**Conversation Guide: Digital Health Modernization Discovery Research - Caregiver Group**

**Introduction (2 minutes)**

*Start recording.*

* **I have started recording**. I'd like to confirm: Are you comfortable if I record my screen and the audio as we talk today? Yes I am okay with you recording the session today.

**Background (5 minutes)**

To get started, I’d like to get a little background information about you, and your experience with the VA.

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and the Veteran you care for? I live in leigh agers Fl just moved here form FL. I was in the Marine Corps for 8 years.
2. Free time: Right now I am doing a lot of eye rest and mediation.
3. How do you like FL: I don’t like it.
4. In AZ before: Yes, I was there for about 15 years.
5. Do you remember when you left the Marines: 2008.
6. Do you personally receive any benefits from the VA? I receive all of my medical care through the VA and here the VA hospital is like 3 hours away so we do a lot of intown appointments because the hospital is to far away to travel.
7. Other benefits you receive: I am not sure of the question you are asking.
8. Like disability, education benefits: Disability benefits.
9. Mentioned in town appointments due to VA distance, care from non-va providers: No, it is just the distance.
10. Does [Veteran] have any family members they claim as dependents? My wife is the only dependent I have.

4.a. Do those family members receive any benefits from the VA? She is a caregiver on the caregiver program through the VA.

1. Do you manage any of [Veteran's] VA benefits online? My wife takes care of everyone online, a little bit of both I guess. On phone and online. I do not use the online tools.

**Mental model of health at the VA (20 minutes)**

Now I’d like to hear about your experience first learning about VA benefits. **(10 minutes)**

1. How did you learn about the health care available to [Veteran] through the VA, and what was the process of applying for and accessing those benefits? I guess from other veterans and they mention something so I asked more questions about it. The VA doesn’t share infomration unless you ask them about it.
2. Proactive one to ask questions: Well you need to know the question to ask to learn. If you don’t know the question then you cant ask them.
3. Anything you remember that stands out that you should apply for: Just having the knowledge that you can apply for different things. Ff you don’t know if you qualify for it you don’t know to ask.
4. that’s an important step: Yes.
5. Process of applying for disability/health care: in the beginning I did a lot of it when I first got out. It was very frustrating so my wife got involved and that’s how she starting taking over and managing thing to get them taken care of.
6. Tell me about the health care [Veteran] receives through the VA: I would say some of the doctors I have are not that great, they talk down to you. Some of the things I have discussed I get off the wall answers and not a high level of care I have received form the VA. Civilian doctors I have liked them a lot. I would do that instead of going to the VA.
7. True for all types of care in the VA: Not every last one of my doctors but most of the ones I have had I had that experience. I am not saying all doctors but the ones I am in contact with I get the feeling that they are talking down and don’t care.
8. Difference in VA: that is what I am talking about the doctors. Only one of the doctors, my psychiatrist , is the only one I feel like care. The rest are talking down to you or talking at you. They don’t communicate to each other; I get a call saying you need to talk to your psychiatrist but I just had an appointment with them. There is a lot of chaos in the system or they can’t see each other’s notes.
9. Problem of feeling that they don’t communicate, only with the VA in FL: Some in AZ, I have had issues with that as well. You have an appointment but you see another person for the same thing with the residents. I just told the last guy you can’t see that in the notes.
10. When you say residents are you referring to med student: Yes or just a doctor in general. I don’t know if they are all med students. I have had more in person appointments in person in AZ. I would go one week and the next it would eb someone different for the same thing. I don’t know if they were residents or not. There was inconsistently as in seeing the same person. You need to start over after explaining it last week or when your last appointment was.
11. Not as many appointments due to covid: That and it’s a 3 hour drive to the VA. We go intown because it is closer.
12. Appointments over the phone or like this: I have a few of them with my psychiatrist but only one with my primary care. I just received a new primary care doctor and that was the first contact.
13. What was it like: It wasn’t to bad. It was our first meeting so the feeling is that she is not listening because after that call I received an appointment for gasto but I have an outside doctor. She put in a referral even though I have one outside of the va. That is what I am talking about communication I ever mentioned it. A few weeks later I had an appointment for the VA gastroenterologist.
14. Not seeing the outside provider: I have no idea what the problem is, I didn’t mention we needed one only that we have one. I don’t know how that came about.
15. How would you explain a “disability rating” to a new Veteran? It is challenging, it is tough, not the same across the board. Some people have an easier time, others have a harder time. I don’t know how to simply it but its not easy to accomplish. You don’t have all of the information; you don’t know you need certain things from the military like detailed notes and documentation when you went to the doctor in the military. A lot of things, I have had a lot of injured but did not claim it because of different thing. You are taught to suck it up and move on, you just move forwards. It hurts you when you get out because it is not documented. It is a challenge.
16. What do the benefits provide you: They help. They will help you until you are able to get on your feet to start the process, it is just a long process until you receive what you think you deserve.
17. For your case, how long did it take: In the beginning, I think maybe a few years. I can’t remember exactly. Then I learned that I can claim that so I would go back and that’s when my wife got involved. It was a process to get there and its not overnight. It is at least 2-3 years before you get in there. The process gets easier when you are in because you don’t need to fill out so many documents, you just add to the previous claims. It gets easier but not as easy. It is still a process but you know how to format it to what they are looking for.
18. Sounds like it is easier to fill out an additional claim then starting because it is less information: yes that is correct.
19. Not all information needed for military doctors notes to claim, were you able to move forward: it is a dead end because if they cant connect it to the military it wont be a claim. If you don’t have the documentation in the medical record. If no one can verify it then it is a dead end.
20. Do you remember how many times you filed for things: It takes a bit, it all melts in together the process is the same. You put in the claim and they say they need this. Then you need to location it, it is still a process even though you have done it a few times. Each time the claim goes to a different set of people even though you have submitted before. It is not streamline no matter how many times you have done it. You don’t just submit and they agree then it is over. For me it has always been something else I need to provide to them or more evidence.
21. What happened after it is filled out: You submit and wait for a response.
22. Sometimes you need to supply additional information, anything else required of you: Sometimes they ask for you to see someone that specializes that stuff or does a test or exam. I don’t know how they are doing it now with the pandemic.
23. Once your receive the approval, anything you need to do moving forward: Once you get the letter of approval it is done and the VA adjust what they need to on your rating. Once the approval has been received it is out of your hands. The va takes care of the back pay and everything on their end.
24. In your mind, is there a relationship between "disability" and "health care"? I do not understand the question. Yes, it ahs an impact. If its not military claim then you can be seen but have to co-pay for it. If it is service connected the care is taken care of. It is like me having a co-pay for the dentist if its not military related. I can be seen but can be charged for it. It dependents what you are seen for, if it’s not service connected you have a co-pay. I don’t know that until I asked what the co-pay booth is for. There are thing you don’t know. You don’t know what you don’t know.
25. Have you gotten a bill: No I haven’t but when I went for travel reimbursement I inquired about the booth.
26. The process for travel: They pay you mileage for driving from your house to the va and back. They already know you address so after your appointment you go to the travel window and give them the paper saying you completed the appointment.
27. Do you receive it there: We use to but now it is direct deposit and that made it easier because you don’t have to go to the travel window. You still have to give them the paperwork but they just deposit it. It doesn’t eliminate you going there because you still have to give them the paperwork. Now with COVID it is better because they don’t need to touch the cash.
28. When it comes to [Veteran's] health, what is the most important thing you need from the VA? Compassion would be one of them. Treating someone like a human being and being understanding.
29. Wife manages appointment through va and outside doctors: yes.
30. Ever instances you call or reach out to ask the question: my wife would take care of it. The only time I have contact with the va is when I am at the appointment or on telehealth.

Now I’d like to ask you how you manage information and tasks related to [Veteran's] health care. For each one, talk me through the steps you’d take. If there is something that you go online to complete, I may ask you to share your screen so I can see what you would do. **(10 minutes)**

**Tasks** Moderator should prompt about device usage if participant mentions digital tools or resources.

* How would you reach out to [Veteran's] VA care team if you had a question?
* How would you refill a prescription [Veteran] have with the VA?
* (If applicable) How would you go about checking the date of an upcoming medical exam [Veteran] has for a disability claim?
* How about an appointment for a yearly check up with [Veteran's] VA care team?
* (If applicable) Or a private provider (dentist, optometrist) outside the VA?
* How would you pay a VA health care bill, such as a copay?
* How would you request a reimbursement from the VA for traveling to [Veteran's] health care appointments?
* How would you update the dependents on [Veteran's] VA benefits?
* How would you make updates to [Veteran's] health care benefits?

**Branding and trust (5 minutes)**

Now I’d like to ask for your thoughts on My HealtheVet. (Confirm that participant has used My HealtheVet previously. If not, amend questions below to capture their first impressions while looking at a logged in account.)

1. How would you describe My HealtheVet to a fellow caregiver?
2. What about “VA health care?” It is hard to describe because everyone ahs a different experience. Just because I experienced it doesn’t mean they will. It is not consistent. It is more inconsistent then consistent.
3. Outside of in person appointment, is there anything you do to manage your health on a daily basis: Outside of the va, I have a vet center counselor I talk to and I do meditation and eye rest.
4. Meditation, you track or journal about: I track it for my own purpose, I don’t share it with the provider because they don’t have anything to do with it.
5. Anything you would like to share besides appointments: I don’t understand the question.
6. Anything we can do to improve communication between you and the va care team, anything throughout the day they should know about: I don’t know if there is anything because if you talk to them in person it is misunderstood. I don’t know that typing it is any better. It is hard to say what can improve the communication if you don’t know where it broken down at you cant improve it.
7. Anything you would like to improve about in person healthcare or managing in between appointments: Nothing that comes to mind.

**Thank you and closing (2 minutes)**

Feedback: No I think that is everything I had to share and the questions you had to ask me.

Well 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.

Lastly, do you know any other Veterans, caregivers, or service members who might be willing to participate in a future user research session? If Yes: Thank you! I'll have our team send you an email with a little blurb that you can pass along.

Great, well thank you so much again, and enjoy the rest of your day!