

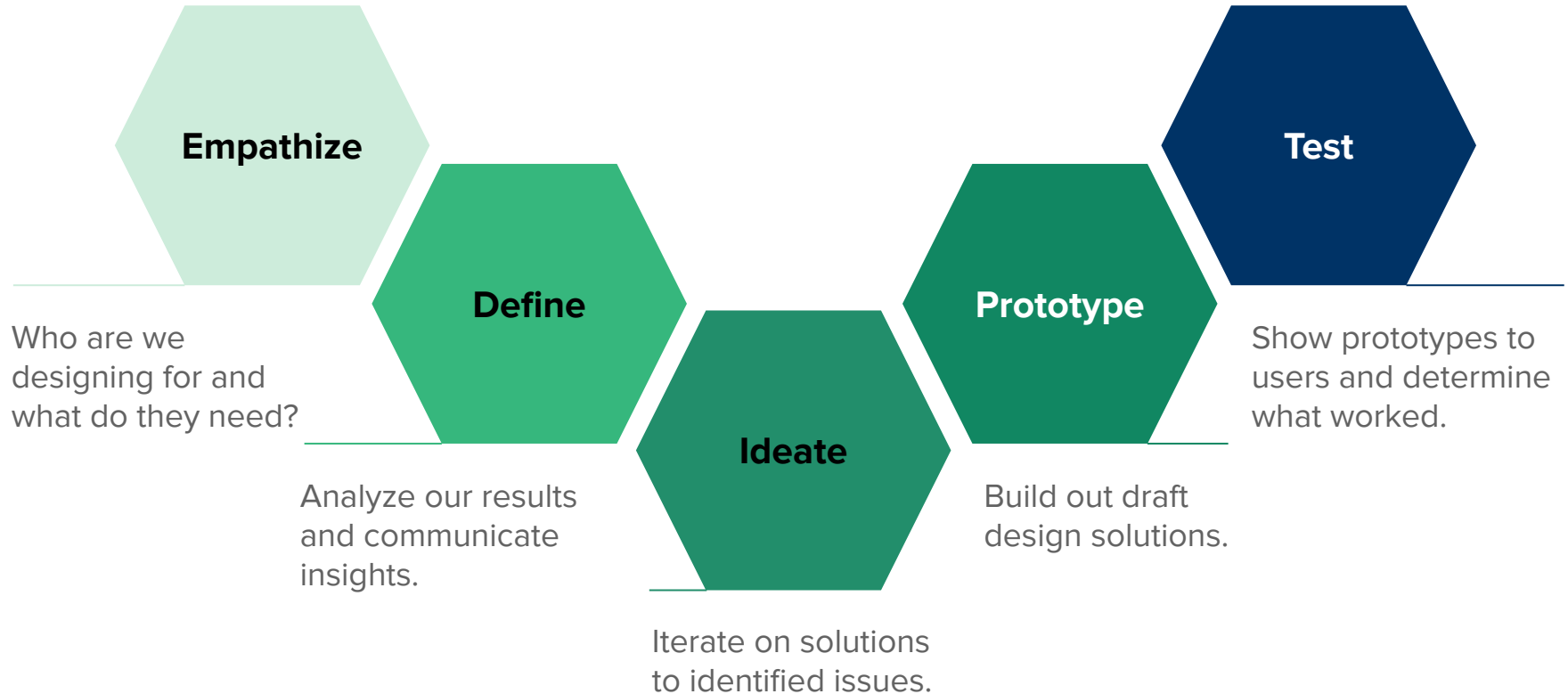
DS Logon Research Results

Agenda layout

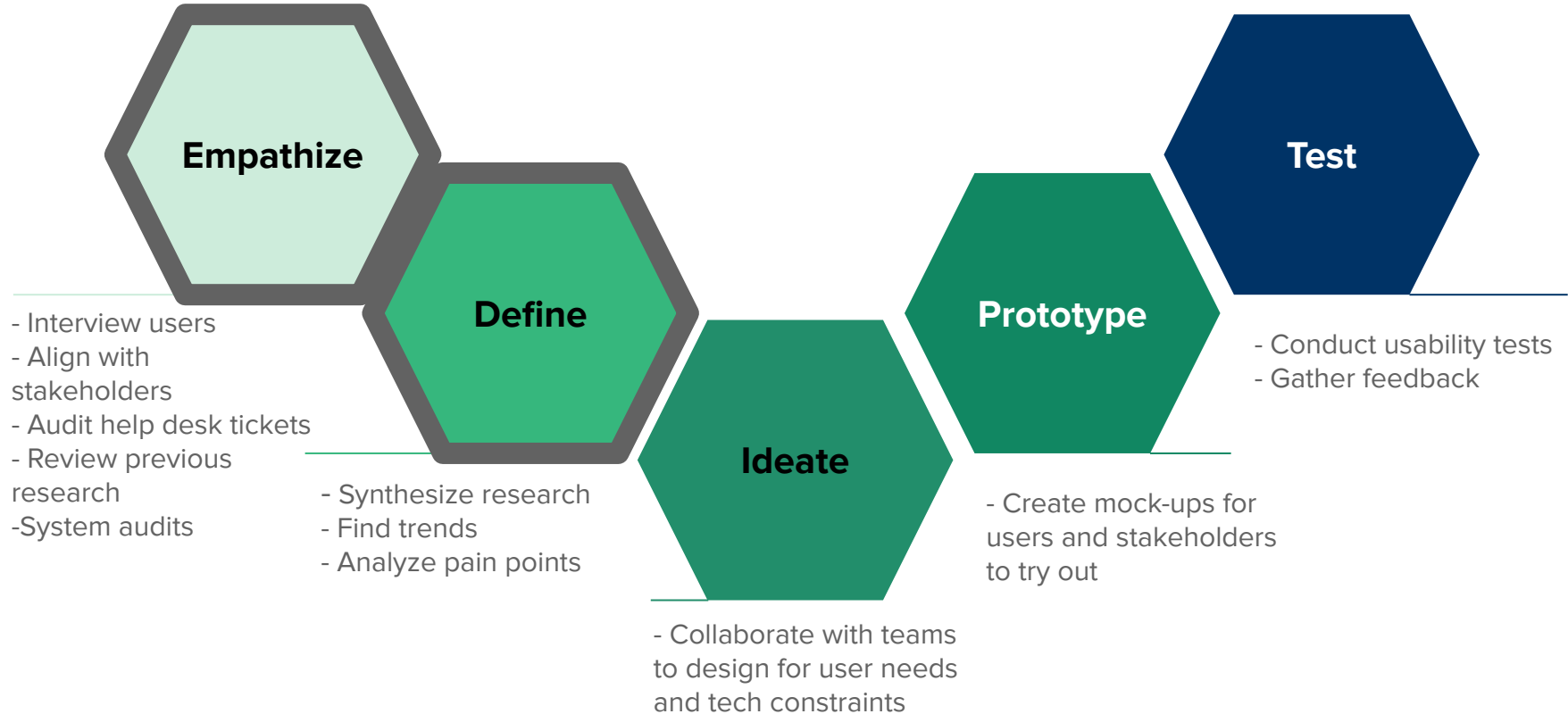
- Our HCD Process
 - ◆ Research Goals
 - ◆ Methodology
- Results
- Recommendations

Our HCD Process

What is Human-Centered Design (HCD)?



Each phase looks different



Research Goals

Objective: Understand the credentialing, account creation, and log-on process for DS Logon, and its impact on users. Our goal is to understand the existing DS Logon process and find areas for improvement to the user experience.

Research Questions:

1. What kind of access does each user group require?
2. What kind of access are they currently able to gain, and how?
3. How many different processes does a single user go through to get the access they need?

Methodology

We conducted 9 remote user interviews from October 1-7, 2019.

Participant breakdown:

- 5 veterans (various branches of service)
- 4 caregivers

In addition to DS Logon work, the team audited and synthesized previous research on VA logon accounts. That synthesis, and transcripts and notes from DS Logon research are available in the DSVA GitHub Repo [here](#).

Results

6 ways DS Logon negatively impacts users

Research revealed that:

1. DS Logon is a barrier to access
2. Password requirements are burdensome
3. Veterans and caregivers desire a single, better system
4. Veterans want secure, trustworthy systems
5. Caregivers lack the access that they need
6. DS Logon is perceived as outdated and dysfunctional

DS Logon is a barrier to access

- Veteran and caregivers feel that they aren't able to access critical resources and information quickly because of DS Logon
- Users find themselves blocked by complex password requirements, stringent password resets, account lockouts, and the instability of DS Logon itself
- Caregivers have difficulty accessing their veterans' accounts due to frequent password changes and security questions that caregivers may be unable to answer.

“

I feel like I need to have a bachelor's degree in computer sciences in order to be able to access the DS Logon. If you gave me a scale of zero to organic chem, this is about organic chem.

”

— Veteran caregiver

“

If you're to the point where you're already thinking of ways out and you go to login to try to make an appointment or to do some basic things and you can't even get in. And you're tired, and you're exhausted, and you're...you know. ...Not everyone's healthy, mentally or physically.

”

— Veteran caregiver

Password requirements are burdensome

- Users manage burdensome password requirements by saving logins in a note on their phone, in a spreadsheet, or in a paper notebook
 - Requirements force users to make less secure passwords or store passwords insecurely
 - “It’s all the same password”
- Users reset their passwords so often (either due to the system requirements or because it is forgotten) that it is difficult for veterans and caregivers to keep their written password lists up-to-date

“

I do a spreadsheet where I put in the start and the finish of it and I can remember the middles. [...] But you have to do so many characters, so many symbols, so many numbers, so it's usually something that's not easy to remember.

”

— Veteran caregiver

“

I have to go and find my password-protected file and look [my account information] up in there. And hopefully I remembered to save it. Like many combat Veterans, I have cognitive and some memory issues with multiple TBIs.

”

— Veteran

Veterans and caregivers desire a single, better system

- Veterans and caregivers are overwhelmed with the number of login credentials they must keep up with
- Users don't understand why there are multiple login options that are unrelated to each other
- Users want a single, simple credentialing system would save them time and frustration

“

If we could streamline all this into one spot to see everything, so there's not seven different logins or seven different portals that you have to go through to see everything. [...] That takes up a lot of time trying to figure out which one to use for which problem.

”

— Veteran

“

Well the logins are completely different. They don't even talk as a system. You can't go from one system to the other. So it's like, ok, now I gotta remember two user names and two passwords.

”

— Veteran

“

Too many websites get confusing to people and if you have something like major PTSD and you're trying to do all this stuff, it can get frustrating.

”

— Veteran caregiver

Veterans want secure, trustworthy systems

- Veterans understand and agree with the need for security
- Veterans will actively choose one login account over the other because of perceived security
 - Some chose ID.me over DS Logon when using a public computer, because they perceive that credential to be more secure
- Veterans and caregivers expect a login process that is easy to use and aligns with their experiences of other secure systems
- Users want alternate login and identity verification processes
- Users want security features like two-factor authentication

“

Other people can get access to it faster than we can with nefarious means and we struggle to use it as it's supposed to be used.

”

— Veteran caregiver

“

I get the need for security...I really do. But there's got to be an easier way.

”

— Veteran

Caregivers lack the access that they need

- Caregivers do not have access to their own DS Logon accounts, forcing them to login with their veteran's account instead
- Family members find it difficult to easily sync updated passwords, and in the case of account lock-outs, might not have the information needed to reset passwords
- Caregivers feel that their reliance on their veteran's account is a single point of failure. This creates a high stakes environment for caregivers, who express a deep fear of losing access to VA resources because of their inability to access their veteran's account

“

Veteran: Who's to say I don't get in a really bad car accident.

”

Caregiver: Exactly, oh my gosh, yes. And then where am I left? I'm left with nothing and the inability to login with anything, and I'm screwed.

“

Being a caregiver, it would be nice to have my own login to see message sending, who he's talking to, the doctors, whatever he's saying. Because memory loss is terrible, so a lot of times I have to ask him, “Have you done this? Have you done this?”

”

— Veteran caregiver

DS Logon is outdated and dysfunctional

- Users have an expectation of what a secure login system should do, and DS Logon does not meet that expectation
- Users find the overall design of the login flow and extensive disclaimer text clunky and unnecessary
- Premium accounts mean nothing to users, who are confused why there are different account levels or why they need to upgrade
- DS Logon is regularly down or under maintenance. Users are surprised when it is up and working, as they see DS Logon as outdated and unreliable
- Outage calendars add to the sense of unreliability and are seen as a blanket excuse for instability

“

We take the same steps every time, and sometimes it's like, “Welcome, here's all your information.” And other times, it's like, “[Expletive] you, I'm going to make it a 72-hour process and you're going to have to give up your firstborn in order to get into the DS Logon website.”

”

— Veteran caregiver

“

This doesn't happen in the rest of the world. This is a VA-unique thing, but that's the story of my 15 years with the VA. That's where this needs to work; it really really needs to work, and not be this difficult.

”

— Veteran caregiver

“

[Discussing outage calendar:] There shouldn't be an outage event. Why in the world is there an outage event? I've experienced a number of those. And there shouldn't be any, ever. If Amazon never has an outage event when I use Amazon to order things, why does eBenefit have outages?

”

— Veteran

Additional findings

1. **Login support.** Caregivers and veterans aren't sure how to get help if they have trouble logging in. There's a desire for more support and assistance, especially in resetting or recovering accounts.
2. **Mobile access.** Many users prefer accessing their VA resources via their mobile devices. For many users this is the preferred way to access their accounts as they also manage/save their passwords on their phone.
3. **Veterans have little memory of account set-up.** Veterans had a hard time recalling their experience identity proofing or setting up their account. We were not able to learn much about account set-up for that reason, other than to learn that veterans felt ambivalent about that process.

Recommendations

Password recommendations

- Update password requirements to meet best practices (see NIST standards on Digital Identity Guidelines).
- Eliminate or reduce required periodic password resets.
- Enable alternate methods of identity proofing and security questions, such as integrating authenticator apps and other forms of two-factor authentication.

Account credential recommendations

- In line with the move to consolidate VA resources on VA.gov, explore consolidating multiple VA account credentials into a single login process.
- Allow caregivers to set up their own account that is linked to their veteran's account.
- Upgrade all existing accounts to Premium and remove the distinction between the two accounts. If that is not possible, consider changing the term “Premium” to more accurately reflect the additional verification that is required and signal to users why they should consider upgrading.

UI/User Flow recommendations

- Drastically reduce the content on DS Logon disclaimer pages.
- Require a user to consent to monitoring only the first time a user has logged on, or if logging in on a new computer.
- Ensure that eBenefits is mobile friendly.

Questions?