**Conversation Guide: Veterans' Experiences at VA Benefit Offices**

Start recording.

* **I have started recording.** I'd like to confirm: Are you comfortable if I record my screen and audio as we talk today?" Yes, no problem.

## **Warm-up Questions - 2 min**

* Can you tell me a little about yourself and your relationship to the VA? I am 46 years old, I served from 96 – 99, and I have been in the VA healthcare system since I was discharged.

## **Baseline Questions - 3 min**

* In the pre-interview survey, you indicated that you had visited a VA Benefits Office in the last 6 months. Specifically, you visited a **[Answer to Screener Question #1 - type of facility]**, is that correct? Yes, in LA.
* In your own words, could you briefly describe the reason for your visit to that office? I went to find out about the home loan and receive the certificate, and I had some questions about CHAMPVA. If you are 100% your family members qualify for healthcare through the VA.
* [Confirm benefit-related service(s)] Okay, so just to confirm, it sounds like this visit was related to [benefit type], correct?
  + This should line up with answer to screener question #2. If not, ask to follow up.
  + On the survey, you also listed **[answer to screener question #2 - benefit type]**, could you tell me about that?
* Before visiting the office, did you try to complete this task via another method (phone, online, etc.)? Well, it is a little hard to get through to people, so I just walked in. I had to wait a little bit because I did not have an appointment, but they were able to help me.
  + Follow up to understand how they came to decide that visiting the office was the best way to complete the task

## **Preparing for the Visit Questions - 8 min**

My first set of questions is about the steps you took to prepare yourself for visiting the office.

* How did you first learn about this office? I looked it up on the internet to see where it was at because I was not sure. I go to the VA clinic downtown and I asked my friend, and they helped me out because they used it before. I think the social worker told them from the VA. We both go to mental health together and I think the social worker told him.
  + Skip or rephrase based on answers baseline questions
* When you were preparing, did you research any other benefit office locations?
  + If so, what factors led you to pick one over another? Just because it was closer.
* What sources did you consult to get ready for your visit? I just looked online to see where it was, but I did not go to the website. I went to Google and looked up VA benefit office.
  + Did you talk to any VA employees?
    - Did you speak to anyone who works at this location?
  + Did you talk to other Veterans/beneficiaries?
  + Did you call a phone number?
  + Did you look at the website?
* What information did you gather from these sources? On Google it has the listing and the hours. I think that is what I looked at. A long time ago when I got out of the Army, and I knew what they could do there at the location. I pretty much familiar with what they offered. They did give me a handbook when I went there. Yes, very much so it was helpful because you never know what benefits you qualify for unless you get the information.
  + Directions? Hours?
  + Details about benefit services/tasks?
* What tasks did you complete before your appointment? Not before just when I was there. I did have to bring my DD-214. That is the discharge form the military gives you with all your service and discharge information.
  + Making an appointment?
  + Any paperwork forms?
* Did you feel prepared for your visit? I mean I went knowing I probably needed my DD-214, but I didn’t feel nervous or anything because everyone was nice.
  + Were you actually prepared, or was there a surprise when you got to the office?
* Is there anything else you wish you had known before your visit? Not really, in hindsight it would have been nice to see all the information they offered at the location. I did have questions about the burial and life insurance stuff, but I did not ask while there, but I found the information in the booklet they gave me. The other thing I did ask about, but I didn’t have the paperwork on me was the disable Veteran license plate.

## **Visiting Questions - 8 min**

Okay, now we're going to talk specifically about the day you visited the benefit office.

* Where is this office located? That one is downtown LA. With Google maps it is really easy.
  + How far away is that from where you live?
* How did you travel to the office? By car. No trouble with parking because I have a handicap sign so I can park without paying.
  + Method of transportation (car/bus, etc.)?
  + Wayfinding/directions (landmarks, GPS, printed)?
* Did anyone accompany you on the visit? My wife.
* Did you have any issues getting to the building (directions, parking, etc.)? No problem at all.
  + Was the address and hours accurately represented?
* Once you were inside the building, how did you find your way to the floor/room you needed? Yes, there is a sign when you come in that states what floor it is on. There are four little windows you can go to when they call you. I waited like 15 minutes.
  + Was there any signage that guided you?
  + Did you speak with any employees? (e.g., receptionist)
  + Was there a waiting area of any kind?
  + How did you know when you were at the right place?
* Did you have a pre-scheduled appointment, or did you just walk-in?
* Was there anything you wish you had on that day that would have made your visit easier? Not really. Maybe the knowledge of what I could ask about. I didn’t have time to look over the handbook they handed me. Yes, I am intended to go back with an appointment because it would probably be easier.

## **Benefit Task Questions - 8 min**

For this next part, we're going to talk about the **[benefit-related task]** you wanted to complete at the office.

* Were you able to complete the task during the visit? Yes.
  + Did you visit multiple offices? No.
  + Did you have to visit the same office multiple times?
* Was there another way you could have completed the task? Yes, I considered going to the VA and figuring it out there, but my friend told me there was a benefit office to help me. If he did not tell me, I would have probably gone to my out-patient clinic.
* If you had the option of completing this task online / by phone / or in-person, what would your preferences be? I would think it depends but my situation if they were able to give me a COE online, I think in-person would be better unless that is available. In-person, online, and then on the phone. If they offer it online, I would do it online. I do everything online. I have done request for records online, and that is way easier because before you had to go to the VA.
  + Rank 1st, 2nd, 3rd
* Is there any information specific to this task/benefit that you wish you had before your visit?
* [Repeat questions if there are multiple tasks or benefits]

## **General Benefit Office Questions - 5 min**

For this last section, I'm going to ask you some general questions about VA benefit offices. There are no right or wrong answers, I'm just interested in your perspective.

* In addition to the [benefit task] that brought you to this office, can you think of other reasons you or another Veteran might visit this location in the future?
  + What other tasks might be completed here?
* I'm going to share my screen and show you a list of benefit offices. [Share screen] **Can you see my screen?**
* As we go through this list, for each office type I'd like you to tell me if you've heard of it before.
  + Regional Benefit Office: I am guessing it is the main area. The HUB the satellites come out of.
  + Satellite Benefit Office: Part of the Regional Benefit Office that people can go to if they are too far away.
  + Integrated Disability Evaluation System Site: No, I do not
  + Pre-Discharge Site: No but I am assuming you get sent there prior to you getting out of the military
  + Veteran Readiness and Employment Office: Yes, I have heard of this. No, I have not but I know of someone who has gone. The VA center I go to they gave me something that had a list of things the VA offers, and this was listed on that.
  + VetSuccess On Campus: No, I have not maybe because I have not been in school for a long time.
* Follow up for each office type they know in your words, what can Veterans do at this type of office?
* If they indicate having heard of at least two types:
  + Based on your understanding of these different office types, are there any important connections between them?
    - For example, have you ever been referred from one office to another?
* Are you involved in any Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs)? Yeah, they are the ones who help you file a claim or are you talking about people who represent you like VFW. I go to the VFW.
  + If you wanted to learn more about VSOs in your area, where would you look? At the VA they have a little office, and they have different people in there from all the organizations you can talk to.
* CHAMPVA, can you tell me a little more about that? Once you are P&T the VA offers you healthcare insurance for your family. They can either be seen at the VA or they can seem through the community as long as they are within network. You pay 25% and the VA pays 75%. It is just like a private insurance. Normally I just go to the VA hospital, but my wife and kids they did not have availability, so they go to any clinic as long as they are within the network. It was a different process, but it was fairly easy to sign up. I had the question on how to go about it. My dependents are already on my VA stuff, but you have to call the number and add them on there. I just asked about it since I was there.
* For the license plate you have to get your doctor to fill out the form, once they fill it out you have to go to the benefit office, and they give you a printed paper to take to the DMV to get the plate issued.

## **Thank-You and Closing - 3 min**

* Ask any additional follow up questions from #feedback-backchannel
* That's the end of my list of questions. Is there anything we talked about today that you have additional thoughts you want to share? No, maybe if it is possible that you can do everything online and get an instant download of the document I need as long as I am verified.
* Did you ever felt like you needed to talk to someone about blank? Yeah, I think there is a need to have someone that could explain something to you that you may not understand online. Basic information. A breakdown of steps. Freely ask the question to be able to get an answer freely. Sometimes you can call and been on hold for 45 minutes if there was just a way to quickly get through it and have someone answer my question easily. Triage for general questions.

We really appreciate you taking the time to share your thoughts with us today. Your feedback is so helpful to us as we continue to work on the site and make sure it really works for Veterans.

Thank you again, and I hope you enjoy the rest of your day.