

Improving communications with Veterans

Demo Day
May 10, 2019



Meet **John***

John served in **Vietnam**.

He has had **cancer** twice, and
been diagnosed with **PTSD**.



Meet **Sam***

Sam is a former Marine who spent **8 years** in service.

He has had issues with his **knee** and **hand** since leaving the military.

John and Sam are among the 5 million Veterans who receive disability benefits from the Veterans Affairs Department

274K

new disability
claim recipients
in 2018

22.6%

of claims are for
**tinnitus, knee
pain, or PTSD**

\$12,400

avg **annual
payment** for
individuals

But the process is complex, slow, and marred by poor communications

Claims take 107 days to complete, on average

The screenshot shows a web browser interface with a blue header containing navigation links: News, Policy, Opinion, Events, Jobs, and HILL.TV. The main content area features the HillTV logo on the left and the article title in large, bold black text. Below the title, it says 'BY RORY E. RILEY-TOPPING, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR — 04/09/19 05:00 PM EDT' and 'THE VIEWS EXPRESSED BY CONTRIBUTORS ARE THEIR OWN AND NOT THE VIEW OF THE HILL'. At the bottom left of the article preview, it says 'Just In...' and '1,395 SHARES'.

50% of calls to the VA Call Center (>600K) are to check the status of a claim

The screenshot shows the GAO (U.S. Government Accountability Office) website interface. The header includes the GAO logo and navigation tabs: Reports & Testimonies, Bid Protests & Appropriations Law, and Key Issues. The main content area features the report title 'VETERANS' BENEFITS: Lack of Timeliness, Poor Communication Cause Customer Dissatisfaction' and the report number 'HEHS-94-179'. Below the title are tabs for HIGHLIGHTS, RECOMMENDATIONS, and VIEW REPORT (PDF, 62 PAGES). The text under the HIGHLIGHTS tab reads: 'Pursuant to a congressional request, GAO reviewed the quality of the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) claims processing services, focusing on the: (1) timeliness of VA claim processing operations; (2) communication between VA and benefit applicants; (3) extent to which applicants have to resubmit documents to support their claims; and (4) extent to which VA denies claims and other veterans service organizations are involved in the claims process. GAO found that: (1) over one-third of VA benefit applicants are dissatisfied with VA claims processing operations; (2) applicants frequently complain that VA does not timely process claims, does not adequately communicate with its customers, and requires many applicants to resubmit documents; (3) although VA recognizes the need to improve the timeliness of its claims processing operations, some applicants remain dissatisfied with the process; (4) 40 percent of the'.

That's where we came in



Raina Davis
MPP, HKS



Daniela Jozic
MPA, HKS



Menaka Narayanan
Senior, Harvard
College



Isaac Yoder
MPP, HKS

Our problem statement

How do we use **communications**
(and notifications) to **improve**
Veterans' satisfaction with the
disability claims process?

We spoke to more than 50 Veterans about their experiences



34 survey respondents

8 phone calls



Our user research identified two key pain points for Veterans

1 There is a lack of communication

“Black hole”

*“It would have been helpful to have **notifications** [about claim progress]”*

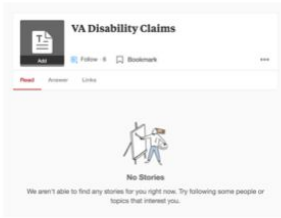
2 Communication is not tailored

*“The option to **opt out of paper mail** would seriously be appreciated”*

“spam”

We came up with 20 potential solutions to these pain points, which we narrowed down to three based on user surveys

Problem: Confusion around steps; expectation system
Solution: VA-Curated Chatroom/Discussion Forum



Medium

Problem: Lack of awareness around existing communications infrastructure
Solution: Biannual communications preferences audit

Amazon.com Communications

We want to stay in touch, but only in ways that you find most helpful.

You have already set your preference to only receive e-mail from Amazon.com. You can [update all of your communication preferences](#) here.

The e-mail you received pertained to the categories below. You can choose to receive e-mail notifications from these categories. If you don't want to receive e-mail from these categories, you can [unsubscribe](#).

Seller Feedback

[Unsubscribe](#)

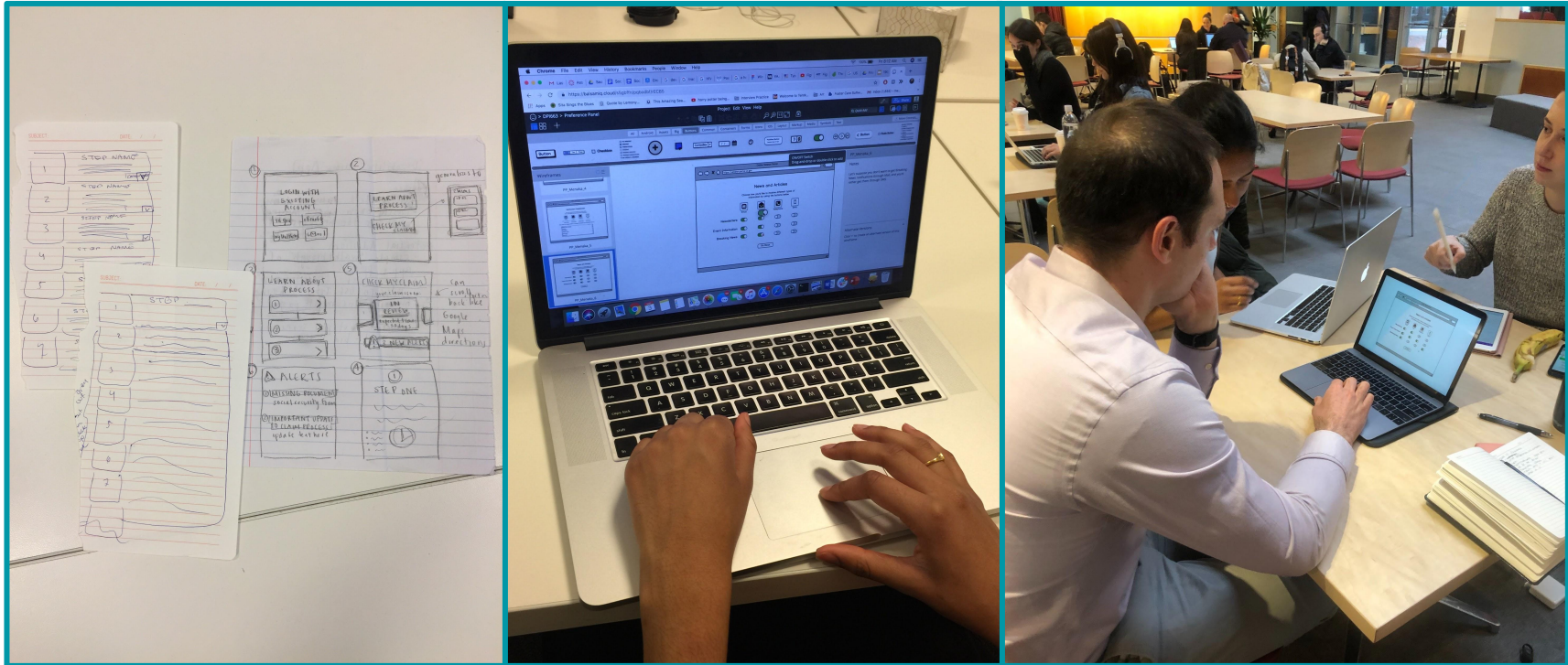
You may also unsubscribe from all Amazon marketing e-mail (transactional e-mail includes messages from Amazon.local and Amazon.com). Deliveries subscribed to by you will not be affected.

[Unsubscribe from all](#)

Problem: Transparency around length of claims processing
Solution: Increase specificity of progress expectations



We then tested our prototypes with 15 Veterans and active service members



Our solutions address each pain point

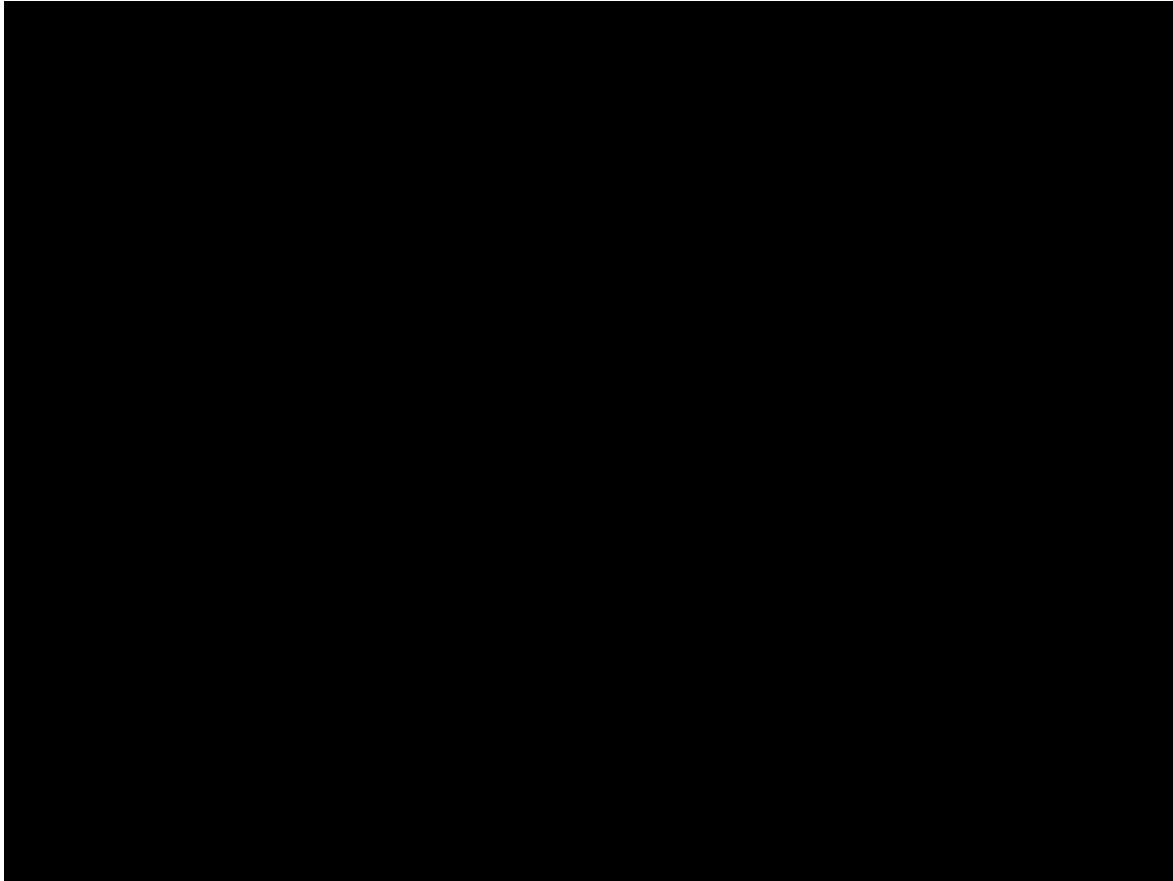
1 There is a lack of communication

Claims tracker app

2 Communication is not tailored

*“The option to **opt out of paper mail** would seriously be appreciated”*

“spam”



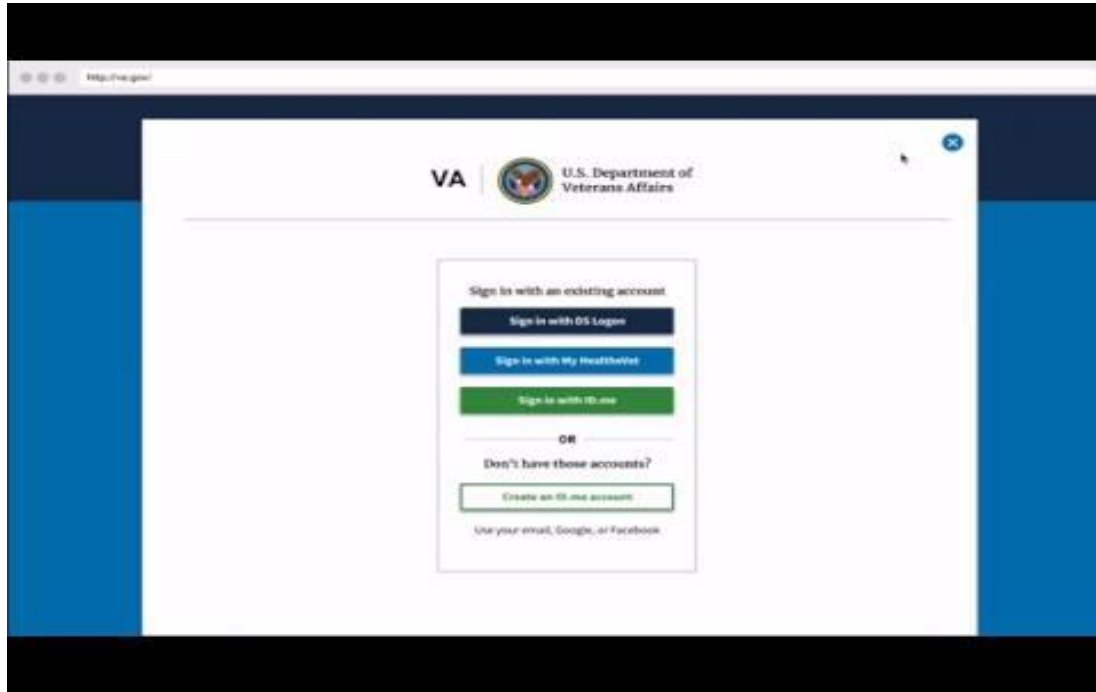
Insert video or
high-fidelity images of
app

Our solutions address each pain point

1 There is a lack of communication

2 **Communication is not tailored**

To address this pain point, we developed a **Preference Panel** for the va.gov website.



*"I like that you can do it **all at once**"*

*"I like that it shows what **functionality** it can and can't offer you"*

*"One click, **one page** - no more"*

Our solutions address each pain point

1 There is a lack of communication

2 Communication is not tailored

3 **Information is confusing and hard to find**

To address this pain point, we developed a **“White Book”** of user insights and changes.

Change to Menaka's idea of turning our Doc into some kind of "White Book" that includes recs like this

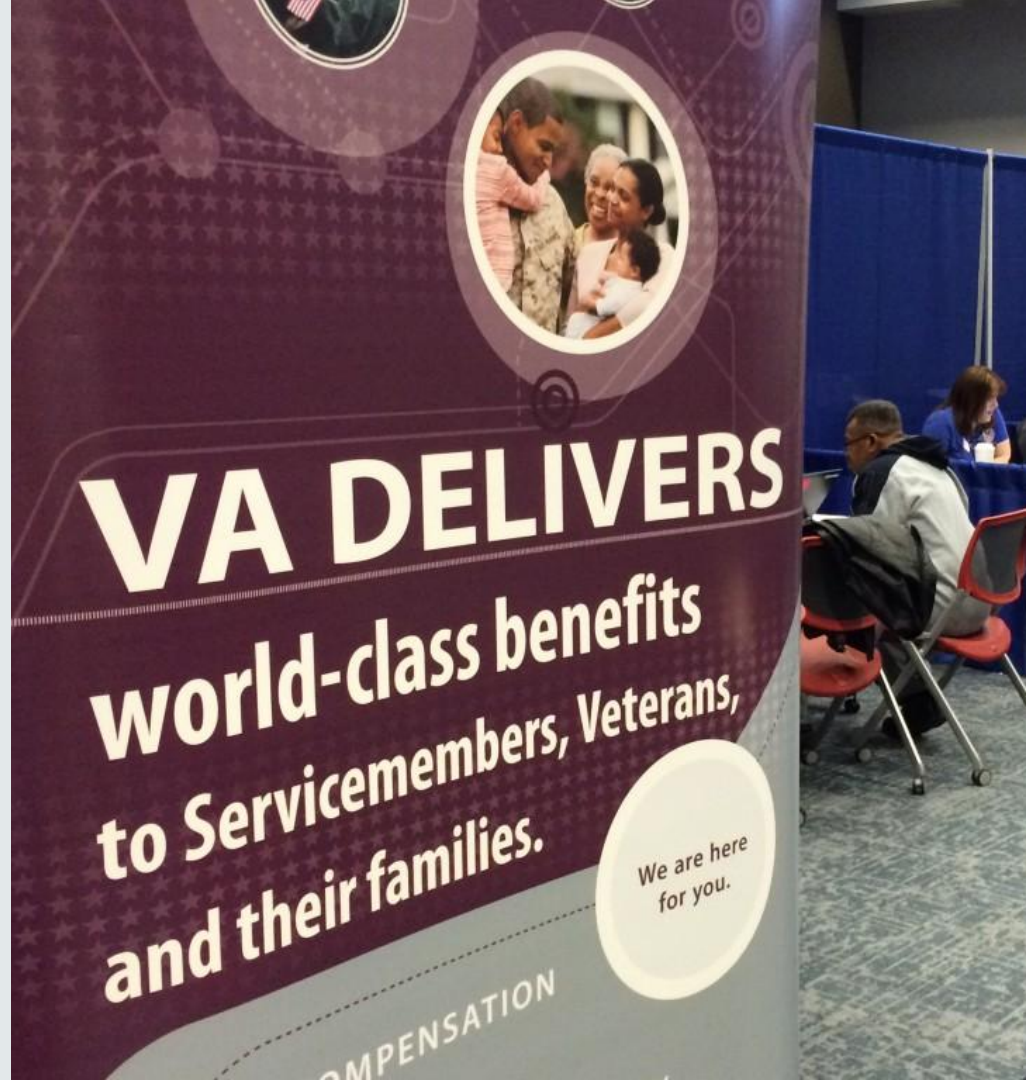
1. Simplify language of compensation award.
2. Provide clearer explanations for how disability ratings are calculated.
3. Enroll exiting service members into eBenefits as part of transitioning out process on base.
4. Callback system in contract for customer service phone systems.

What we learned

How information is **delivered** has a huge impact on how it is **received**.

Change at the VA is hard but **not impossible**.

Don't underestimate the **power of Veterans' voices and stories**.



Thank you

to Clarice, Zach & Charles
the VA

and all the Veterans for their service