**Benefits Taxonomy Conversation Guide**

**Main Interview**

**Warm-Up**

1. For how long have you been out of active duty military? Lets see uh 30 years.
2. Where, geographically, are you based right now? Right now I am in Northern California. Rural.
3. Can you tell me about a time you’ve utilized a VA service? Yes when I first came out I did Voc Rehab and got my degree. That’s I think about it. We used Chapter 35 for my son for when he went to college.
4. Last time you went in person to the VA: yesterday. It was for the Chiropractic services.
5. Other then medical: no its pretty much just health services I’ve used in the last 15 years.
6. Are you familiar with VA.gov, and if so, what do you typically use it for?

**Scenario 1 - Category Name Evaluation**

Appy for benefits is helpful.

Let me look at them quick.

Basically all of them would be helpful so just make it simple that way.

What makes them helpful: Is the label when looking at them helps like apply for benefits, disability claim help, each item is helpful because first of all they are questions that individuals might have. I know if some of these were around when I first got out it would have been very helpful looking for assistance I needed when I got out and when navigating the process of answering these questions

Which ones would have been super helpful that were around: Apply for benefits, disability claim help, they didn’t have ebenefits when i got out it didn’t exist yet but it would have been really helpful, Voc Rehab is something I used, Education benefits, pension doesn’t apply to me because I got out with a service connected disability. Family member claim help my wife could’ve gone there for help. Help for homeless veterans because I knew a few veterans that were homeless and being able to find help they needed would have been very helpful. I didn’t have transition help when I got out because I was discharged one day and then the civilian the next. IDES, would be helpful when trying to process that’s when you get out of the military and you are having a disability evaluation. It transitions from active duty to veteran status. Predischarge claim help wasn’t around. Of course burial claim, insurance, education/career counseling would also be helpful.

Any that could be clearer: No they are very clear and for someone that is just getting out having a step by step process nowadays because they have the transition help. The people getting out now are lead through the process of what they need to do when getting out. Theres the communication through the va and services that helps them transition. The transition help wasn’t there when I got out but they have that now which explains what they need to do to apply for benefits, they can know the websites, different little things that are there now are very helpful for people.

**Scenario 2 - Search Page Evaluation**

Imagine you are trying to get benefits and you have a complicated question what steps would you take for help: well I would call the 800 number which gets you to the menu tree and you’d go through it to pick like in the case for Voc Rehab or GI Bill theres a prompt for those services so then you are connected with a service rep that would attempt to answer the question or direct us to where we need to go.

How did that go: normally it is pretty good. Only sometimes we had issues when the person said they’d get back to us but most of the time they could answer questions and direct us where to go

Steps after that: No

Other ways to seek help: access va.gov website to see if I can get the answers that way, if not I would call.

If you wanted to go in person, does that sound familiar: yes

Done in past: yes, I have gone to the regional office. it was years ago but I would go into the office to get help in person.

Ever for a particular service: one of the times was for the Voc Rehab which was chapter 35 I think.

Va location link, looking for help how would you do that: I would put my zip code, va benefits, then click search. It shows me where I am. Then theres nothing close to me I would turn around and put CA. Theres a benefit there, because I know where I am at San Francisco would be the closest or Oakland is the closest facility to where I am. I know because I have been there before so in this case I would type Oakland, CA and it shows the regional offices and the satellite center. For me in Northern CA up here in Red Bluff. That’s the closest area for us.

Not close to you: no.

Use to go to the reginal office was it this one: yes

Experience: It was pretty good. Back when I went to it we got in and was able to talk to someone. They were able to answer the questions or assist me in getting the right paperwork or whatever we needed to do.

Expected or know to go in: When I first got out trying to figure out benefits I called first and told to come in. That’s the first time I went in was in 92 when I got out and then over time most of the time I would call and was told to come in to get help or when the websites started allowing access to infomration I would use that.

How confident were you that they could help: I was pretty confident depending on who you talk to, you have those new employees that don’t know everything or have the experience of dealing with individuals. They would also be able to ask the coworkers questions and stuff like that.

Click on the reginal office, looking at this what stands out: well the first thing is the limited services hours because of Covid. Which that wasn’t there before but its expected in today’s world I guess. It gives the websites, phone number, checking status is a new one since the last time I’ve been here. Then it gives the list of things they can help with

The list, do they make sense, clear: They are pretty up front. Yeah they are pretty much upfront.

improvements: no it gives number, website, directions, online status tool, phone number, list of services. These aren’t all of the services but it gives a look at the services you can access.

Other services needed here: I was thinking the medical side but that’s the other side this is the benefits side. The list looks pretty good I am trying to think of anything else. No I think this list is pretty good.

Would the location help you with questions you had: yes.

Anything you want to loop back to: no I think were good.

Location specific ones: no I think were good. All of the information for the location you are looking at it gives you everything, website, directions, number, claim status tool. It has everything on it.

**Closing**

Thank you so much for your time and for your help today!

Was there anything you wanted to tell us about Benefits and services that we didn't get to cover today? The session is fine, I am glad they are looking at improving infomraiton on services and accessibility of getting the infomration so it cuts down on calls and in person visits. especially now because of COVID. Being able to get information on claims or services needed you can do a lot more now that allows the veteran to process and get help they need.