Ask VA User Research

Contact Center Team | Research Readout

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April 22, 2021

Contents

Goals

Research Goals

- What, if any, changes need to be implemented before the full release of Ask VA (AVA)
- Explore topics such as Customer Satisfaction and Trust, Findability, and (Task) Service Completion
- Determine the overall usability of the user experience in regards to finding the form and submitting a legitimate inquiry

Research Questions

- Does AVA provide end users with a user-friendly method of submitting inquiries for issues regarding VA.gov?
- What are end users' expectations in regard to inquiry submissions?
- What are expectations in regards to: information needed to submit an inquiry, response time, login information, etc?
- Does AVA provide an interface that elicits trust from the end user?
- Is "plain language" utilized throughout the entirety of the AVA application?

Hypothesis

Though users will be able to successfully submit a new inquiry, they will experience areas of uncertainty throughout the process.

Methodology

Methodology

Usability Testing and Interviews

7 Participants

- 4 desktop
- 3 mobile

Aiming to learn:

- Can users locate the IRIS (and, therefore, AVA) form?
- What are their impressions of the form?
- What would they use them for?
- What are their expectations after forms are submitted?
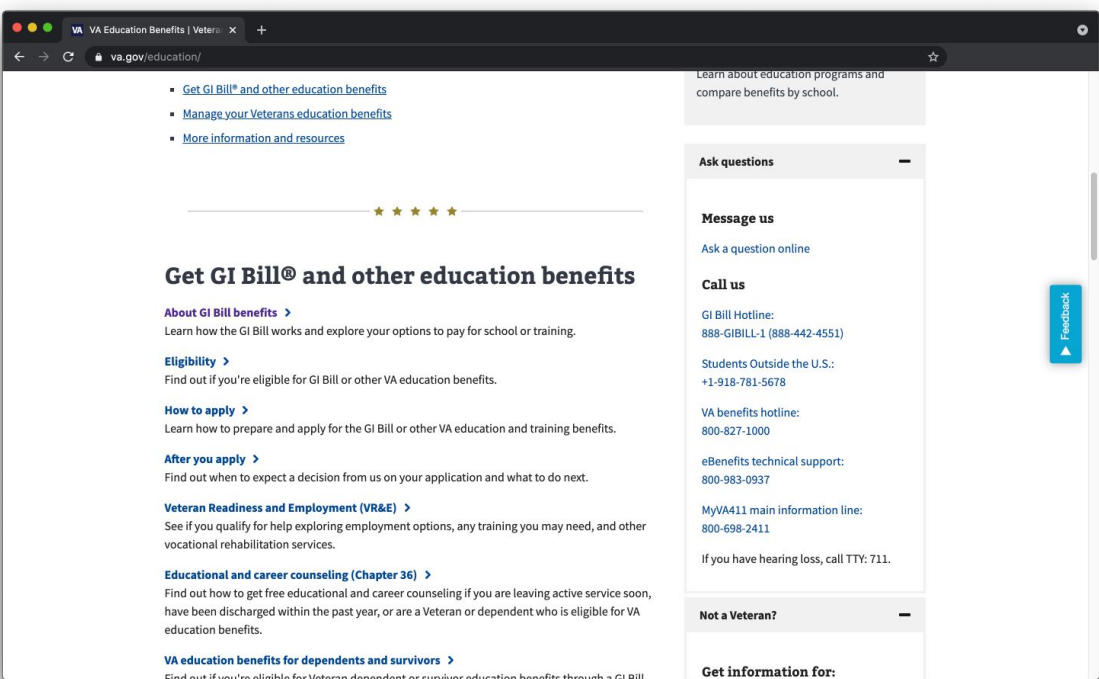
Research Findings

Summary

- A slight majority of users (4 out of 7) were able to find a link to ask a question, though the experience was often roundabout and confusing
- The form is largely self-explanatory; all participants were able to successfully submit an inquiry
- OMB Burden Language confused multiple users
- All participants expressed interest, or preference, in logging in to complete the form
  - Logging in would automatically fill in multiple form fields, and make further contact more streamlined.
- There were multiple technical issues which diminished the overall usability of the form. These issues include:
  - Lack of help text around certain form fields
  - Review page does not have a title, nor does it retain conditional display logic
  - Required field indicators are easily overlooked
  - Modal window search inconsistencies
  - Spacing issues

Form Findability
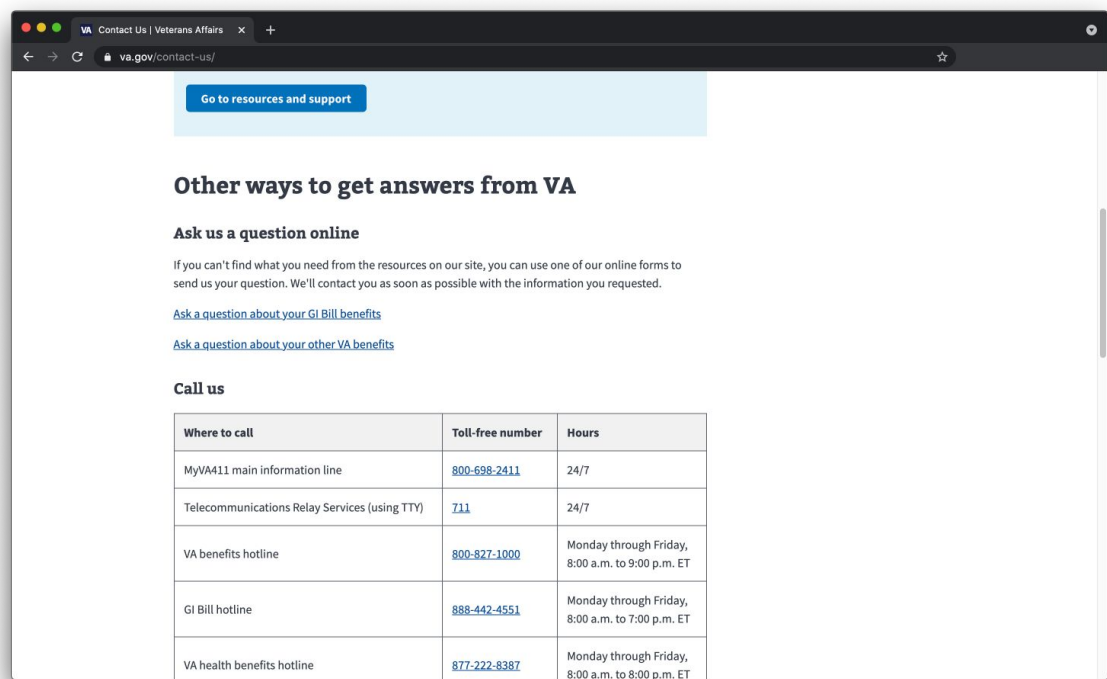
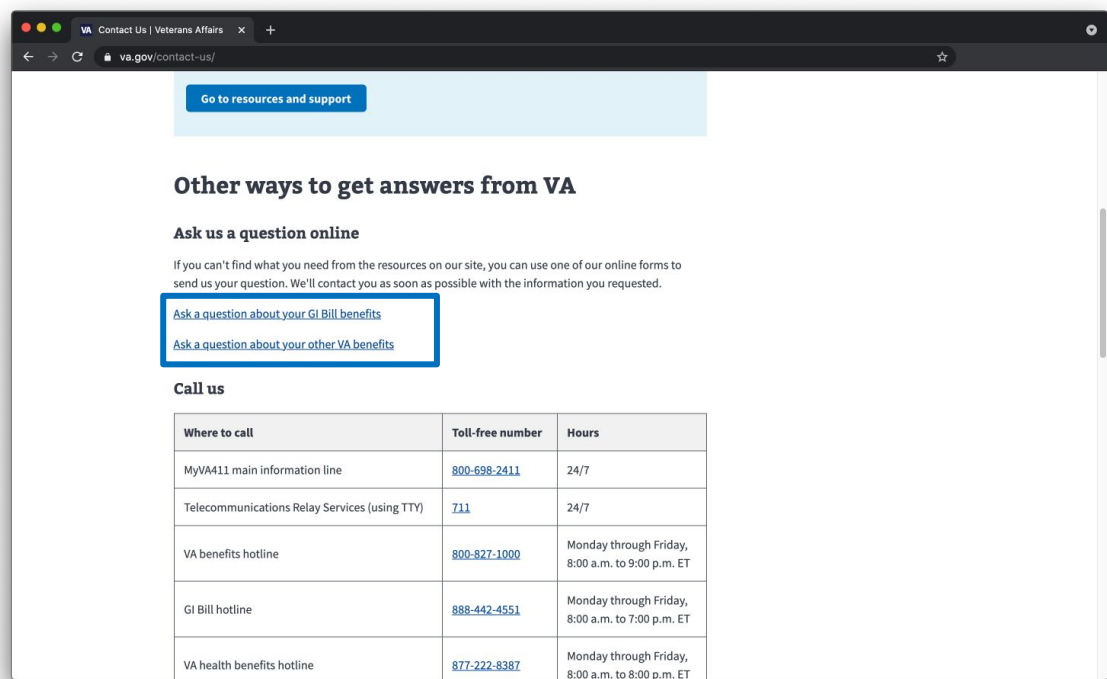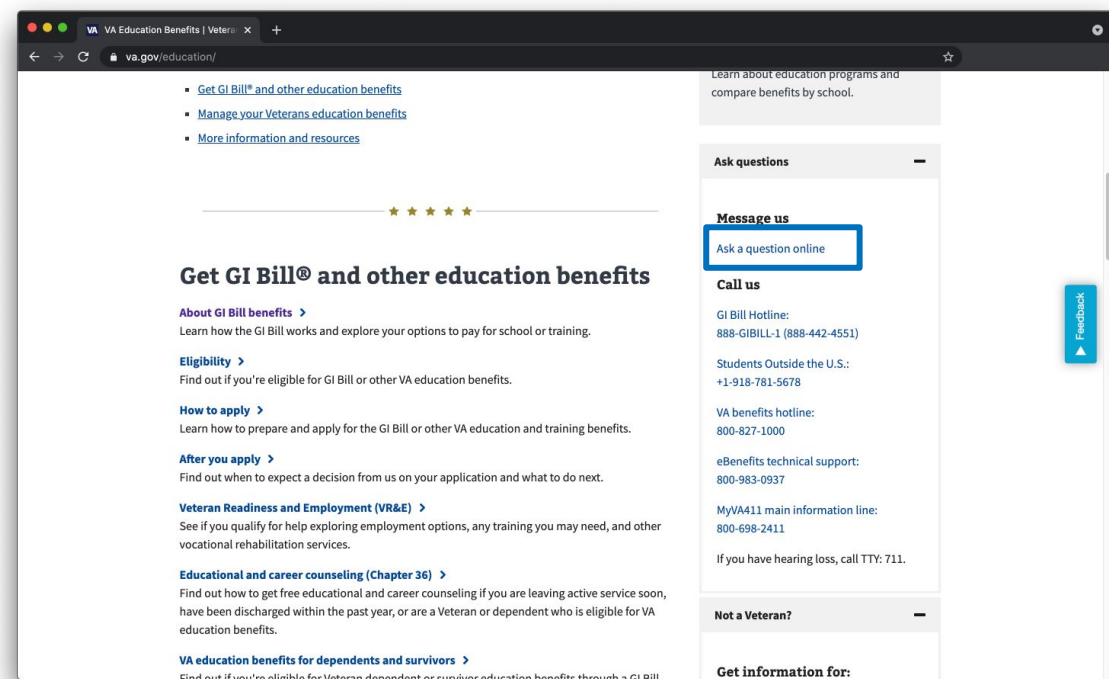Contact us page

VA education and training benefits page

Form Findability

Contact us page

VA education and training benefits page

Form Findability

- Four participants found a link to ask a question
- Only 3 participants went straight to the Contact us page
    - 1 of those 3 accessed it via the footer
- Two participants who made it to the contact us page clicked on the Research & Support button and did not find a link to ask a question
- Four participants did not go directly to the contact us section, but either attempted to sign in or went directly to an area of interest

Form Findability

If users are seeking to ask a question about a specific topic, they are more likely to navigate to tertiary pages regarding that subject. These tertiary pages rarely contain links to asking a question.

Even if users do navigate to the "Contact us" page, it is not guaranteed they will find and access the "Ask a question…" links.

Potential considerations due to the above:

- Links on the contact us page need increased visibility
- "Ask a question…" links need added on internal pages, possibly on a consistent basis.

Help Text

- Users were unsure of the correct format for the various date fields.
  - The date picker delivers a clunky experience.
  - Users would attempt to manually enter a date, but if the format was incorrect (such as mm-dd-yyyy or mm/dd/yy), the field would clear.
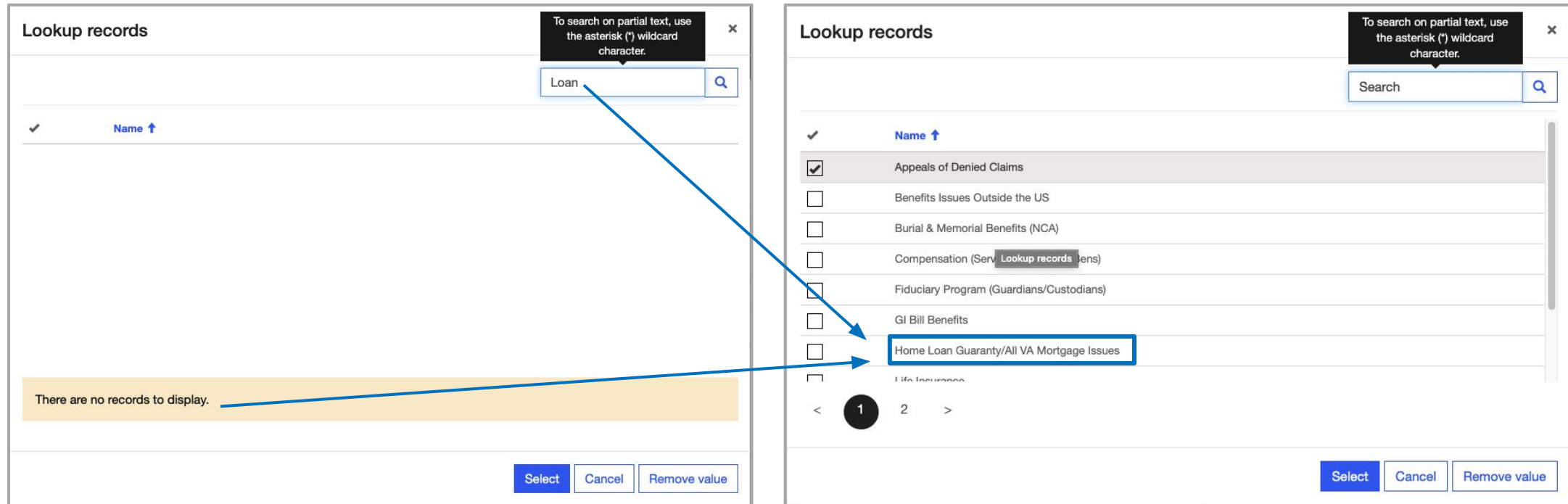
Help Text

- Users were unsure as to what to put for "Veteran's Service Number."
  - Most theorized it was their Social Security Number (SSN), despite the presence of a separate SSN field.
- Inclusion of abbreviations & acronyms created confusion in multiple areas
  - DoD ID/EDIPI
  - SSN

Modal Search Inconsistencies

In the above example, searching for "Loan" yields no results, despite "Home Loan Guarantee/All VA mortgage Issues" being an option on the first page.

This issue also appeared when users attempted to search for their VA facility.

Review Page

- The review page lacked a title or any clarifying information, leading most users to believe it was part of the original form.
- The review page loses its conditional display, providing additional fields for the user despite the fields being unnecessary due to the user's previous choice.
  - Ex) GI Bill questions were provided when user asked a question regarding a home loan
  - Additional address fields would appear after the user already provided an address
- Users were asked if the veteran in question was deceased, despite the active user being the veteran in question.
  - Users were also asked questions pertaining to being a dependent, despite the user signifying they were a veteran.

Logically inconsistent

Unrelated

Design Issues

General design issues include:

- VA.gov fonts not utilized throughout the form
- VA.gov button styles not implemented for form progression & submission buttons
- Required field indicator easily overlooked
- Spacing issues, on both mobile and desktop

Design Issues: AVA Landing Page
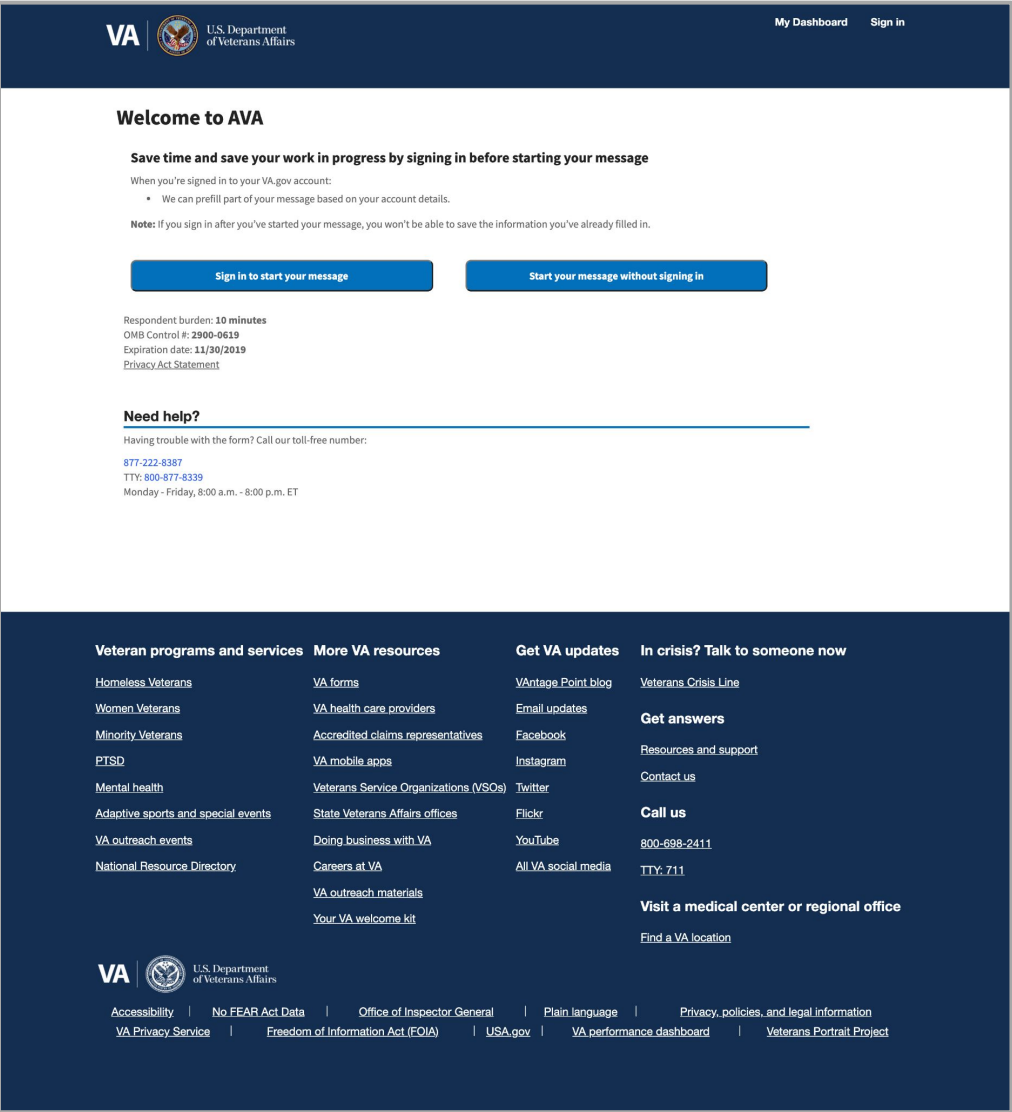
No indication this form is replacing IRIS

Buttons retain browser default border

OMB Burden language misled users
Multiple participants interpreted burden time to indicate VA's response time, not the form time commitment

AVA footer (left) not 1:1 to VA.gov footer (bottom)

Design Issues: AVA Form

New Inquiry

0%

Which category best describes your message? *

Which topic best describes your message? *

Which subtopic best describes your message?

Tell us the reason you're contacting us? *

My inquiry is: *

How should we get in touch with you? *

What is your Question? *

Next

Required field indicator easily overlooked. Design system recommendation below:

Please tell us a date (*Required)

Month   Day   Year

1976

Large space pushed "Next" button below the fold for some users, leading to a lack of clarity of the next step.

Design Issues: Mobile

From left to right:

- Excessive header spacing
- Non-responsive footer column structure
- Crammed modal window experience

Next Steps

Recommendations

- Address the review page form conditional display issues
- Add help text around specific fields, such as:
  - Veteran Service Number, SSN, DoD ID/EDIPI
  - Clarify required date format for date fields, or consider implementing design system date picker
  - Additional context and description for the attachment field
- Resolve the above mentioned mobile issues
- Implement the appropriate design system updates
  - Fonts →
  - Button →
  - Required Field Display →
- Reduce spacing between form fields and Next button
- Add header and clarifying information to the Review page

Next Steps

- Work with appropriate team members to implement the technical issues listed above
- Additional testing:
  - Test the authenticated experience
  - Provide recommendations on future tests & test types based on updates and needs
- Determine final recommendations regarding:
  - OMB burden language
  - Ask VA link location and style