Lovell Federal - Usability Research

Navigating a joint VA and TRICARE facility

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Background & Goals

Project background

- James Lovell Federal Health Center is unique in that it serves VA beneficiaries, TRICARE beneficiaries, and a population of dual-eligible beneficiaries

- The scope of the Lovell VAMC solution centered around Top Tasks and Manage Your Health Online

- The team explored single site and separate site IA solutions, separate site tech feasibility, SME interviews, and created a UXPin prototype to reflect the separate site solution

- The team conducted usability testing on the separate site design solution with 11 Veterans
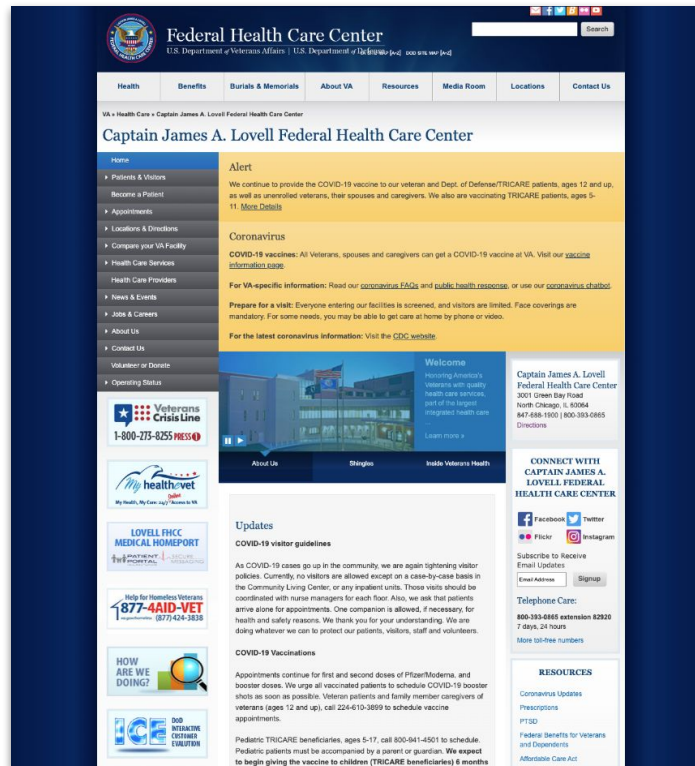
Project timeline

Lovell Federal Experience | June 2022

- December: [Epic](#) kickoff

- December: [IA exploration](#)

- January: [Design Intent #1](#)

- January: [Card sort](#) with Lovell SMEs

- February: [Prototype](#) iteration

- March: [Design Intent #2](#)

- April: Facilities [team transition](#)

- May: [Planning](#) for usability tests

- June: Usability tests & synthesis

Single site is more ideal for search and SEO…
however it creates a need for users to select their coverage each time they do a task
- IA exploration

Separate sites eliminates the need for users to sift through information that may not be relevant…
but it creates a risk in not serving the correct page with such similar names - IA exploration

A lot of content pertains to both audiences. The existing [single] site design works well.
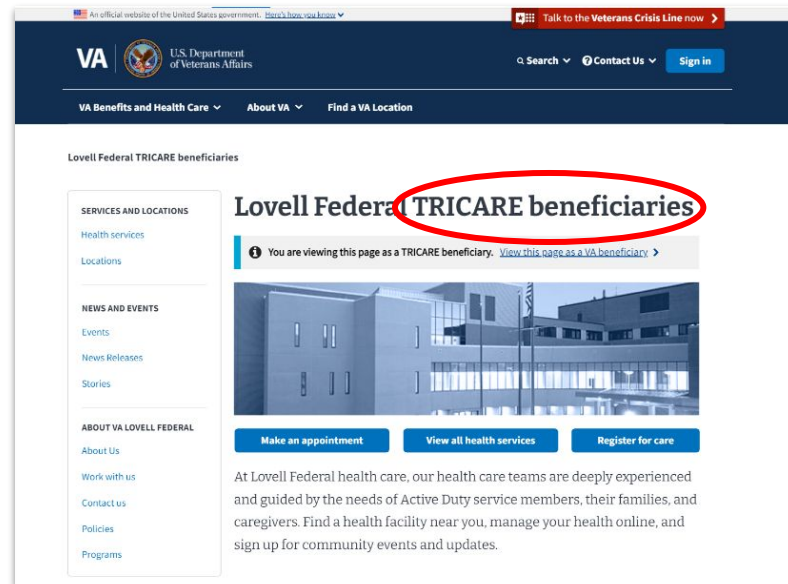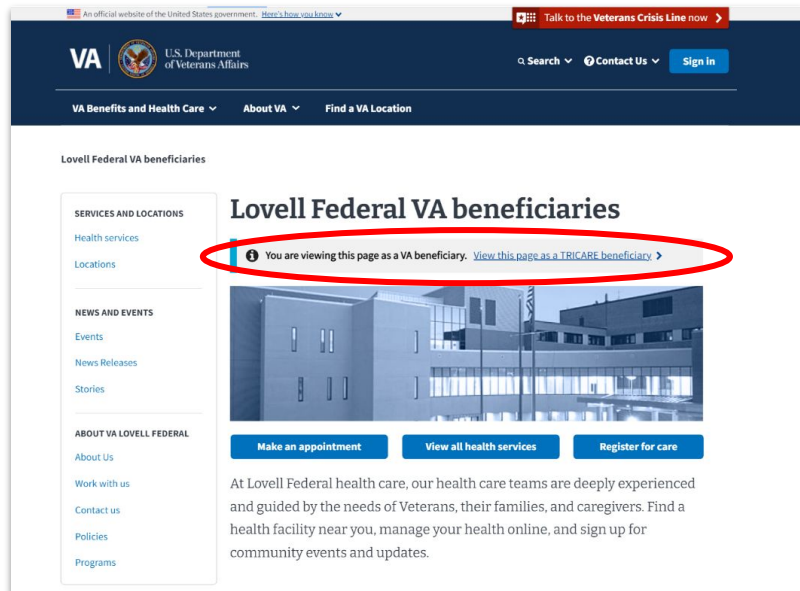- Lovell SME

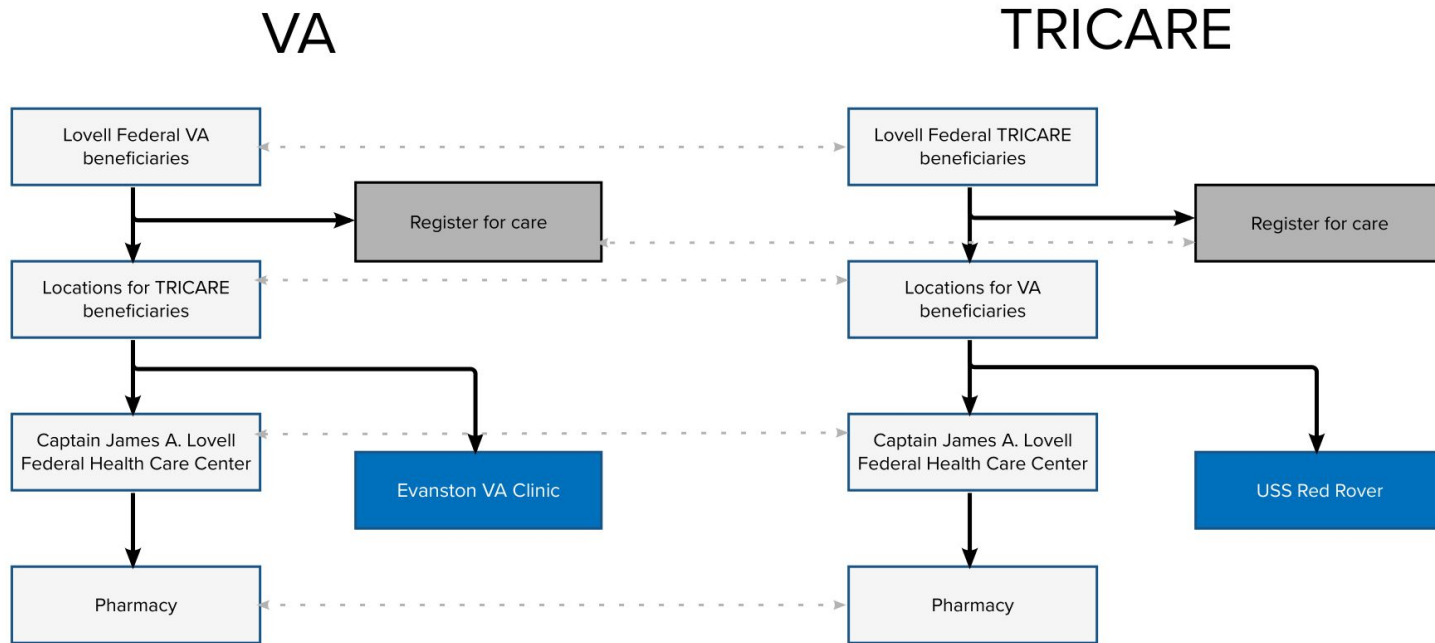VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Separate sites prototype

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Top-level pages for Lovell VA (left) and Lovell TRICARE (right)

Prototype site map

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VA

TRICARE

```
Lovell Federal VA          ----→   Lovell Federal TRICARE
beneficiaries                      beneficiaries
     |                                  |
     |----→ Register for care           |----→ Register for care
     ↓         ⋮                         ↓         ⋮
Locations for TRICARE ←----       Locations for VA ←----
beneficiaries                      beneficiaries
     |                                  |
     ↓        ↓                         ↓        ↓
Captain James A. Lovell    Evanston    Captain James A. Lovell    USS Red Rover
Federal Health Care Center  VA Clinic  Federal Health Care Center
     |                                  |
     ↓                                  ↓
Pharmacy            ----→          Pharmacy
```

Legend

| | Duplicated page | | Non-duplicated page | | Not included in user paths |

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Research questions

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Will Veterans and dual-eligible Veterans **know where they can receive care** at Lovell Federal Health Care Center?

Will participants **notice and understand** the informational alert?

Will dual-eligible Veterans **understand when to use** the VA health care experience vs. the TRICARE health care experience?
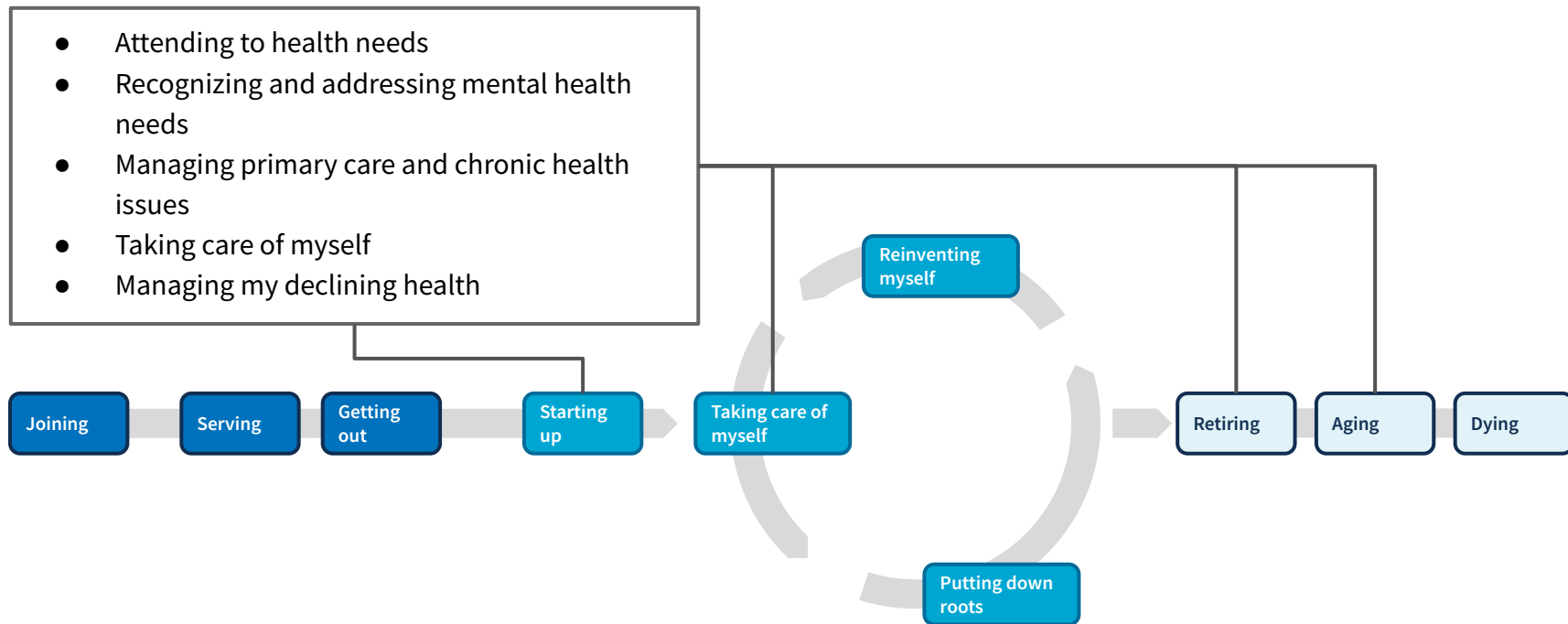
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How this research maps to the Veteran journey

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- Attending to health needs
- Recognizing and addressing mental health needs
- Managing primary care and chronic health issues
- Taking care of myself
- Managing my declining health

Reinventing myself

Joining → Serving → Getting out → Starting up → Taking care of myself → ... → Retiring → Aging → Dying

Putting down roots

For a fully detailed Veteran journey, go to
https://github.com/department-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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| 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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Methodology

Participant demographics

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Lovell Federal Experience - Participants

final # of participants	11		# of tech issues					1		# of no shows			2	
Category	Target	Study	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14

Beneficiary Type

Category	Target	Study	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
VA	5	6	N	0	T	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0
VA & TRICARE	5	5	0	1	0	0	0	N	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1

Veterans — Based on current VA statistics

Category	Target	Study	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Age 35-	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Age 55-64+	2	5	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Cognitive Disability	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Rural	0	3	0	1	T	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
No degree	5	0	N	0	T	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Women	0	8	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0

Race / Ethnicity — Based on VA's projected statistics

Category	Target	Study	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Black or African American	0	4	N	1	0	0	0	N	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	N	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total participants of color	5	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Participant Tracker on Google Sheets

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Usability test overview

- Warm-up questions about VA.gov usage
- First Task: Switching Experiences
  - v.1 - Dual-eligible
  - v.2 - VA only
- Second Task: Location Experience
  - v.1 - Dual-eligible
  - v.2 - VA only
- Wrap-up questions about benefits

Conversation guide

"[I use VA.gov] probably at least once a week maybe twice." - Participant 12

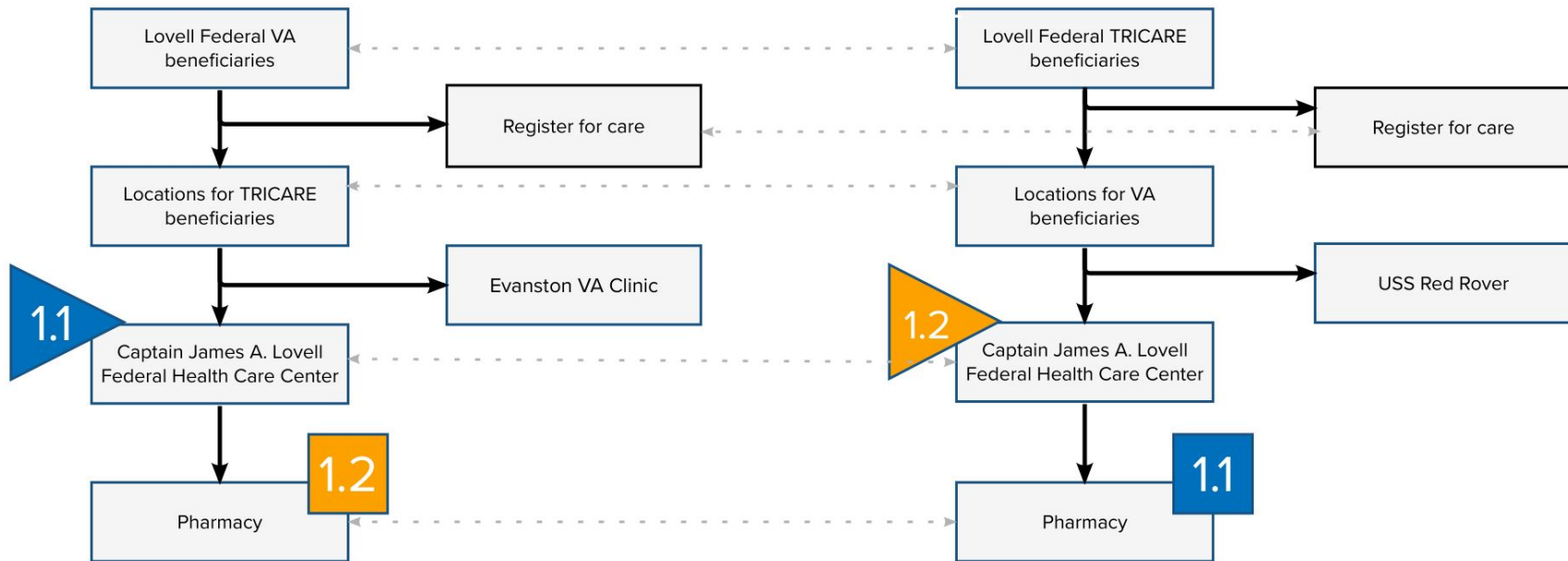"I like that you can switch between VA and TRICARE options because that's not always clarified." - Participant 8

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Limitations

- Prototype did not include all functionality of actual site, this led to some artificial dead-ends for users who tried to use:

  - Search
  - Find a VA location
  - On this Page
  - Health Services

- Participants did not include any users of assistive technology

- Testing only included one design pattern for site switching, so there is no comparative data on different options

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First task overview

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Left flow:

Lovell Federal VA beneficiaries → Register for care

Lovell Federal VA beneficiaries → Locations for TRICARE beneficiaries → Evanston VA Clinic

1.1 → Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center → Pharmacy (1.2)

Right flow:

Lovell Federal TRICARE beneficiaries → Register for care

Lovell Federal TRICARE beneficiaries → Locations for VA beneficiaries → USS Red Rover

1.2 → Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center → Pharmacy (1.1)

Legend

▷ Task Start   ■ Task Goal

Mural

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Second task overview

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2.1 Lovell Federal VA beneficiaries → Register for care
Locations for TRICARE beneficiaries → Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center → Pharmacy
Evanston VA Clinic **2.2**

2.2 Lovell Federal TRICARE beneficiaries → Register for care
Locations for VA beneficiaries → Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center → Pharmacy
USS Red Rover **2.1**

Legend
▷ Task Start   ◻ Task Goal

Mural

Research Findings

Usability findings

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1. Across all participants and tasks, the informational alert was only noticed only 7/22 times = 32% success rate
2. Many participants were attempting to utilize other navigational elements that they were already familiar with to get to their destination.
   a. Site search
   b. Find a location
   c. On this page
   d. Health services
3. Most participants began (or continued) their task by first scrolling through the page they were already on.
4. Top Task buttons are the primary call-to-action on the page and compete with the informational alert.

"I just don't know why [Evanston VA] wouldn't be listed on the site before."
- Participant 10

"Click pharmacy right here. Just the pharmacy button."
- Participant 4

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Findings about VA.gov usage

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1. Most Veterans visit VA.gov weekly. Most common reasons include:
   a. Pay bills, secure messaging, appointments, MyHealtheVet, checking claims, finding forms, prescription refills.
2. Most Veterans are attempting to complete very specific tasks while on VA.gov, and don't browse very often.
3. Many of the Veterans we spoke to indicated the high number of other emails, phone calls, and other communications they receive.
4. When searching for a location, the majority of Veterans we spoke to would immediately start at Google.

"I don't use the apps…because there are 30 of them…Having an app to manage other apps doesn't make sense to me." - Participant 8

"For the most part I have had a good experience." - Participant 13

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Findings related to TRICARE & VA benefits

1. When asking VA beneficiaries whether they are familiar with TRICARE, most indicated they were aware of it, but didn't know much about it.

2. Most of our participants either use one or the other, almost exclusively. There are few instances of Veterans using both.

3. Why dual-eligible Veterans choose VA or TRICARE:
   a. Local facility convenience - 3/5
   b. Familiarity with system - 2/5
   c. Coverage for specific health services - 2/5
   d. Different family members use different benefits - 1/5

4. The actual journey to receive care and benefits isn't always clear to Veterans.

"You know prior to moving, we were located between two military bases, so I used TRICARE because I retired…so it made sense. We relocated 3 months ago, so now I use VA because there are zero military locations near me and finding individuals that accept TRICARE is hard so I use VA." - Participant 9

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Conclusion

Research questions...answered

Will Veterans and dual-eligible Veterans **know where they can receive care** at Lovell Federal Health Care Center?

Will participants **notice and understand** the informational alert?

Will dual-eligible Veterans **understand when to use** the VA health care experience vs. the TRICARE health care experience?

- It's clear to Veterans which health insurance benefits they receive.
- Our research indicated that participants mostly did not notice whether the page they were on was for VA or TRICARE beneficiaries.

- Our research indicated that participants did not notice the informational alert 68% of the time.

- Our findings indicate that Veterans typically use one benefit primarily over the other.
- Dual-eligible Veterans were more likely to understand the distinction between VA and TRICARE.

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Conclusion

This research was focused on the usability of the informational alert as an "experience switcher." This research plan was not designed to identify alternate solutions.

Additional discovery and research is recommended on the following gaps before a path forward can be determined:
- More refined understanding of shared vs. separate VA and DoD content
- Differing VA and DoD Services taxonomy
- Explore a single site architecture

It would also be recommended to utilize staging prototype when appropriate.
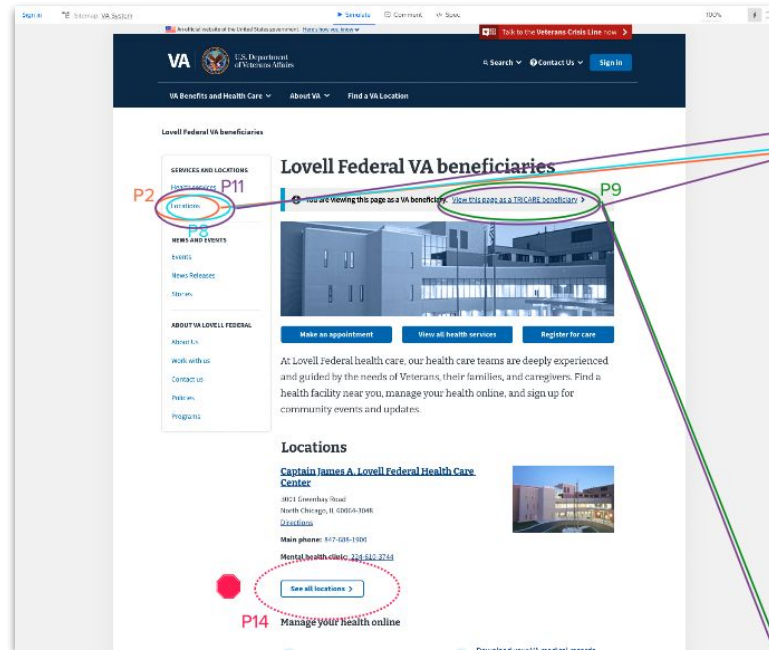
Appendix

First Task v.1: Switching Experiences

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[First Task v.1](#)

Participant: Dual-eligible Veterans

Start screen: [VA beneficiary Lovell Federal Health Care Center](#)

If you preferred TRICARE pharmacy and wanted to learn more about TRICARE pharmacy benefits, where would you go?

Success Rate

1/5
20%

"I would go to search then type in TRICARE." - Participant 14

"I wouldn't know it is TRICARE… I would think there would be two buttons, VA pharmacy and then TRICARE pharmacy… People won't read this small print. I don't know what FHCC is. It says they don't process but I don't know if that's me or not." - Participant 11

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First Task v.2: Switching Experiences

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First Task v.2

Participant: Veteran with VA health care

Start screen: TRICARE beneficiary Lovell Federal Health Care Center

Success Rate

0/6
0%

As someone who is enrolled in VA health care, where would you go to get more information on the pharmacy at Lovell Federal Health Center?

"I would just click Pharmacy. It is self-explanatory." - Participant 7

"I don't have TRICARE, so I would be a little confused. I would be at a loss at this point. So I would message my provider or do the phone refill since doing it electronically wouldn't be easy or even possible." - Participant 10

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Second Task v.1: Location Experience

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[Second Task v.1](#)

Participant: Dual-eligible Veterans

Start screen: [VA beneficiary system page](#)

As someone who prefers to receive care at a TRICARE location, how would you find information on the USS Red Rover location?

Success Rate

4/5
80%

"I would go to see all locations because this is Lovell federal health center." - Participant 14

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Second Task v.2: Location Experience

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Second Task v.2

Participant: Veteran with VA health care

Start screen: TRICARE beneficiary system page

Success Rate

2/6

33%

As someone with VA health care, how would you find information on the Evanston VA location?

"[I] would just have to do [a] search because I wouldn't know where to start." - Participant 7

"The left hand side under services and locations I would click locations. It did not popup. I guess I would have to go to a search button because I don't see the Evanston clinic." - Participant 12

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Additional quotes

" I would say that there's nothing hard about it. It's a matter of getting used to it."
- Participant 5

"I like that you can switch between VA and TRICARE options because that's not always clarified." - Participant 8

"I think the VA website is fluid and easy to use. I don't have an issue with it and you guys do a good job."
- Participant 4

"You can't forget you have an appointment unless you want to get out of it. They are really good with communication."
- Participant 3

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