Finding a community care provider in VAOS

Research Report

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VA Online Scheduling

VA Online Scheduling app (VAOS) allows Veterans to request health care appointments at VAMCs, or with providers in their community if the Veteran meets certain eligibility requirements.
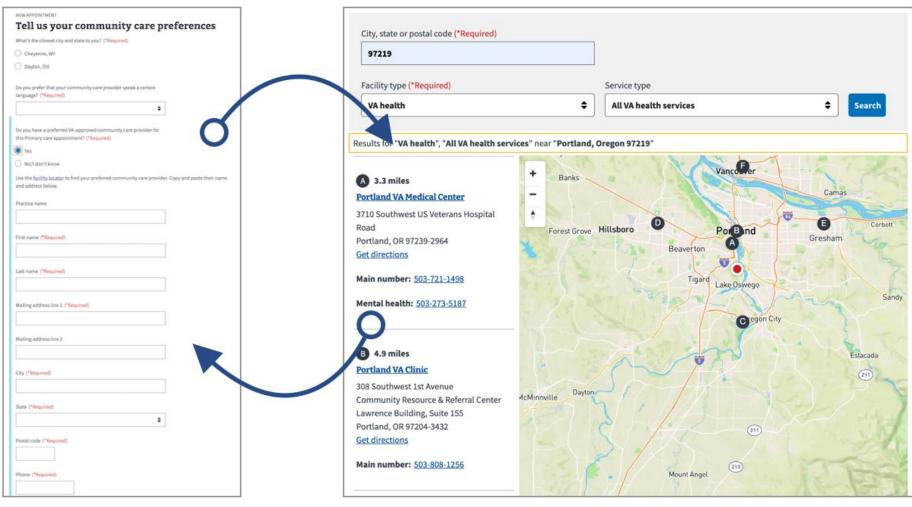
Background

The community care preferences page in VAOS has a high abandonment rate.

On the current page, if the Veteran wants to enter a specific health care provider, they have to open the Facility Locator tool, manually copy the information there, and paste it back into the preferences page on VAOS.

Hypothesis: allowing Veterans to **find providers directly** in VAOS will **reduce the drop-off rate**.

Current workflow

Veterans are sent to the Facility locator to retrieve provider information..

VAOS

Facility Locator

Step	Users (% of Step 1)	Completion rate	Abandonments	Abandonment rate
1. Started New Appointment Flow	117,501 (100%)	94.85%	6,053	5.15%
2. Type of care	111,448 (94.85%)	4.07%	106,914	95.93%
3. Choose Community Care	4,534 (3.86%)	94.88%	232	5.12%
4. Choose date, AM/PM	4,302 (3.66%)	75.59%	1,050	24.41%
5. Communty care preferences	3,252 (2.77%)	21.8%	2,543	78.2%
6. Reason for appointment	709 (0.6%)	96.05%	28	3.95%
7. Your contact information	681 (0.58%)	98.68%	9	1.32%
8. Review your appointment details	672 (0.57%)	6.25%	630	93.75%
9. Submitted Request	42 (0.04%)	-	-	-

78.2%

Abandonment rate

Community Care Preferences page
Oct. 1 - Dec. 3 2020

Goals

- Help Veterans request community care appointments by letting them search for providers directly in VAOS.

- Help Veterans choose whether to go to a VAMC or find a provider in their community.

- Learn how Veterans choose health care providers.

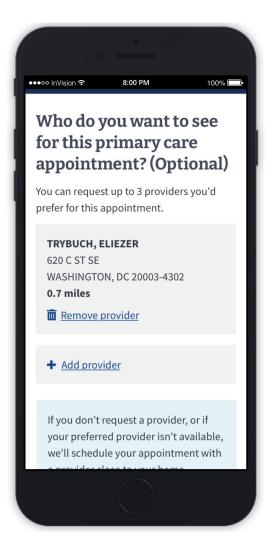- Help Veterans find their requested appointments.*

*Not all participants saw this part of the test.

Methodology

We conducted 8 60-minute remote moderated sessions with Veterans over 8 days

We asked Veterans about their current experience scheduling health care appointments and their understanding of community care. Then we had them to navigate through the clickable prototype of the VAOS app.

Choosing a provider

Provider selection criteria

The most important criteria when selecting a provider, as reported by participants:

- **Personalization**: Choose from a list of providers they'd seen in the past

- **Availability**: Choose providers who they know are seeing patients

- **Location**: See distance and know where to go once they get to the clinic

Selecting a provider - hypotheses

It will be easy for veterans to choose a provider.	- All participants were easily able to select a provider from the list. - Participants saw value in this flow for finding new providers, or providers for minor treatments. - But they also expected to be able to find providers they have seen previously.
Veterans will be able to understand the difference between VA care and community care.	- All participants understood the choice between Community Care and VAMC. - One suggested that it would be easier if they could see VAMCs and Community Care facilities together, so they could see which was closer.
Veterans will clearly see the value of selecting multiple providers.	Most participants assumed that selecting multiple providers would help them get an appointment sooner.

Findings

- **Top request:** let me schedule with providers I have seen in the past, or have researched/heard about.

- Some participants indicated that if they need routine care or urgent care availability is more important than specific provider.

- All participants liked knowing a provider's distance, but some wanted to see the provider list in alphabetical order so they could find someone who they already knew.

Findings

- **Availability**: most participants wanted to know how soon they could see the provider, or if the provider was available on specific dates.

- Some participants expected that the date they entered into the calendar would be tied to the provider selection

- Most participants said **they would spend time researching providers before scheduling**, by googling review sites to learn provider's reputation.

- Other provider selection criteria that came up: **gender, job title/role, and whether or not they accept VA billing**

Findings

- Most participants said they would want to research or call a provider before choosing.

- Most participants preferred the list over the map. Most struggled with the map.

- All participants understood that the provider selection step was optional/skippable.

Quotes

"If this is me getting a new doc, finding a provider is part of the process, annoying but part of it. If I just need care I shouldn't have to find my doctor. My expectation would be different for the two appointments." - P10

"This is putting in my preferred doctors and dates but if it is urgent I would need to know who has the soonest availability" - P2

"If they gave me a list like this I would go on Google to see the reputation of the doctor. This is just a random list and doesn't say much about anything." - P1

General attitude toward scheduling

Findings

All participants described problems with scheduling appointments in the past that caused them frustration, including:

- Long wait times
- Inconsistent messaging about appointment status
- Appointments being cancelled or changed without a clear reason

While it's out of VAOS' scope to solve all of these problems, we're noting them to help identify opportunities where we can clarify expectations.

Findings

- As in the July Express Care research, some participants did not understand they were requesting an appointment until close to the end of the prototype.

- When they did realize this, they were frustrated, indicating that they would prefer to schedule over the phone because it's faster.

Quotes

"This doesn't even tell me when the VA will contact me, what if it was urgent like me being in pain?" - P2

"I am wasting my time. If I am going to fill this out and it tells me they will contact me. It makes more sense for me to call them and see what they have instead" - P11

Findings

Appointments

Findings

- Along with date and location, most participants wanted to see **type of care** to help differentiate their appointments.

- The name of the facility or clinic would help them plan ahead leading up to the appointment.

- Some found the doctor's name was confusing, and the video icon helpful

"The type of appointment is important so you know what to be prepared for because some can be in the same area but others you may need to get lab work so it is good to know why you are there."
- P11

Recommendations

Provider selection

- **Consider researching a provider-first approach to the VAOS workflow** that would support two paths for Veterans scheduling appointments; those who are returning to a provider, and those who want to find someone new.

- **Let Veterans choose to make appointments based on those they have scheduled in the past**, using the same provider and type of care.

- Validate that schedulers would be able to speed up the process of finding care if they had three provider options.

"It's hard to schedule with the same doctor even if you have seen them before. I would want to add someone I have seen before." - P3

Provider selection

- Consider moving the calendar to later in the request process, or removing it entirely for community care appointment requests. (Preliminary results from the community care scheduler research shows that schedulers aren't looking at this data, though a round of follow up questions is needed to validate this).

- Consider adding gender, job title, and some indication that the provider is VA approved to the provider list. These are nice-to-haves.

- Focus on the list over the map for surfacing providers.

"Some doctors may not have anything open until February and one may have one by next week. Picking a doctor then their availability would be better. This seems hard to me." - P9

Building trust

- On the entry pages, **communicate the value of requesting an appointment over VAOS vs. over the phone**. Explain the choices simply, and lay them out as distinct alternatives.
- **If possible, provide a rough estimate of the time** it is expected to take for common scenarios, like a scheduler following up on an appointment request, or completing a scheduling request online vs. over the phone.
- **Consistently notify veterans when an appointment has changed** across all touchpoints (email, text, online services.). Use the same language everywhere the notification is shown.

If I am scheduling online I would like them to send the change to me, I would make the assumptions that I wouldn't get a call or letter notifying me. - P3

Clarifying appointments

- Display date and time, facility name, and **type of care** in the appointment cards.

- Let users drill down for detailed location, departmental and other information.

"The VA in my city has multiple clinics and hospitals. If I have 3 appointments in one month I wouldn't remember where to go or what it is for." - P3