

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Flagship Mobile

OCTO TEAM MEETING, JUNE 2022

June 23, 2022

Brief history of the mobile app (and me!)

- **2016: vets.gov**
- **2017: PoC for Platform and Lighthouse**
- **2018: VA.gov and Lighthouse**
- **2019: Lots of things, kind of a mess**
- **2020-2022: Flagship app**

We provide Veterans easy, personalized access to the most popular digital services via the flagship native mobile app so it's faster and easier for them to do what they need to do

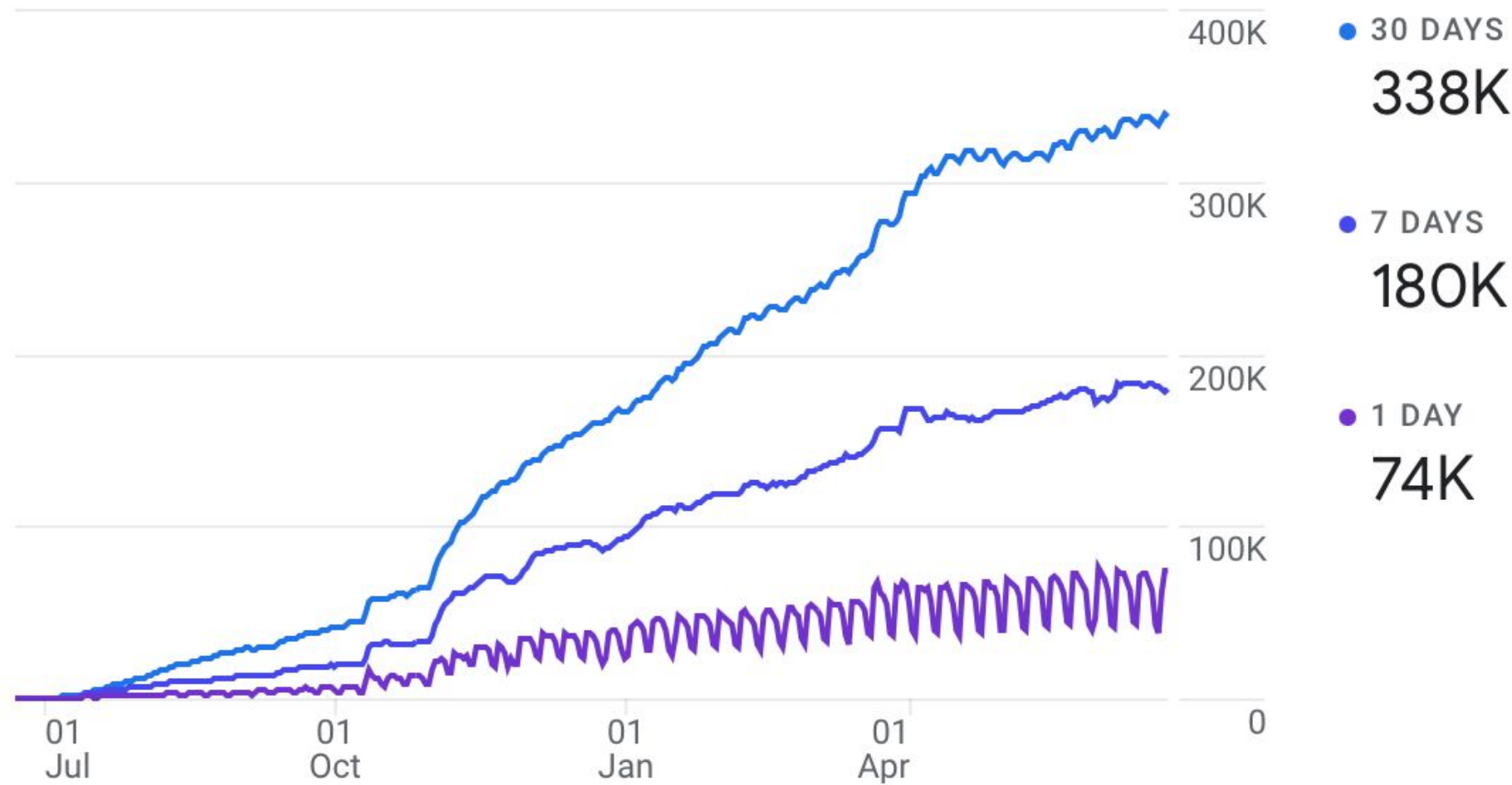
Objective:
We provide Veterans
easy, personalized
access to the most
popular digital services
via the flagship native
mobile app

KR1: 1,000,000
monthly active
users

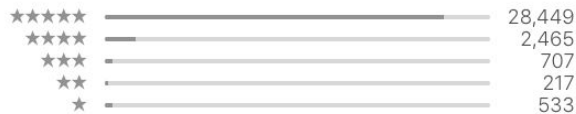
KR2: App store
rating at 4.8 stars

KR3: 20 most
common VA digital
services available
via the app

User activity over time



4.8
out of 5



32,371 Ratings

[All Versions](#) ▾ [All Ratings](#) ▾ [All Reviews](#) ▾

VA the Best! Thank you VA! Love the app. ★★★★★

by Bill from mass – Jun 21, 2022

Thank you!

Version 1.23.0 | [United States](#) | [Report a Concern](#)

Overview

4.621 ★

Default Google Play rating ⓘ

4.601 ★

Lifetime average rating ⓘ

8,744

Users ⓘ

Service/page	Available in app?
Lots of logging into things	Y
Track claims	Y
Secure messaging	Y
Claim/appeal status	Y
Refill prescriptions	In flight
eauth.va.gov/ebenefits/disabilities/	?
My va	In flight
Health appointments	Yes
Payment history	Yes
Download my data from MHV	No
Download letters	Yes
Search	No
Covid vaccine	Yes
www.va.gov/disability/compensation-rates/veteran-rates/	No
Labs and tests from MHV	No
Find locations	Yes
Confirm address on letters	Yes
Find forms	No



Health
Metrics

Accessibility
measure (need to
baseline)

App store rating at
or above 4.6 stars

99% Crash
Free

FLAGSHIP MOBILE STRATEGIC ROADMAP

Phase 1:

POC (2021)

Minimum viable product;
view my information more
easily and complete some
simple transactions

- Biometric login
- Claims and appeals status
- View health appts
- Secure messaging
- Etc.

Phase 2:

Complete (2022)

Serve the needs of most VA
Veterans, most of the time

- Appointment mgmt
- Auth improvements
- Rx refill
- Cerner integrations
- Payments
- Medical records
- Etc.

Phase 3:

Proactive (2023)

Use what we know about our
customers to surface relevant,
timely information; build
innovative solutions to solve
common pain points

- Appointment status change
notifications
- Claims “shepherding”
- Notifications for debt
accrual and payments
- Deepen personalization

Phase 4:

Expanded (?)

Expand our customer base to
transitioning Servicemembers,
Caregivers, and
representative

- Tailored experience for
Caregivers and
representatives
- Enrollment in healthcare,
disability comp

The flagship app is

Deep Product

Feature Set A	Feature Set B	Feature Set C
Supporting Feature	Supporting Feature	Supporting Feature
Supporting Feature	Supporting Feature	Supporting Feature
Supporting Feature	Supporting Feature	Supporting Feature
Supporting Feature	Supporting Feature	Supporting Feature

Shallow Product

Feature Set A	Feature Set B	Feature Set C	Feature Set C	Feature Set C
Supporting Feature	Supporting Feature	Supporting Feature	Supporting Feature	Supporting Feature
Supporting Feature	Supporting Feature	Supporting Feature	Supporting Feature	Product Gap
Supporting Feature	Product Gap	Product Gap	Supporting Feature	
Workaround	Product Gap	Product Gap	Supporting Feature	

Baseline functionality needed to solve problems

Deep

- focused on a narrow set of users and problems
- fewer features for one market
- the flagship app is focused on a discrete set of experiences and transactions for existing VA customers
- notice on the strategic roadmap, we pivot from adding features to going deeper into Veteran experiences and bringing those features into close alignment with one another, i.e. a snapshot of all of the benefits you're receiving from VA, or a picture of your financial relationship, or time-sensitive tasks and alerts

Independent

- We prioritize based on Veteran needs and our own validated hypotheses about how to deliver value to our users
 - we use app store feedback, co-design activities,
- We don't take business line money, so we don't need to take a program, process, or business-oriented view of problems
- We don't map our teams to different parts of the agency to avoid creating siloed thinking and experiences

The flagship app isn't

A platform

- Products take on the shape of their team
- While VA should have a mobile platform that owns shared services and governance, the flagship mobile app shouldn't be that team
- It's narrow and deep, not wide, so the team should stay narrow and deep - focused on key journeys and transactions

A mobile version of VA.gov

- feature parity is not the goal
- it's okay to deviate from standards and patterns that govern VA.gov
- we're aiming for a cohesive experience, not an identical one
- the medium is the message!
- stay tight and transactional, play to the strengths of mobile and **know thy user.**

The web but different

- Requires a different skill set, team structure, release cadence, product strategy, etc.
- Release cycle is longer
- Risk of putting out bad bugs or bad code is higher, harder (impossible?) to roll back
- Mobile apps can work when not connected to the internet!
- Apps can integrate with the hardware of your device more smoothly and easily (navigation, camera, GPS, address book, text and email, calendar, motion sensors, haptics, push notifications). Play to that
- Apps need to be updated by the user. Web just updates itself.
- It's ok for mobile apps to look different on each platform. This is what users expect. Aim for feature parity, not parity of look and feel.

These were hard won lessons

- **Shipping over governance**
 - Focus on building a great product over shutting bad things down. If Veterans have one good option and a lot of crappy ones, that's better than having no good options and fewer crappy ones.
- **Trust building over stakeholder management**
 - Tell the truth always, especially when it's hard
 - If you feel nervous about sharing something with your stakeholders, it's a good sign you should tell them
- **Longer engagements over shorter ones**
 - Change takes time. Building trust, context, relationships, etc takes time. Don't be afraid to invest deeply in this agency for many years. It will pay off.
 - Slow down, show your work; the slower you go in the beginning, the faster you can move later
- **... but don't be afraid to leave when it's time**

- **You can have anything but not everything.**
 - Anything: anything is within your influence. with enough vision, time, enthusiasm, support, and luck, you can make anything possible
 - But not everything: there will always be fires everywhere. Be clear on what you care about and do your best to ignore the rest.
- **Don't go it alone**
- **... but don't be afraid go after what needs to happen even if it's not your "job"**
- Even good vendors need a lot of oversight and accountability