**Vets.**gov Sign In Options

Alex Yale-Loehr // September 2017

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Making it Easy for Existing VA Credentials to Work on Vets.gov

* When interacting with VA online today, the two most frequently used credentials are from DS Logon and the My HealtheVet accounts. Vets.gov will allow users with identity-proofed DS Logon and My HealtheVet accounts to interact with all functionality on the site, as these users have already gone through the burden of identity proofing with VA or DoD.
* Vets.gov will continue to maintain and promote the ability to create ID.me accounts, giving a NIST-compliant, FICAM approved option for any user who wants the highest level of security on their account. Vets.gov will also allow securing non-identity-proofed DS Logon or MHV account via ID.me’s identity proofing process.

Optionally Securing an Account for Accessing Vets.gov

* Vets.gov will give users the option to add multi-factor authentication (MFA) to their account, no matter which credential they use to sign in. This means to access Vets.gov, a user can sign in with their DS Logon account and then add MFA, which is an additional layer of account security that is not available today on eBenefits or My HealtheVet.
* Since MFA has been shown to reduce the risk of fraud, Vets.gov will guide users to add MFA by default for added security on their account. Vets.gov is making MFA optional so as to not limit access to the site to those who need benefits the most, such as homeless Veterans who may not have consistent access to a phone.
* Over time, Vets.gov will use data to determine what percentage of users are opting-out of MFA and work with VA and ID.me to make this as accessible as possible, with the plan to eventually require MFA because of the security benefits and NIST requirement.

**DETAILS**

This document outlines the identity requirements Vets.gov is moving forward with beginning in October 2017. This approach brings Vets.gov in line with current VA authentication requirements on eBenefits and My HealtheVet, while also giving Veterans options to make their account more secure via multi-factor authentication (MFA) and a FICAM approved, NIST 800-63-3 standard compliant logins via ID.me.

There are two types of functionality on Vets.gov:

* Unauthenticated functionality - a user does not need to be signed in to access
* Authenticated functionality – a user does need to be signed in to access

Unauthenticated Functionality

There will be no change as to which users can access unauthenticated functionality; all site users are able to do so. This unauthenticated functionality includes products such as the facility locator, GI Bill comparison tool, healthcare application, education forms, burial application, and pension application. It will also include future products where the user does not need to be authenticated.

Authenticated Functionality

Within authenticated functionality, there are multiple categories. These are first shown in the table below as an overview; a green cell means a user who logged into Vets.gov using that specific login is able to access that feature, while a red cell means a user who logged into Vets.gov using that specific login is not able to access that feature.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Social Accounts (Google, Facebook, Email) | ID.me, non-identity proofed account | ID.me, identity proofed account | MHV Basic Account | MHV Advanced Account | MHV Premium Account | DS Logon Level 1 (Basic) | DS Logon Level 2 (Premium) |
| Save forms in progress |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Prefill forms |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Claims and Appeals Status |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Prescription Refills |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Secure Messaging |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Download Health Record |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Post 9/11 GI Bill Status |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| VA Letters |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

In text form, this table says:

Using a Social Login to Access Vets.gov

* Vets.gov will consider accounts created using Facebook, Google, and other non-identity proofed logins as non-identity-proofed accounts, which will allow users to save information they have self-entered on forms, but users will not be able to pull data from VA.

Using an ID.me Account to Access Vets.gov

* Vets.gov will consider an ID.me account created with a username and password as a non-identity-proofed account, which will allow users to save information they have self-entered on forms, but users will not be able to pull data from VA.
* Vets.gov will consider an identity-proofed ID.me account as an identity-proofed account, which will allow users to interact with all services on Vets.gov. MFA will be required on these ID.me identity proofed accounts. This is the only account for accessing Vets.gov that is NIST 800-63-3 compliant at IAL2 and AAL2.

Using a My HealtheVet Account to Access Vets.gov

* Vets.gov will consider an MHV Basic account as a non-identity-proofed account, which will allow users to save information they have self-entered on forms, but users will not be able to pull data from VA.
* Vets.gov will consider an MHV Advanced account as a non-identity-proofed account, which will allow users to save information they have self-entered on forms, but users will not be able to pull data from VA, except for prescription information. Allowing prescription information to be viewed with a My HealtheVet advanced account matches what is available and approved on My HealtheVet today.
* Vets.gov will consider an MHV Premium account as an identity proofed account, which will allow users to interact with all services on Vets.gov.
* Note: Users accessing Vets.gov with My HealtheVet Basic or Advanced credentials will be given the option to upgrade to an identity-proofed ID.me account as they try to access functionality that requires identity proofing or if they go to their profile and select identity proof account.

Using a DS Logon to Access Vets.gov

* Vets.gov will consider DS Logon Level 1 account as a non-identity-proofed account, which will allow users to save information they have self-entered on forms, but users will not be able to pull data from VA.
* Vets.gov will consider DS Logon Level 2 account as an identity-proofed account, which will allow users to interact with all services on Vets.gov.
* Note: Users accessing Vets.gov with DS Logon Level 1 credentials will be given the option to upgrade to an identity-proofed account as they try to access functionality that requires identity proofing or if they go to their profile and select identity proof account.

Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA)

Users with identity proofed ID.me accounts will be required to add MFA to their account. This will allow this login method to meet NIST IAL2 and AAL2 standards, which means that this login option is compliant with the NIST 800-63-3 standard.

Users logging in with all other account types, including DS Logon Level 2 and My HealtheVet Premium accounts, will optionally be able to add MFA to their account. This will be an opt-out model, where users are guided to add MFA, but they are not required to do so. Adding MFA does not change the identity proofing level and thus does not change any of the functionality that users are able to use on Vets.gov with these accounts. In other words, adding MFA is solely for the security of a user's account, but does not functionally change what features a user can use on Vets.gov. If users choose not to add MFA initially, they will have the option to add MFA later from their Vets.gov profile page.

Vets.gov intends to make MFA mandatory over time and will work to do this as quickly as possible. Through prompts on the website and in the login flow, the Vets.gov and ID.me teams will encourage users to enable MFA. Using metrics to understand what proportion of users opt-out, the teams will determine the best path for requiring MFA while reducing the additional burden on users, especially homeless, disabled, and older Veterans, as much as possible. Additionally, if either My HealtheVet or DS Logon adds in a requirement to have MFA, Vets.gov will pass this requirement through to users as well; without controlling those credentials, however, Vets.gov cannot control if or when this happens.

Future Products

Vets.gov will continue to add new functionality over time and this policy should not have to be amended each time it does so. The guiding principle of this policy, which should apply to future products on Vets.gov as well, is that if a user has already been identity proofed by VA (in the case of My HealtheVet) or DoD (in the case of DS Logon), Vets.gov will allow that user to be considered identity proofed, even if that proofing does not meet the current NIST standard. With that, users with these identity-proofed accounts should have access to all features on Vets.gov, unless specified differently by the product’s business owner.

Conclusion

Users already went through a burdensome process to acquire DS Logon Level 2 and My HealtheVet Premium accounts and they should be able to use these accounts to access functionality on Vets.gov. At the same time, Vets.gov is also giving users an option to create a FICAM-approved, standards compliant ID.me login if they want the highest level of security available. This policy balances user privacy and security with the realistic knowledge that some users will have difficulty remotely identity proofing or using MFA immediately upon signing up.

The risk this policy puts on user privacy and security is lower than what users have on My HealtheVet and eBenefits because of the addition of optional MFA, which is not available on those sites today. This policy puts VA on a realistic path to higher security accounts without limiting access to those who need services the most.