

# Authenticated Experience - My VA

Audit usability research findings - January 2023



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# My VA Audit Research Goals

My VA Audit | January 2023

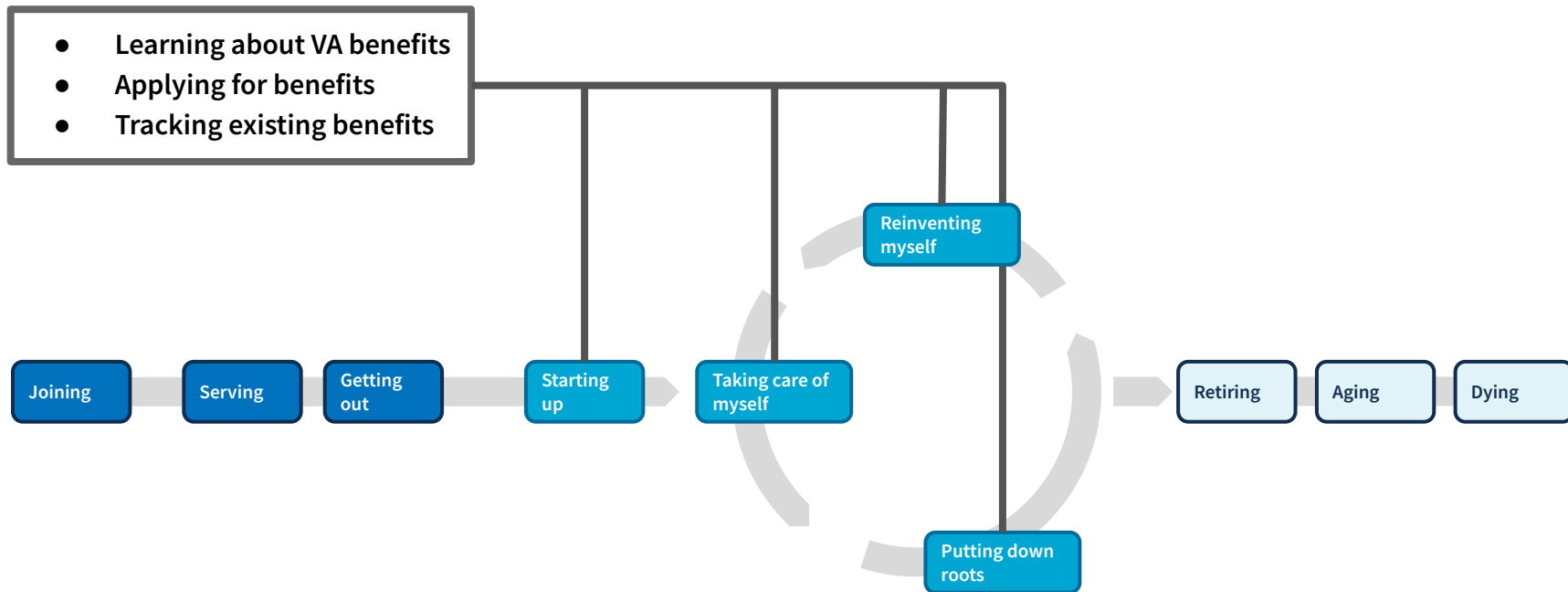
- Determine if the updated information architecture of My VA still aligns with Veterans' mental models.
- Determine if showing all sections all the time on My VA has made the page more, less, or equally usable compared to its current state.



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# How this research maps to the Veteran journey

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For a fully detailed Veteran journey, go to

<https://github.com/departement-of-veterans-affairs/va.gov-team/blob/master/platform/design/va-product-journey-maps/Veteran%20Journey%20Map.pdf>

Serving and separation

Living civilian life

Retiring and aging

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# OCTO-DE goals that this research supports

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Supported

Not supported

Veterans and their families can apply for all benefits online

Veterans and their families can find a single, authoritative source of information

Veterans and their families trust the security, accuracy, and relevancy of VA.gov

Veterans can manage their health services online

VFS teams can build and deploy high-quality products for Veterans on the Platform

Logged-in users have a personalized experience, with relevant and time-saving features

Logged-in users can update their personal information easily and instantly

Logged-in users can easily track applications, claims, or appeals online

Measures to increase

Completion rate of online transactions

Percent of applications submitted online (vs. paper)

Veteran satisfaction with VA.gov Benefit use and enrollment, across all business lines

Benefit value (in \$) delivered from online applications or transactions

Number of VA.gov users as a function of total Veteran population

Usage of digital, self-service tools

Measures to decrease

Time to successful complete and submit online transactions

Time to process online applications (vs. paper)

Call center volume, wait time, and time to resolution

Time from online benefit discovery to benefit delivery

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# Participant Demographics

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Findings may not include the perspectives of the following underserved Veteran groups:

- Live in rural areas or abroad
- Don't have a degree
- Other than honorable discharge
- Identify as Biracial, or LGBTQ+

We recommend studies with these underserved groups in the future.

Auth Exp - My VA - 2023 Audit Usability Study																			
final # of participants		13		# of AT users							3	# of no shows							3
Category	%	Target	Study	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13			
Veterans		Based on current VA statistics																	
<a href="#">Age 55-64+</a>	50.00%	7	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
<a href="#">Cognitive Disability</a>	50.00%	7	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
<a href="#">Mobile user</a>	50.00%	7	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
<a href="#">Rural</a>	25.00%	4	?	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
<a href="#">No degree</a>	25.00%	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
<a href="#">Other than honorable</a>	21.00%	3	?	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
<a href="#">Immigrant origin</a>	17.00%	3	?	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
<a href="#">Women</a>	10.00%	2	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
<a href="#">Expat (living abroad)</a>	0.40%	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Race		Based on VA's projected statistics																	
Black	15.00%	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Hispanic	12.00%	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Biracial	3.90%	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Asian	3.00%	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Native	0.30%	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
LGBTQ+		LGBTQ+ Veterans are 5 times as likely to have PTSD																	
Gay, lesbian, or bisexual	--%	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Transgender	--%	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Nonbinary, gender fluid, ge	--%	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			

[Participant Tracker on Google Sheets](#)

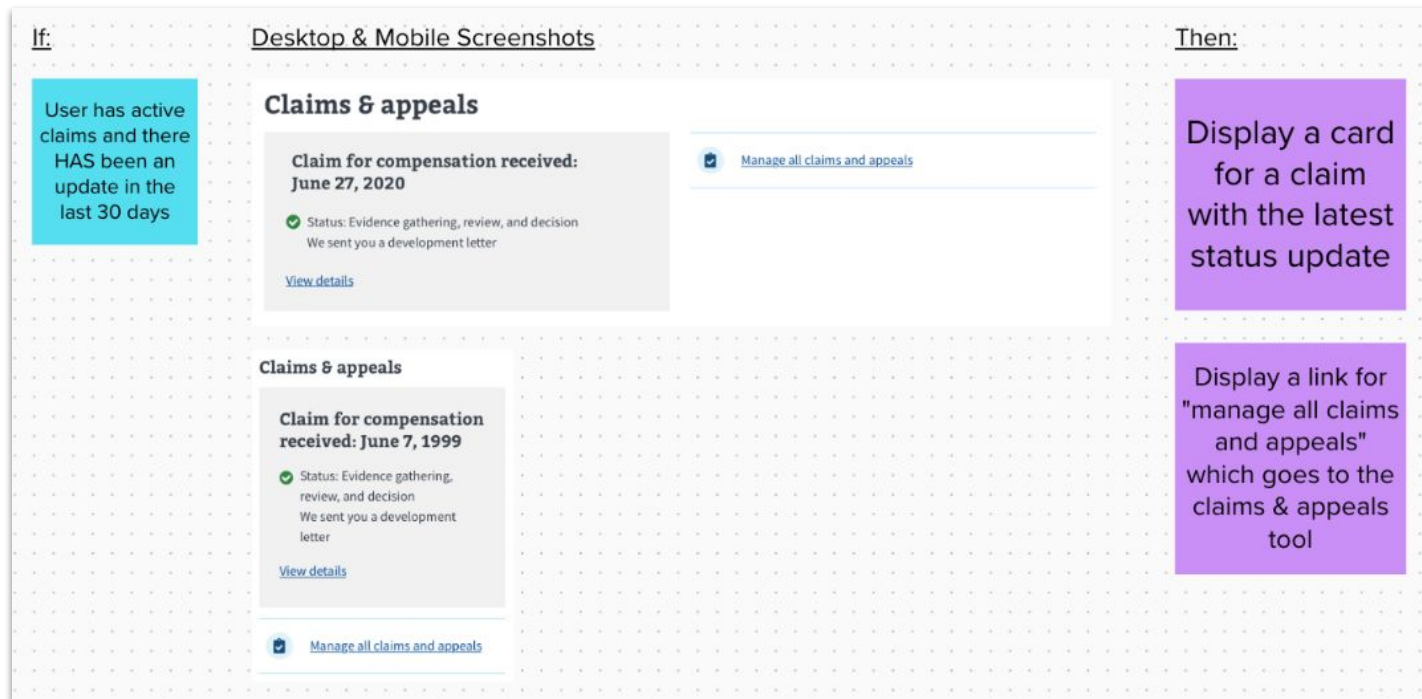
# The Audit

My VA Audit | January 2023

The audit form is titled "My VA Audit" and "January 2023". It is divided into five main sections: "Benefits", "Health Care", "Medical Records & Data", "Apply for VA Benefits", and "Thoughts". Each section contains a table with columns for "Section", "Date", and "Notes". The "Benefits" section includes a table with 10 rows and 3 columns. The "Health Care" section includes a table with 10 rows and 3 columns. The "Medical Records & Data" section includes a table with 10 rows and 3 columns. The "Apply for VA Benefits" section includes a table with 10 rows and 3 columns. The "Thoughts" section is a free-form area for notes. The form is filled with various colored sticky notes (yellow, blue, purple, green) representing different types of information or actions. The form is titled "My VA Audit" and "January 2023".

# The Audit

My VA Audit | January 2023




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# The Design Updates

My VA Audit | January 2023




**Hector Benjamin Garcia**  
United States Army  
Your disability rating: [40% service connected](#) >

## My VA


[Go to your profile](#)

### Claims & appeals

**Claim for compensation received:**  
June 27, 2020

 Status: Evidence gathering, review, and decision  
We sent you a development letter


[Review details >](#)


 [Manage all claims and appeals](#)

### Apply for VA benefits


What benefits does the VA offer? ▾


**Applications in progress**


**FORM 22-1990N**  
**Application for education benefits**  
 Application expires on: January 02, 2023  
Last opened on: December 20, 2021  
[Continue your application >](#)


**FORM 22-1990N**  
**Application for education benefits**  
 Application expires on: January 02, 2023  
Last opened on: December 20, 2021  
[Continue your application >](#)

**Explore VA benefits and health care**

**Health care**  
With VA health care, you'll receive coverage for services like regular checkups with your health care provider and specialist appointments.  
[Learn how to apply for VA health care](#)

**Disability compensation**  
With VA disability benefits, you can get disability compensation for an illness or injury that was caused, or made worse, by your military service.  
[Learn how to file a VA disability claim](#)

**Education and training**  
With VA education benefits, you and your qualified family members can get help finding a college or training program and paying for tuition or test fees.  
[Learn how to apply for VA education benefits](#)




**Hector Benjamin Garcia**  
United States Army  
Your disability rating: [40% service connected](#) >

## My VA


[Go to your profile](#)

### Claims and appeals

**Claim for compensation received:**  
June 27, 2020


 Status: Evidence gathering, review, and decision  
We sent you a development letter

[Review details >](#)

 [Manage all claims and appeals](#)


### Health care

You have no health care information to show.

 [Apply for VA health care](#)


### Outstanding debts

You have no overpayment debts or copays to show.


 [Learn about VA debt](#)


### Benefit payments


You have no recent payments to show.

 [Manage your direct deposit information](#)

### Education and training


 [Learn how to apply for VA education benefits](#)


 [Compare GI Bill benefits by school](#)

 [Check your Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits](#)

### Saved applications

What benefits does VA offer? ▾

**FORM 22-1990N**  
**Application for education benefits**  
 Application expires on: January 02, 2023  
Last opened on: December 20, 2021  
[Continue your application >](#)

**FORM 22-1990N**  
**Application for education benefits**  
 Application expires on: January 02, 2023  
Last opened on: December 20, 2021  
[Continue your application >](#)

Example of user who has an open claim and a saved application but no VA health care, debt, or benefit payments

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# Testing Method

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- Tested in production with a feature flipper
  - Wanted to recruit an audience who was using a range of benefits and see their real data in testing so we could get accurate feedback that was specific to their use cases and didn't require any hypothetical scenarios
  - We were able to test with assistive technology users in code so we could uncover any a11y issues before UAT
  - We didn't anticipate a lot of changes to the implementation or anything that would be very time-consuming for our devs to alter based on usability testing
  - We had the research method conversation as a team early enough that the timeline allowed for coding and testing in production
- Kick-off call with Perigean to ensure screener questions for must-have requirements like logging into VA.gov for the session were included in the survey and email



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# Testing Method cont'd

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- 13 completed sessions
  - 9 desktop (incl. 1 screen reader user); 2 tablet; 2 smartphone
- Testing format:
  - A few interview questions about what VA benefits they have and what online and manual tools they use to manage them
  - Had participants log into VA.gov and asked questions specific to the benefits they use to determine if they could effectively manage them from My VA
  - Asked participants what they thought “Saved applications” meant
  - Asked users what they thought about seeing empty sections and CTAs in them
  - Asked users for feedback on the new Education & Training section, specific to whether they have or ever have had VA education benefits
  - Asked if there was anything important missing from My VA or if there’s anything they would change if they could

# Key findings

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1. All participants had positive reactions to seeing My VA immediately upon login.
2. My VA encompasses all top tasks for Veterans.
3. Veterans generally don't mind seeing empty sections on My VA and some find them helpful to have on the page.
4. The "Saved Applications" section is confusing to Veterans.
5. The "Education and Training" section is positioned well on the page and important to have present on My VA, but some of the terminology in the links is unfamiliar to Veterans, and for Veterans who have education benefits, they would like to see dynamic content here about their remaining benefits.
6. Accessibility: My VA is highly accessible to disabled Veterans using assistive technology, but the smallest font is still a little too small for some Veterans.



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# Finding 1 Details

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1. Most participants weren't familiar with My VA but all of them had **positive reactions to seeing My VA immediately upon login.** They said things like:

*"I have not seen this page but I like it. It's a summary of all my various systems that they have. My health benefits, next appointment...**I have not seen this but I love it.**" - P5*

*"This is nice. My disability rating is up here. I can log in really quick and see everything. ...Now that I've seen this **I actually prefer this over eBenefits.**" - P2*

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# Finding 2 Details

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1. We can confidently say that with these updates, My VA encompasses **all top tasks** for Veterans.
  - a. All participants were able to access information and features on My VA that they said they currently manage either manually or on MHV or eBenefits.
  - b. We heard some nice-to-haves that we will consider in the future, like a section for VA documents

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# Finding 3 Details

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1. Veterans generally don't mind seeing empty sections on My VA and some find them helpful to have on the page.
  - a. The only feedback we heard contrary to this was 4 out of 13 participants mentioned that it'd be nice if they could reorder or collapse sections according to their specific needs.

## Health care

You have no health care information to show.



[Apply for VA health care](#)

*"I don't mind this at all because I can just skip right past it because I know it doesn't apply to me." - P7*

## Outstanding debts

You have no overpayment debts or copays to show.



[Learn about VA debt](#)

*"I like it because I have in the past had a debt so I definitely don't mind it. I like to see that I don't have any debts or copays to show." - P5*

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# Finding 4 Details

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1. The "Saved Applications" section is confusing to Veterans.
  - a. 11 out of 13 participants thought that both submitted and in-progress applications would appear in this section
  - b. There was also confusion around the term "applications" and several participants thought of a computer application rather than a benefit application initially.

## Saved applications

What benefits does VA offer? ▾

FORM 22-1990N

### Application for education benefits

❗ Application expires on: January 02, 2023

Last opened on: December 20, 2021

[Continue your application >](#)

*"Applications' is kind of misleading because when we think of applications, we think of 'apps', like Google Chrome is an app." - P6*

*"I don't know if my submitted applications would be here. I guess I'd have to get used to the page because it's new to know if my pending applications would show up here." - P4*

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# Finding 5 Details

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1. The "Education and Training" section is positioned well on the page and important to have present on My VA, but some of the terminology in the links is unfamiliar to Veterans, and for Veterans who have education benefits, they would like to see dynamic content here about their remaining benefits.

## Education and training



[Learn how to apply for VA education benefits](#)



[Compare GI Bill benefits by school](#)



[Check your GI Bill Statement of Benefits](#)

## Benefit payments

**+\$1,345.00**

**Disability benefit payment**

Deposited on August 18, 2022

[Review your payment history >](#)

*"I think I still have some GI bill benefits. I would love for it to be here the same way, similar to what you guys are providing here [gestures to Benefits Payments]. This is very good information when I log into my landing page. **I don't see why you wouldn't have it here.** I've never heard that before though, GI Bill Statement of Benefits. I can guess what it is but **I've never heard it before.**" - P12*

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# Finding 6 Details

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1. My VA is highly accessible to disabled Veterans using assistive technology, but the smallest font is still a little too small for some Veterans.
  - a. The 1 screen reader user that we tested My VA with was able to navigate easily using headings and was able to dive into specific sections and access all links. They had very positive overall feedback about the page.
  - b. 2 Veterans mentioned that the smallest text on the page was a bit too small and hard to read for users who are older or who have low vision.

## Claims and appeals

You have no claims or appeals to show.



[Learn how to file a claim](#)



[Manage all claims and appeals](#)

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# Finding 6 Details cont'd

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*"I like its simplicity. I understand why this page may be very basic, I don't know how pretty it is. When I use bells and whistles out in the commercial world, they attract people's eye so that's why a lot of pages are aggravating for me but I know why because **with screen readers we like industrial stuff** that doesn't have a lot of extra stuff. People coming here are probably coming here for a reason. It's not like they have to compete with other retailers so there's probably not a lot of wizz bang... **If people would just think about accessibility in the beginning, everything would be so much easier for them and for us. I like this page very much. I wish more web pages were like it.**" - P7 (screen reader user)*

*"The headers are very readable for old tired eyes but it drops off pretty quickly from that to this [points at body text]. I can see it but **I have to kind of zoom in** and get my trifocals." -P9*



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# Secondary finding

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1. When we asked if anything was missing from My VA, 2 participants mentioned wanting to see information online about **mental health services, especially for PTSD**. 1 of these participants noticed there were links in the footer of the page for this, and the other said they were not able to find any information about it online.
  - a. This finding has been shared in the DSVA Slack and there are efforts underway to surface mental health services in the main benefits navigation, as well as updating the link to take users to the modernized mental health services page.

*"I know that the VA is doing a lot of cutting edge stuff with mindfulness and that sort of thing and **I'd just love to see information about that online because it's not readily available**. You have to go through outside groups to get that stuff right now."*

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# Finding unrelated to digital experience

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1. For Veterans who have experienced traumatic events such as MST, VA can have a negative connotation and they can be discouraged from applying for benefits.

*"Aside from my GI bill, I didn't seek any VA benefits until I had been out of the military for 11 years. Now I'm just kind of making up for lost time. I was fully aware that I'd be eligible for them but I had PTSD due to military sexual trauma and **I related the VA to the military and when I got out of the military I wanted to forget that it happened.** ...I was unemployed and homeless and my sister made me seek VA benefits at the time. I should've done it a lot sooner because I realize now that **the VA is not the military.**"*

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# Recommendations

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1. Rethink the "Saved Applications" section to be more clear that only in-progress applications will show there, and more clear what "applications" are.
2. Reconsider the link currently called "Check your GI Bill Statement of Benefits" in the "Education and Training" section, as the term is not familiar to Veterans and is an important link for Veterans using GI bill benefits.
3. As of now, we would not recommend reordering the sections on My VA or allowing for additional customization like moveable modules or collapsible sections, since one of the main goals of this study was to simplify the code logic and come up with an ordering of sections that works best for the **most** users. We didn't hear any Veterans say the order of sections was impeding on their ability to find information relevant to them. We may want to consider further customization of My VA in the future if we continue to hear similar feedback or see significant changes in analytics.



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# Recommendations cont'd

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## Benefit application drafts

What benefits does VA offer? ▾

FORM 22-1990N

### Application for education benefits

❗ Application expires on: January 02, 2023

Last opened on: December 20, 2021

[Continue your application >](#)

Section title change for clarity around what “applications” are and that this section only displays drafts, not submitted applications

## Education and training



[Learn how to apply for VA education benefits](#)



[Compare GI Bill benefits by school](#)



[Check your Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits](#)

Terminology change for third link from “Check your GI Bill Statement of Benefits” to “Check your Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits”

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