VA websites

Many Vets voice that sign in to VA websites is a pain point for them, which echoes prior research into sign in at VA.

Source:

<https://github.com/department-of-veterans-affairs/va.gov-team/blob/master/products/va-mobile-app/ux-research/user-interviews/research-summary.md>

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“You have to fill in your user name and all this each time [you sign in].”

— Air Force, Male, 34–44

“If you forget your password, it is like pulling teeth to find someone to help you”

Persistence is required

At times, it can feel like the onus is on the Veteran to develop an understanding of VA and be persistent until their need is met. This might mean calling persistently until VA has information to share, or navigating through phone trees and websites to find the right place to go. Sometimes, this results in a Veteran becoming fatigued and giving up, or knowing VA benefits are out there but not having the time to navigate exactly how to tap into them.

Source:
<https://github.com/department-of-veterans-affairs/va.gov-team/blob/master/products/va-mobile-app/ux-research/user-interviews/research-summary.md>

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"I don't want you to think I'm easily dissuaded but at some point you reach the point of diminishing returns."

"I could have gotten everything done through the VA if they had been more responsive...even the VSO was aggravated with the process and lack of communication."

Understanding benefits eligibility

Source:

<https://github.com/departement-of-veterans-affairs/va.gov-team/blob/master/products/va-mobile-app/ux-research/user-interviews/research-summary.md>

Veterans at all stages express that it can be a pain point to discover what VA benefits are available to them, and what benefits they are eligible for.

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"I am frustrated that I never knew about these types of services once I exited the military."

Thank you!