

# Home Page Redesign Usability Testing

## Research Readout

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U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# Research Goal & Focus

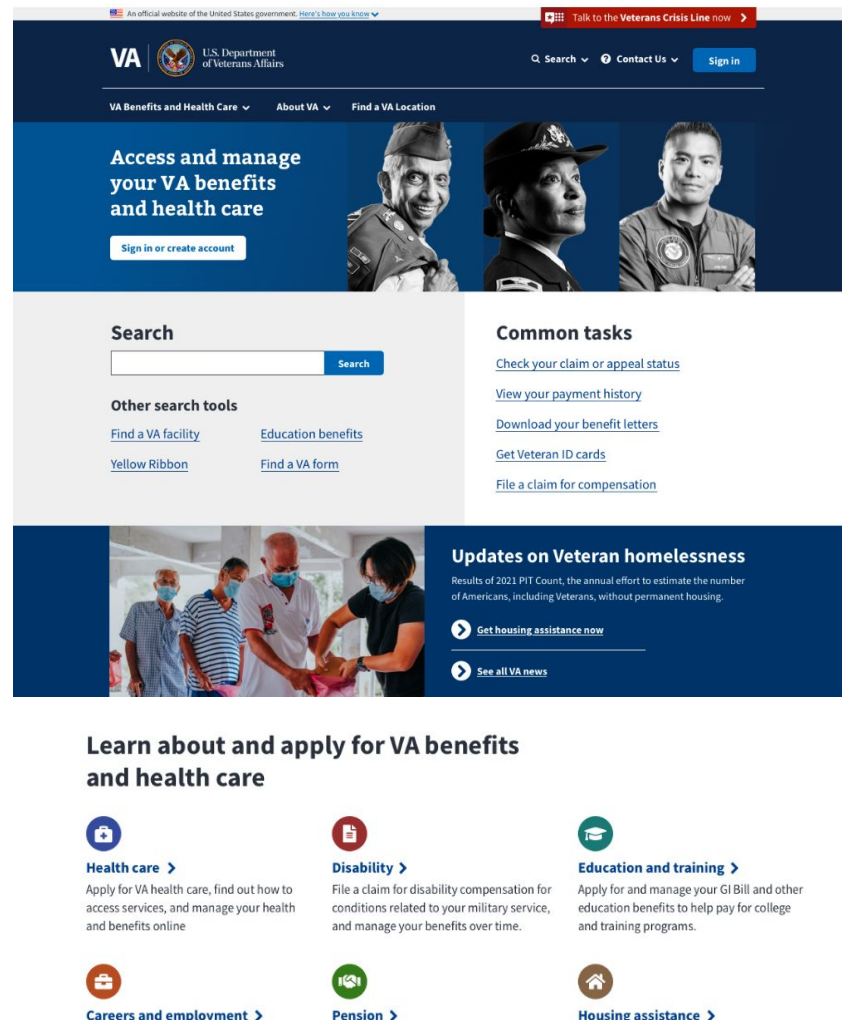
**Goal:** Get user feedback on the redesigned VA.gov home page and assess whether the design changes have improved the usability of the home page

## Areas of focus:

Everything between header & footer–

- "Sign in or create an account" button
- New Search box
- Other search tools
- Common tasks
- VAntage Point blog promo
- Benefit hubs

**NOT:** header, footer, banner alerts



# Research Questions

## Research Questions:

1. Are participants **able to complete top tasks from the home page?**
  - a. For tasks that are the same as those from last year's baseline wayfinding research, how do success rates compare with last year?
2. **Which parts of the home page do participants use** to complete tasks and how?
3. **When do participants search** (typing into a box) **vs. browse** (clicking on links)?
4. What are participants' **expectations of the VAntage Point blog** promo content?

## Learn about and apply for VA benefits and health care



### Health care >

Apply for VA health care, find out how to access services, and manage your health and benefits online



### Disability >

File a claim for disability compensation for conditions related to your military service, and manage your benefits over time.



### Education and training >

Apply for and manage your GI Bill and other education benefits to help pay for college and training programs.



### Careers and employment >

Apply for vocational rehabilitation services, get support for your Veteran-owned small business, and access other career resources.



### Pension >

Apply for monthly payments for wartime Veterans and survivors with limited or no income who meet certain age and disability requirements.



### Housing assistance >

Find out if you're eligible for a VA-backed home loan. If you have a service-connected disability, see if you qualify for a housing grant to help you live more independently.



### Life insurance >

Explore VA life insurance options for Veterans, service members, and families. Manage your policy online, file claims for benefits, and access helpful resources.



### Burials and memorials >

Get help planning a burial in a VA national cemetery, order a headstone or other memorial item to honor a Veteran's service, and apply for survivor and dependent benefits.



### Records >

Apply for a printed Veteran ID card, get your VA benefit letters and medical records, and learn how to apply for a discharge upgrade.



### Service member benefits >

Find out what benefits you may be eligible for during service and which time-sensitive benefits to consider when separating or retiring.



### Family member benefits >

Learn about the benefits you may qualify for as a spouse, dependent, or survivor. And find out what you're eligible for as a family member caring for a Veteran with disabilities.

### Veteran Programs and Services

[Homeless Veterans](#)

[Women Veterans](#)

[Minority Veterans](#)

[PTSD](#)

[Mental Health](#)

[Adaptive Sports and Special Events](#)

[National Resource Directory](#)

### More VA Resources

[Find a VA Form](#)

[Get VA Mobile Apps](#)

[Careers at VA](#)

[Doing Business with VA](#)

[Grants Management Services](#)

[VA Claims Accreditation](#)

[Find a VA Health Care Provider](#)

[Veterans Service Organizations \(VSO\)](#)

[State Veterans Affairs Offices](#)

[Print Your VA Welcome Kit](#)

### Get VA Updates

[VAntage Point Blog](#)

[Email Updates](#)

[Facebook](#)

[Instagram](#)

[Twitter](#)

[Flickr](#)

[YouTube](#)

[All VA Social Media](#)

### In Crisis? Get Help Now

[Veteran Crisis Line](#)

### Contact Us

[Find a VA Location](#)

[Ask a Question](#)

[Call MyVAS11:](#)

[844-698-7311](#)

[TTY: 711](#)



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# Methodology












**Remote moderated usability sessions** via Zoom (**August 2022**)

- Asked about VA benefit experience
- Based on their benefit experience, **moderator posed top tasks to do (from 20 of the 25 Veteran top tasks)** as wayfinding prompts to explore the redesigned home page
- Some tasks were listed under "Common tasks", while others were not
- **Recorded success yes/no**, and participant's ease rating (1-5)
- Each task completed by  $\geq 6$  people

Top task in usability test	When asked
Learn/apply for education benefits	If <i>haven't</i> used education benefits
Compare VA education benefits by school	If <i>haven't</i> used education benefits
Learn/apply for disability compensation	If <i>haven't</i> used disability benefits
File for disability increase	If <i>have</i> used disability benefits
Find current amount of disability or education (payment history)	If <i>have</i> used disability or education benefits
Check current disability compensation rates	If <i>have</i> used disability benefits
Check/update education benefits	If <i>have</i> used education benefits
Message your doctor	If <i>have</i> VA health care
Travel expense reimbursement for medical appt	If <i>have</i> VA health care
Learn/apply for VA health care	If <i>don't</i> have VA health care
Find a VA hospital (Find a VA location)	anytime
Get VA medical history/records	anytime
Get proof of income from VA (benefit letters)	anytime
Add spouse (Review/update dependents)	anytime
Update your address with VA	anytime
Find mental health counselor/therapist	anytime
Learn if eligible for burial	anytime
Apply for home loan Certificate of Eligibility	anytime
Request your military records	anytime
Find a VA form	If participant said they'd look for a form...

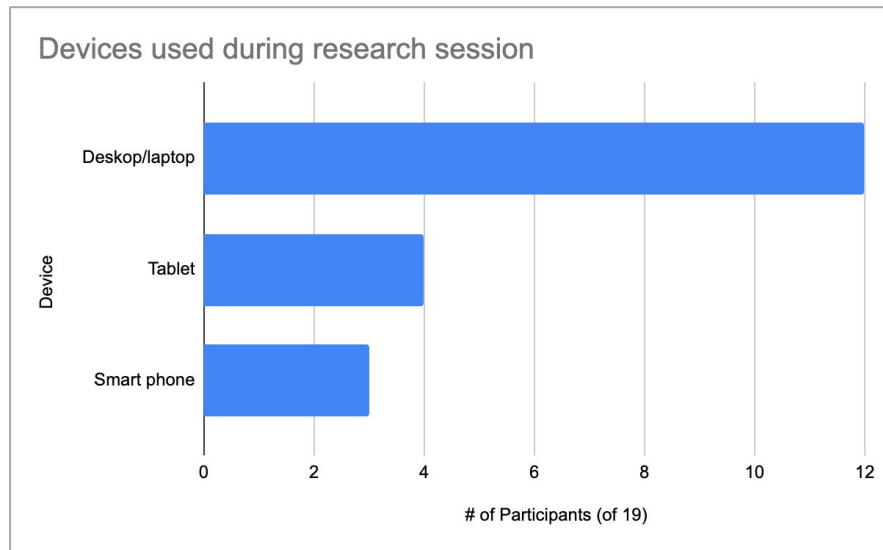
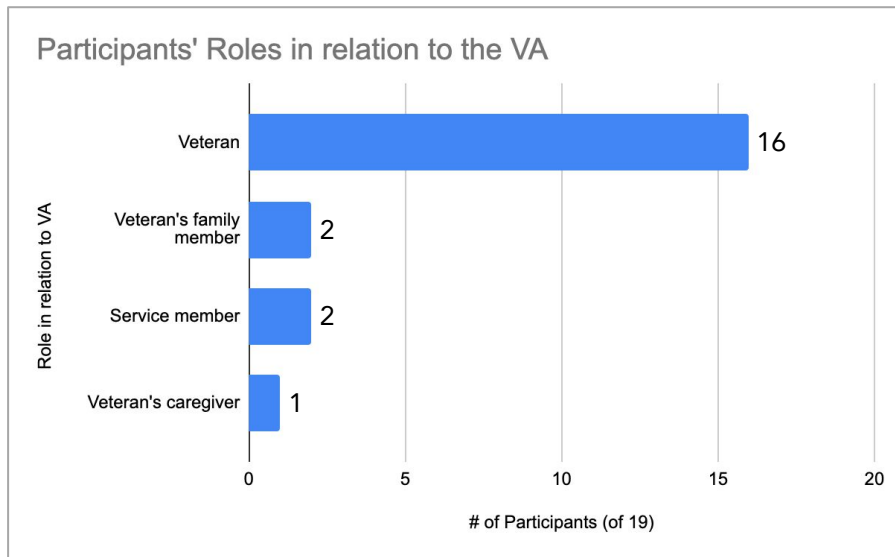
# Participant Recruiting–Talked to 19 people

We wanted to recruit a diverse sample of people who might use VA benefits, including

- Veterans, Veterans' caregivers, Veterans' family members, and service members  **see next slide**
- Range of experiences with VA benefits:
  - No experience with *any* VA benefits or only one benefit  **2 people w/little experience**
  - Experience with 2 or more VA benefits  **17**
  - No experience with VA health care  **3**
  - Experience with VA health care  **15**
- Using different devices (desktop/laptop computer, tablet, smartphone)  **but only 3 smartphones**
- Some with a cognitive disability  **4**
- Range of ages, including people 55 years or older and people under 35 years old  **7 older, 2 young**
- A few who are visually impaired and use screen readers  **didn't get any**
- Some who have never used VA.gov before  **4**
- A range of genders, races, rural/urban locations, and education levels 

# Participant Demographics (19 total)

Good distribution across ages, races, genders (12 male, 6 female, 1 trans), rural/urban, education levels



*Note: Participants' roles add up to more than 19 because some had more than one role*

# Key Finding #1: Most participants browsed w/o searching

**Most participants browsed** (clicked links on home page, header megamenu, benefit hubs, etc.)  
**without using the Search box at all, or searched only when browsing didn't work.**

5 distinct usage patterns:

1. **Browsed exclusively**, never searched (7 participants)
2. **Started browsing, and later discovered the search box** and used it more (7 participants)
3. **Mostly browsed but tried search once** (3 participants)
4. **Tried search first, some success, then irrelevant results, so stopped using search** (1 participant)
5. **Searched exclusively** (only 1 participant, which was the youngest one)

***WHY** did participants browse and avoid search?*

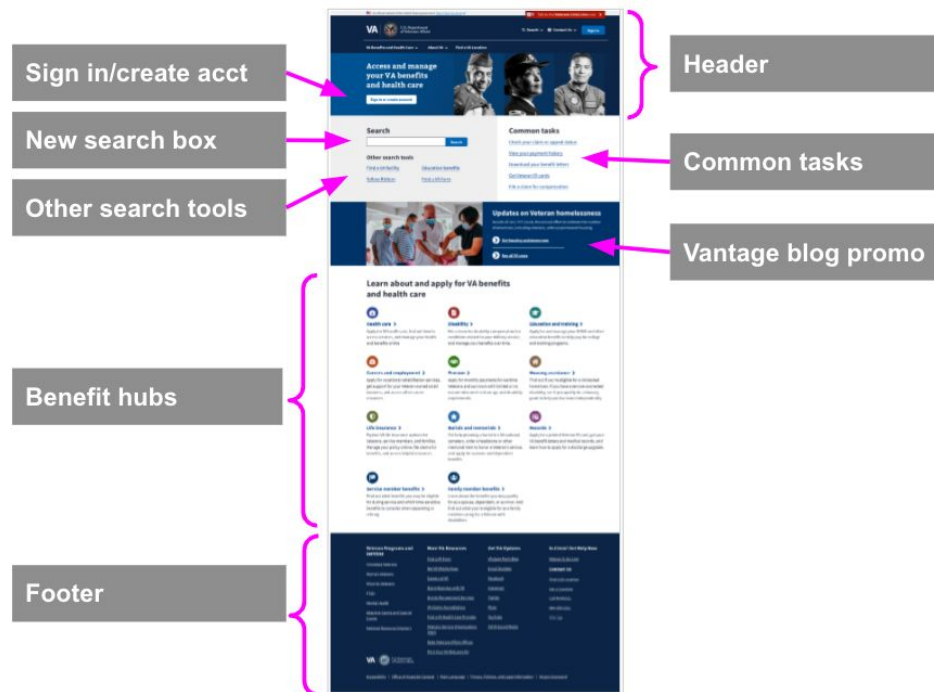
- Don't like to type into the search box (and have to spell correctly)
- It's easier to click on something
- Figured they can find what they need by browsing the topics shown

# Key Finding #2: Most people's navigation didn't include the entire home page but only certain parts of it

**Some participants found one way to navigate that worked for them, which they used for most tasks, ignoring other parts of the home page.**

## Browsing focus patterns observed:

- Only the *VA Benefits and Health Care* megamenu in the header
- Only *Common tasks* and *Other search tools*
- Only the benefit hubs
- Only the search box
- A combination of some of the above but usually not all





# Key Finding #2: Most people's navigation didn't include the entire home page but only certain parts of it (cont'd)

% of 19 research participants who clicked in each area

Key:

70-100%

50-69%

25-49%

10-24%

0-9%



Where people clicked:

1. Header (74% = 14/19 participants)
2. Common tasks (68% = 13/19)
2. Benefit hubs (68% = 13/19)
3. Other search tools (63% = 12/19)
4. New search box (47% = 9/19)
5. Footer (21% = 4/19)
6. Sign in or create account button (16% = 3/19)

*Most participants (79%) scrolled all the way down the home page to the footer.*

\*0% is OK because we didn't have any tasks that related to the Vantage part of the page



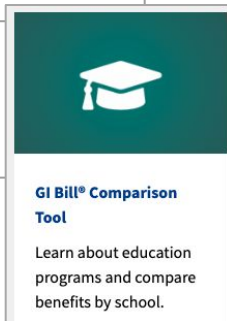
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# Key Finding #3: 16 of 20 tasks were successfully completed by at least 70% of those who tried them

Task #	Task description	Participant Ratings (1 = difficult, 5 = easy)			Successfully completed task w/o assistance	Comparison w/Baseline	Baseline Wayfinding (4/2021)
		Avg	Min	Max	% Success		% Success
3	Learn/apply for disability compensation	4.9	4.0	5.0	100%		
8	Find a VA hospital (Find a VA location)	5.0	5.0	5.0	100%	Improvement from	83%
11	Travel expense reimbursement for medical appt	3.6	2.0	5.0	100%		
12	Learn/apply for VA health care	4.8	4.0	5.0	100%		
13	Get proof of income from VA (benefit letters)	4.5	3.0	5.0	100%	Improvement from	82%
15	Update your address with VA	4.3	3.0	5.0	100%		
17	Learn if eligible for burial	4.8	3.0	5.0	100%		
18	Apply for home loan Certificate of Eligibility	4.1	2.0	5.0	100%		
19	Request your military records	4.5	3.0	5.0	100%		
16	Find mental health counselor/therapist	4.1	2.0	5.0	90%		
1	Learn/apply for education benefits	4.6	3.0	5.0	89%		
9	Get VA medical history/records	4.0	3.0	5.0	86%	Improvement from	67%
20	Find a VA form	4.6	3.0	5.0	86%		
5	Find current amount of disability or education (payment history)	4.2	2.0	5.0	83%		
10	Message your doctor	3.8	1.0	5.0	83%	WORSE than	100%
7	Check/update education benefits	4.1	2.0	5.0	71%		
6	Check current disability compensation rates	3.1	1.0	5.0	60%		
2	Compare education benefits by school	3.1	1.0	5.0	56%		
14	Add spouse (Review/update dependents)	3.0	1.0	5.0	56%	WORSE than	78%
4	File for disability increase	4.5	3.0	5.0	50%		

## Key Finding #3: 16 of 20 tasks were successfully completed by at least 70% of those who tried them (cont'd)

Tasks with lowest success rates	Why difficult
File for disability increase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Link goes to new application for disability</b> that doesn't mention filing for an increase</li> </ul>
Add a spouse (review/update dependents)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Couldn't find by browsing</b> (tried megamenu, benefit hubs &gt; Family member benefits)</li> <li>• <b>Didn't recognize</b> links with <b>the word "dependent"</b> as relevant</li> </ul>
Compare education benefits by school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Didn't notice "GI Bill Comparison Tool" in right rail</b> of megamenu &gt; Education and training, on <a href="#">Education page</a></li> </ul>
Check current disability compensation rates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Couldn't find by searching</b> (tried "disability pay")</li> <li>• <b>Couldn't find by browsing</b> (tried megamenu &gt; disability, megamenu &gt; pension, benefit hubs &gt; pension)</li> </ul>



## Key Finding #3: 16 of 20 tasks were successfully completed by at least 70% of those who tried them (cont'd)

Other challenging tasks	Why difficult
Message your doctor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Couldn't find by browsing</b></li><li>● Used to doing from MHV and not VA.gov</li></ul>
Get VA medical history/records	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Couldn't find by browsing</b> (tried megamenu &gt; health care)</li></ul>
Find mental health counselor/therapist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Couldn't find by searching</b> (tried "therapist", "counselor")</li><li>● <b>Couldn't find by browsing</b></li></ul>
Update your address with VA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Couldn't find by browsing</b> (tried benefit hubs)</li></ul>

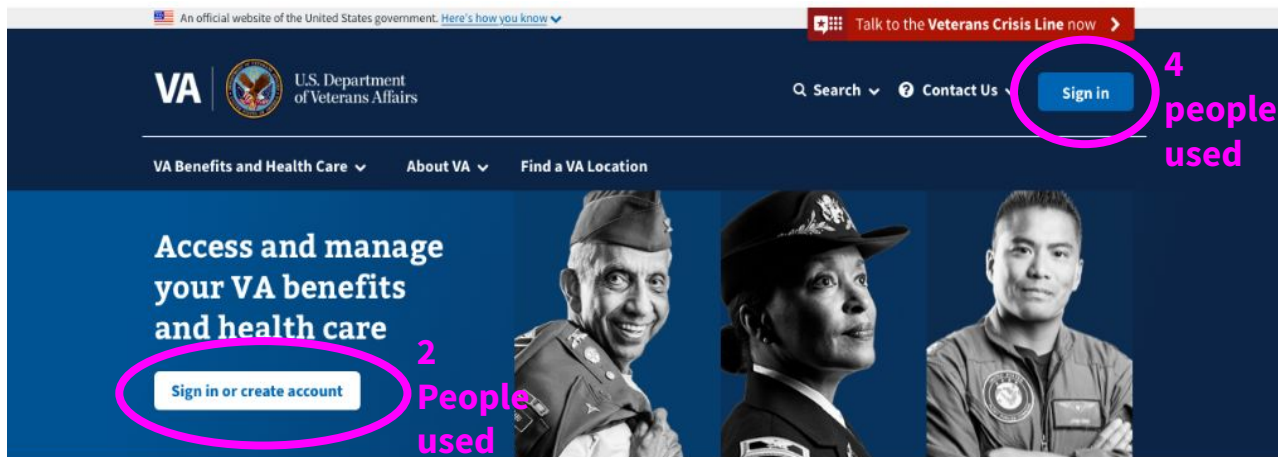
# Key Finding #4: Two sign-in buttons redundant/confusing

- 3 participants said that it was redundant or confusing to have two different sign-in buttons.
- **Neither button was used much during the sessions because most people used the "sign in" button on specific content pages.**
- A quarter of the participants (5 of 19) said that they'd normally sign in first.
- One participant said that they didn't think to sign in because they mostly use the VA mobile app (and stay signed in).

 **Sign in to see your claim or appeal status**

Sign in with your existing **Login.gov**, **ID.me**, **DS Logon**, or **My HealtheVet** account. If you don't have any of these accounts, you can create a free **Login.gov** account now.

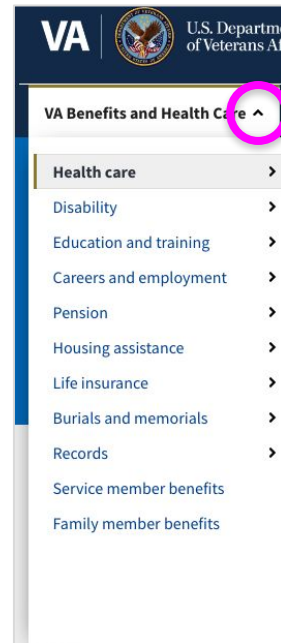
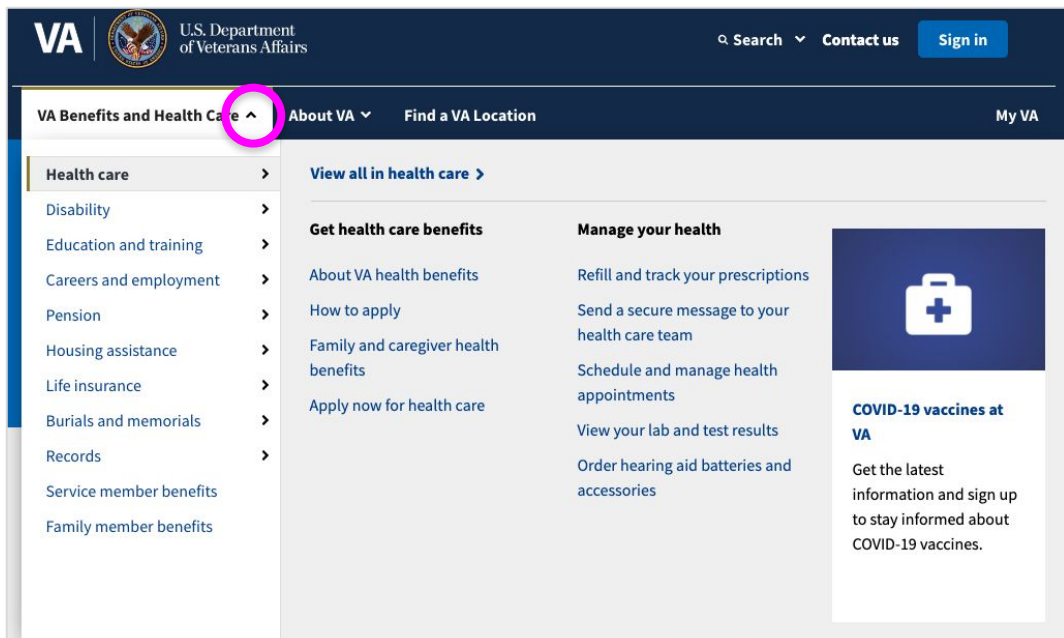
**Sign in or create an account**



# Key Finding #5: Two accessibility issues in megamenu on desktop

## 1. Difficulty using the megamenu because it didn't work as expected

- Affected both sighted participants and a pilot participant using a screen reader
- When dropdown opened, **one option is already expanded**:



Expected  
behavior:  
no option  
expanded  
at first



# Key Finding #5: Two accessibility issues in megamenu on desktop (cont'd)

## 2. Focus issue caused by the megamenu

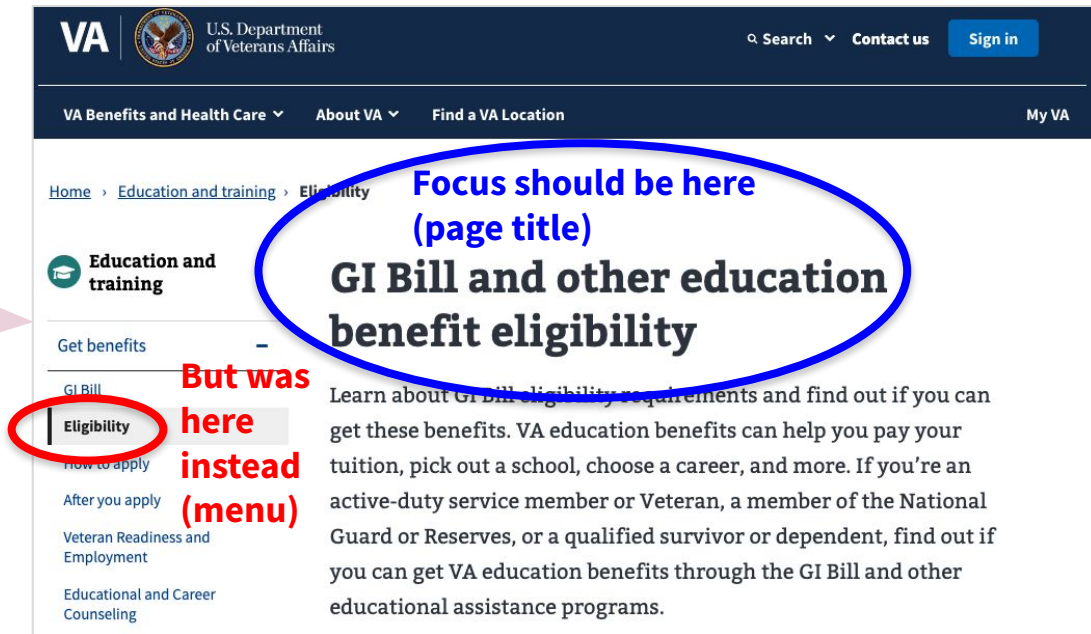
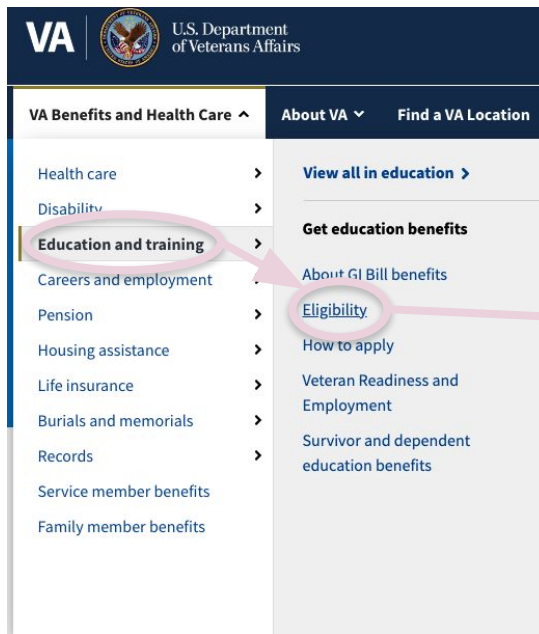
- Affected only the pilot participant using a screen reader
- **When navigating to a content page...**

The image shows two screenshots of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) website. The left screenshot displays the 'VA Benefits and Health Care' megamenu. The 'Education and training' link is circled in pink. A pink arrow points from this link to the 'Eligibility' link in the sub-menu, which is also circled in pink. The right screenshot shows the 'GI Bill and other education benefit eligibility' page. The breadcrumb trail at the top reads 'Home > Education and training > Eligibility'. The page title is 'GI Bill and other education benefit eligibility'. The main content area contains a heading 'Learn about GI Bill eligibility requirements and find out if you can get these benefits. VA education benefits can help you pay your tuition, pick out a school, choose a career, and more. If you're an active-duty service member or Veteran, a member of the National Guard or Reserves, or a qualified survivor or dependent, find out if you can get VA education benefits through the GI Bill and other educational assistance programs.'

# Key Finding #5: Two accessibility issues in megamenu on desktop (cont'd)

## 2. Focus issue caused by the megamenu

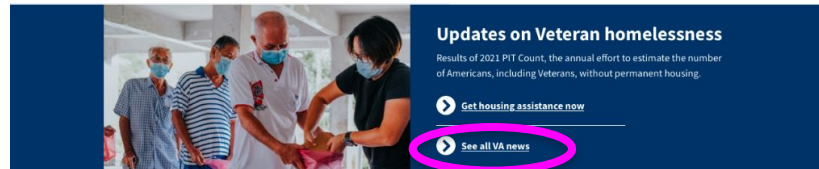
- Affected only the pilot participant using a screen reader
- When navigating to a content page, **focus was still in megamenu:**





## Key Finding #6: Vantage blog promo box not seen as news

There were no tasks related to the Vantage blog promo box, and no one mentioned it until the moderator asked about it during the post-task interview. Participants' feedback:



- Many **didn't realize that the Vantage box entitled "Updates on Veteran homelessness" was a news article and thought it featured an important VA benefit for homeless Veterans.**
  - Those who noticed the **"See all VA news" link in the box questioned why it was there** because it had nothing to do with the homelessness benefit information.
- 2 recognized the Vantage box as **news, which they didn't care to look at.**
- 1 said they thought it was a **banner ad, and so ignored it.**
- When asked what other types of content should be shown in this section, several said they **wanted information about recent legislation enacted (e.g., burn pit registry), changes in VA benefits or procedures, or specific VA benefits** (e.g., education, disability/claims, housing loans, local Veterans homeless shelters or mobile assistance units).

# Recommendations: For home page redesign

1. **Try to ensure that all top tasks can be accomplished via both searching and browsing** in order to support people who use the home page in different ways.
  - a. **Keep the new search box** because more participants found it (9) vs. using search in the header (6).
  - b. Work with the Content team to **make headings and link labels more intuitive** (e.g., Common tasks, Other search tools).
  - c. Consider **adding more top tasks to the Common tasks** section (e.g., Get mental health help, Update your address, View or change dependent, Manage your VA health care).
2. Consider **removing the 2 education links from Other search tools** (Education benefits, Yellow Ribbon), leaving only the actual search tools (Find a form, Find a VA facility).
3. Consider **renaming the "Sign in or create account" button** to "Create an account" to target people who don't yet have a VA account and reduce confusion with the "Sign in" button in header.
4. **Consider enlarging the font size** of some of the text of the benefit hub descriptions and the list of common tasks.

# Recommendations: Beyond the home page

1. **Fix the two accessibility issues with the megamenu on desktop**
2. **Try to ensure that all top tasks can be accomplished via both searching and browsing** by considering **tweaks to the benefit hubs and the VA Benefits and Health Care megamenu**:
  - a. Add "Get your VA medical records" to the **megamenu under Health care**.
  - b. Add "mental health" to the **megamenu under Health Care**, to search **autocomplete suggestions**, to **search "top recommendation"** for "therapist", "counselor", and "therapy".
  - c. Add "Update contact info" to the **Records benefit hub**.
  - d. Add "View or change dependent" to **Family Member Benefits page**, a search autocomplete suggestion, and a search "top recommendation" for "spouse" and "dependent".
  - e. Add "View disability rates" to **megamenu under Disability**, as an search autocomplete suggestion, and a search "top recommendation".
  - f. Make clear on the **disability application page** that this form can be used to increase your existing disability rating (i.e., add to heading "or increase your current rating").
  - g. Change **GI Bill Comparison Tool link in megamenu and education content page** to make it look more like a hyperlink instead of an ad.
3. Consider whether **common misspellings could be handled gracefully by search**



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# Next Steps

- **Present results** to Health Apartment, Authenticated Experience, and any other interested teams.
- After the home page redesign is revised per this research feedback, conduct a **second round of usability testing**.
  - Recruit some screen reader users
  - Recruit more people who will use their smartphone during the session

# Questions?

Link to [full research report on GitHub](#)

Reach out to Cindy Merrill on Slack