

Healthcare.gov

Designing for scale and impact

The request was to build a vital but missing piece of the healthcare.gov user experience: a window shopping application.

The problem

Help people shopping for healthcare plans answer their most fundamental questions: What kind of healthcare plan can I buy, and can I afford it?

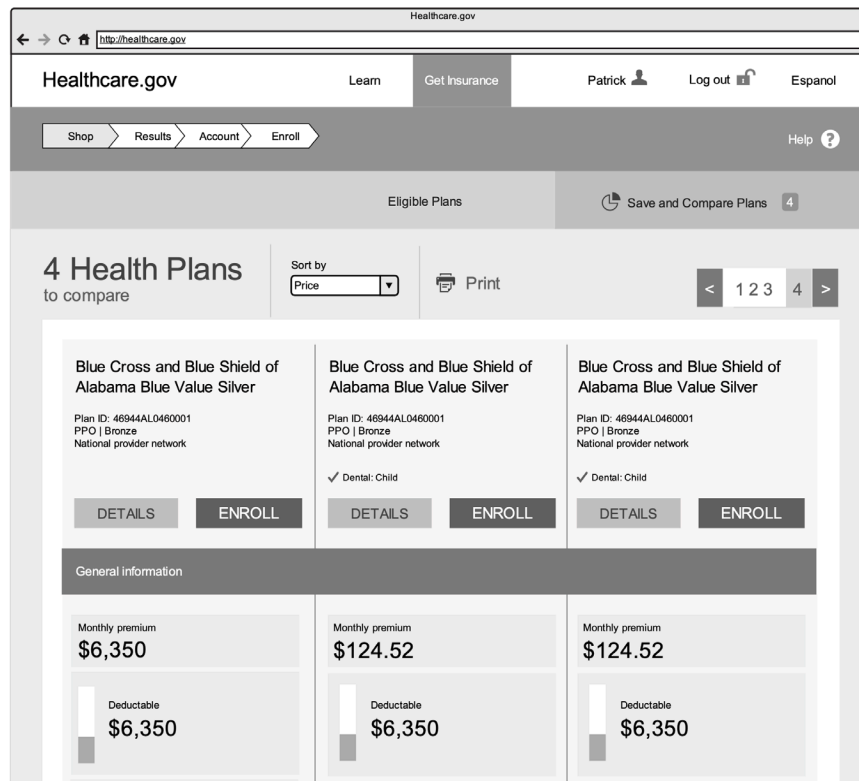
As the lead (and only) designer on a small agile development team, I had less than six months to build a window shopping user experience from scratch. To make this work more challenging I had limited direct access to prior research, users, analytics, or past precedent to draw from.

The solution

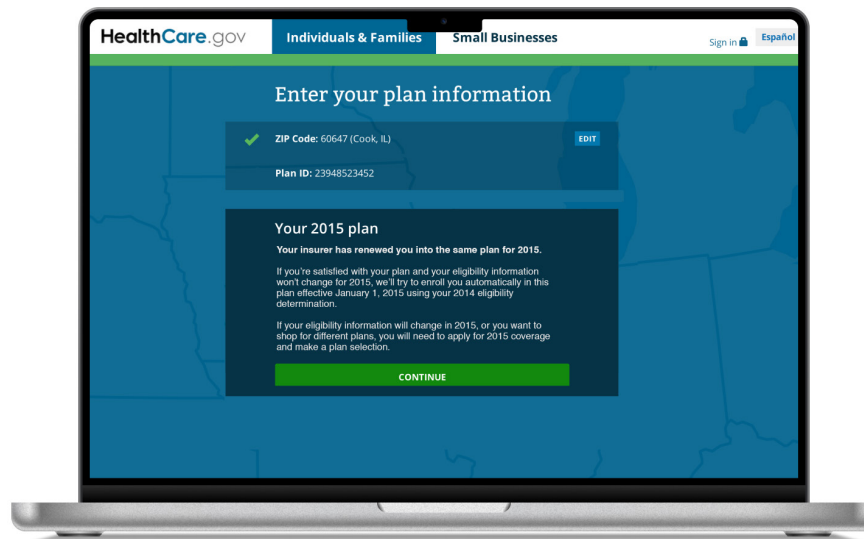
While our engineering team worked to create our application platform and associated infrastructure, I set about to create extensive user flow diagrams and low-fidelity prototypes. These proved vital in that they would spur conversation, disagreement, and resolution with our government stakeholders. I worked iteratively, refining prototypes weekly and regularly meeting virtually with our external partners to work through areas for alignment and improvement. To build trust, I worked in the open - inviting stakeholders directly into our prototyping tools to view changes, and my design process, in real time.

Once largely aligned, I put my front-end coding skills to use, taking this transparent approach to designing in the open to our application development. I designed iteratively, aligning my work to our development sprints, contributing CSS, HTML, and content updates as agile user stories that could be tracked by our partners and engineering team alike — design sprints aligned with development.

In addition, I built both prototypes and front-end designs with a mobile-first approach - refining existing HC.gov branding and UX to better work for a mobile device from the get-go, rather than as an afterthought in late state development.



Low-fidelity prototype of healthcare.gov.



High-fidelity prototype of healthcare.gov.

Challenges

- No direct access to users - research conducted by a third party research firm.
- Balancing complex stakeholder needs between three user groups: internal engineering leads, government partners, and health insurance providers.
- Compressed six month timeline to build, test, launch in production in time for open enrollment.

Outcomes

- Window Shopping became the most popular destination on Healthcare.gov during open enrollment, with **over 99% uptime**.
- For the first time, **millions of potential Healthcare.gov users** were able to start making informed decisions about their healthcare without creating and verifying their personal information.
- **Trust gained by our transparent, agile design and development process lead to additional work** for Ad Hoc, and scope for future healthcare enrollment cycles.