



Meeting Veterans Where They Are: Their Smartphones

May 15, 2020

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BACKGROUND

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Our Team



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Presidential Innovation Fellow



Clarice Chan

Presidential Innovation Fellow

BACKGROUND

> **20 million**
U.S. VETERANS

More than **9 million** receive benefits ranging from healthcare to professional development to home loans.

BACKGROUND

Innovation

AT THE VA

- **Invented** the nicotine patch and implantable cardiac pacemaker
- **Pioneered** Electronic Medical Records
- In 2018, **revamped** VA.gov to provide a more **user-centric** experience


THEIR VISION

“VA will deliver self-service tools **on par with top private sector companies**, and will have the best online experience in the federal government. Every digital service will be **personalized** to the individual using it.”



OUR MISSION

To explore how we can make it **easier for Veterans** to access their **online services** and benefits, particularly in light of the increase in **mobile users** on VA.gov



In other words, how to turn the Veteran who said this:

“ [I expect] A super clunky implementation of a lumbering government agency.” - Alex T., Air Force

Into the Veteran who said this:

“This is self-explanatory and intuitive...Something like this would be very helpful...Actually, I would use this.” - Alex T., Air Force, after 10 minutes with our app prototype

USER
RESEARCH

02

REACHING OUT TO VETERANS



BLACK HISTORY BOSTON
#MORETHANAMONTH

MAYOR MARTIN J. WALSH INVITES YOU TO THE 4TH ANNUAL
AFRICAN AMERICAN VETERANS APPRECIATION BRUNCH

HONORING

Get your tickets now on eventbrite!
<http://bit.ly/AAVB2020>

02.29.2020 | 11:00AM
ABCD Thelma Burns Building
575 Warren St Boston MA 02121

Thaddeus Miles | Mary-dith Tuitt | Lt.Col. Gerard Eric Hill

Fair Housing and Equity

City of Boston Veterans Services

City of Boston Health and Human Services

Neighborhood Services

BEN



Veterans news and information
r/Veterans

Posts Wiki

We had 102 in-depth interactions

- **64 User Research Interactions**

- 35 in-person interviews
- 29 Veterans who filled out an online survey

- **38 Prototype Feedback Sessions**

- 13 Veterans who did a one-on-one prototype feedback session
- 25 Veterans and VA beneficiaries who recorded self-guided prototype feedback sessions

INSIGHTS

PAIN POINTS OF POTENTIAL USERS

FRAGMENTED EXPERIENCE

"I'll probably forget the password and then get it emailed to me. And then things are just scattered."

"When I applied I used my DC address, but when I moved to Boston... It got lost because 'Now he's in the Boston system, not the DC system,' and I had to apply again."

TROUBLE FINDING ANSWERS

"A lot of clicks."

"There was a lot of searching...you had to know where you were"

"I've about blown a gasket just trying to get the right person on the phone."

ELIGIBILITY UNCERTAINTY

"There is most probably more out there that I am eligible for that I am not taking advantage of."

"Determining... what you are eligible for should be easier. Everyone wants to know and it is kind of hard to determine"

POTENTIAL GAINS

MANAGING APPOINTMENTS

“Appointment reminders/being able to schedule appointments” was the **most requested functionality**

87% of survey respondents agreed.

COMMUNICATING WITH DOCTORS

Even older, less tech-literate Veterans reported a desire to **communicate directly** with their medical team online.

69% of survey respondents agreed.

ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATIONS

Many Veterans requested a function that “can look at my situation and **provide me a list of all available programs** and services.”

72% of survey respondents agreed

QUICK ACCESS TO DOCUMENTS

Many current users of the mobile site were driven by a need to get documents and information **on the go**.

83% of survey respondents agreed.

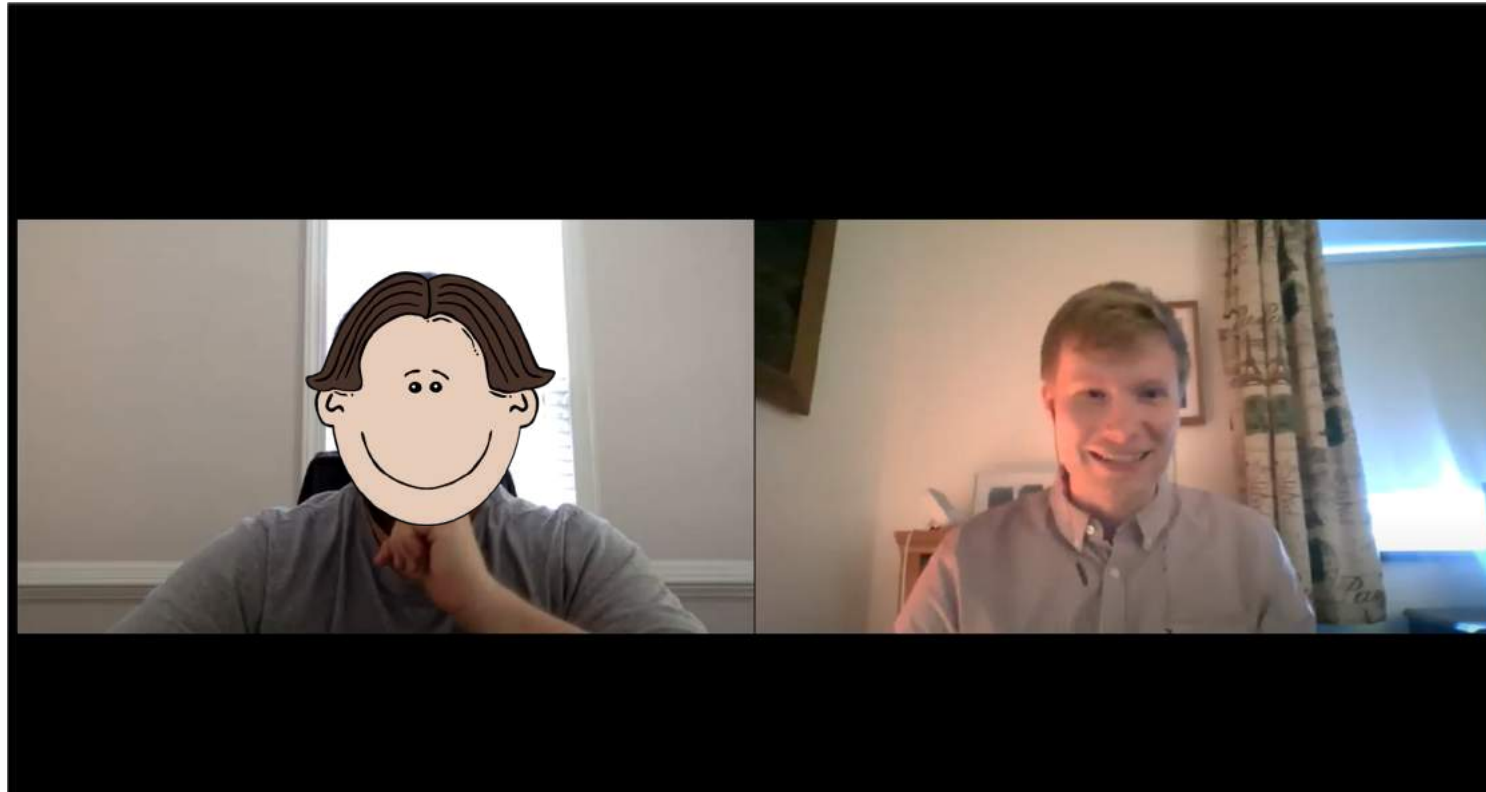
Mobile Solution Considerations

Aspect	Responsive Website	Progressive Web App	Native App
Brief Description	Make changes to the website's layout if mobile screen is detected	A "hybrid" between a web app and a native app	An app built for intended specific platforms (e.g. iOS/ Android smartphones)
Access to Features	Through common web browser	Via URL and/ or icon on phone's home screen Crawlable and discoverable by search engines	Download via App Store, Play Store and access via home screen
Flexibility of Feature Development	Limited. Content is strictly dependent on the original	Somewhat limited (e.g. can't use camera, send push notifications on iOS)	Only restricted by platform. Full-fledged features of a typical mobile app
Development Cost	Low	Medium	High
Meets Most Requested Features	No	No	Yes

PROTOTYPING

03

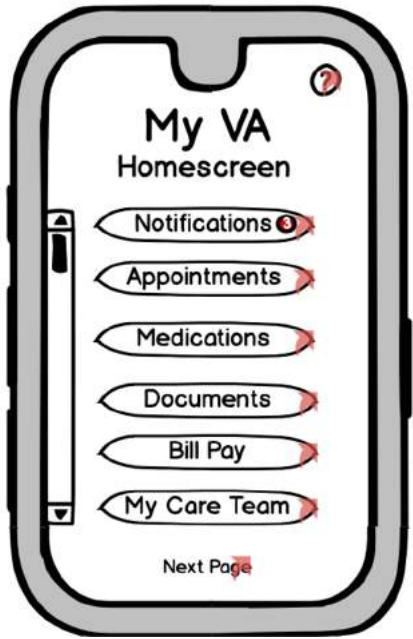
Remote Feedback Sessions



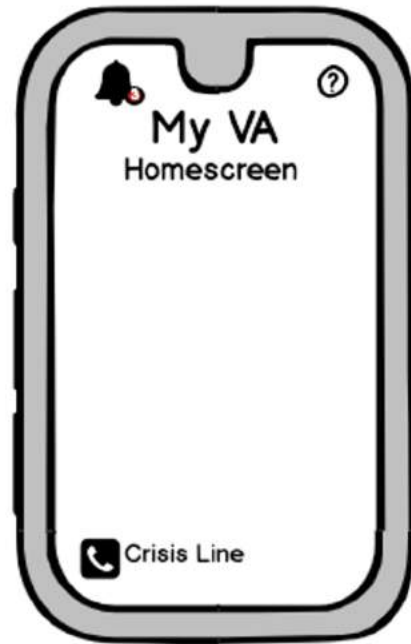
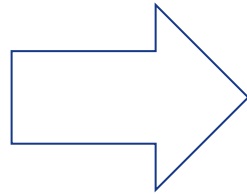
A remote chat with “Smith”, a 34-year-old veteran from North Carolina...

Our Prototypes:

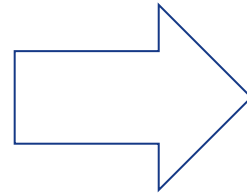
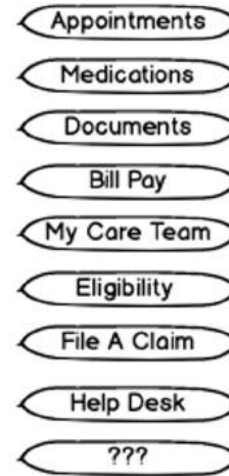
Evolution of the home screen



Prototype 1.0



Prototype 2.0



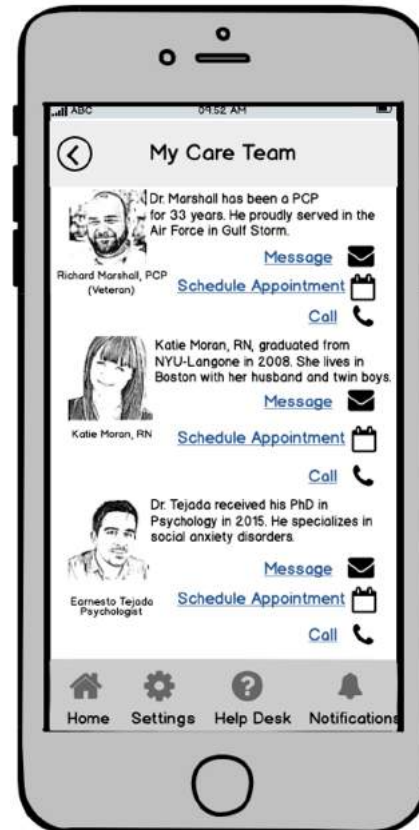
Prototype 5.0

Features for Health Care

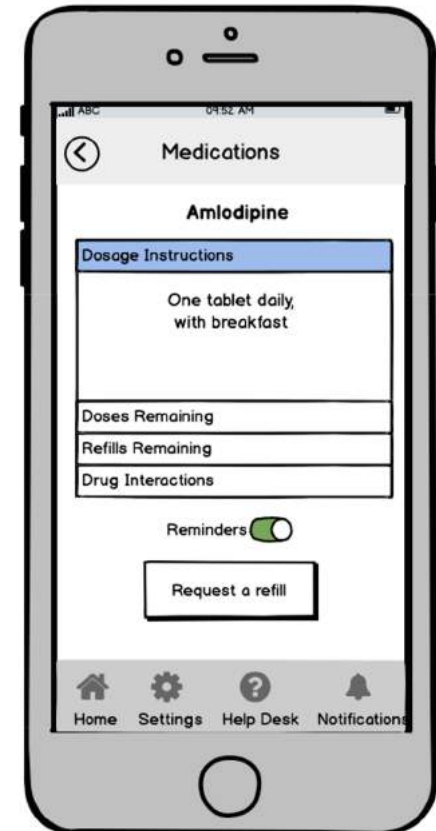
Make medical appointments



Communicate with their medical team

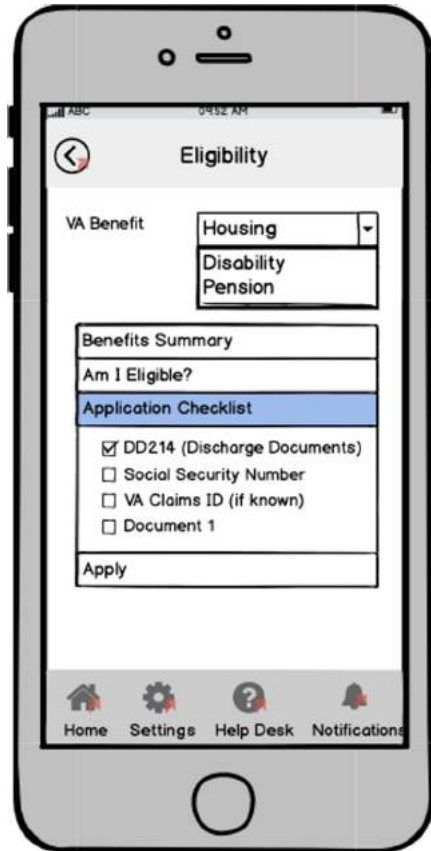


Manage their medications



Streamlined Information Access

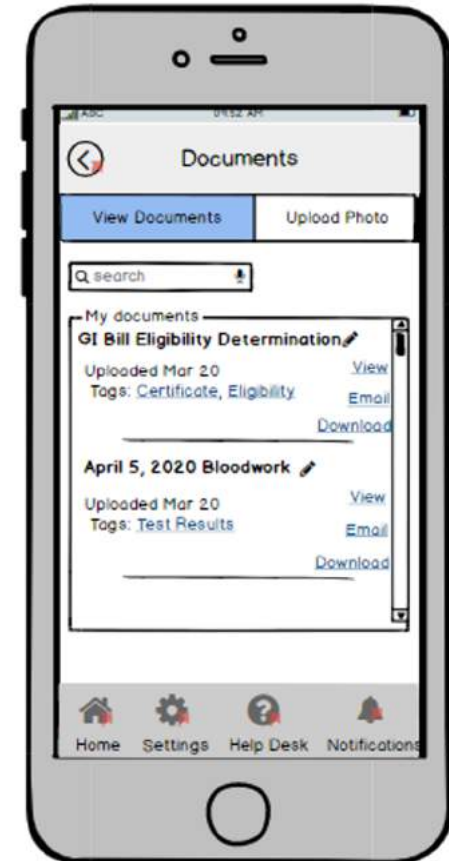
Determine their Eligibility



Review & Manage their Benefits



Access & Upload Paperwork

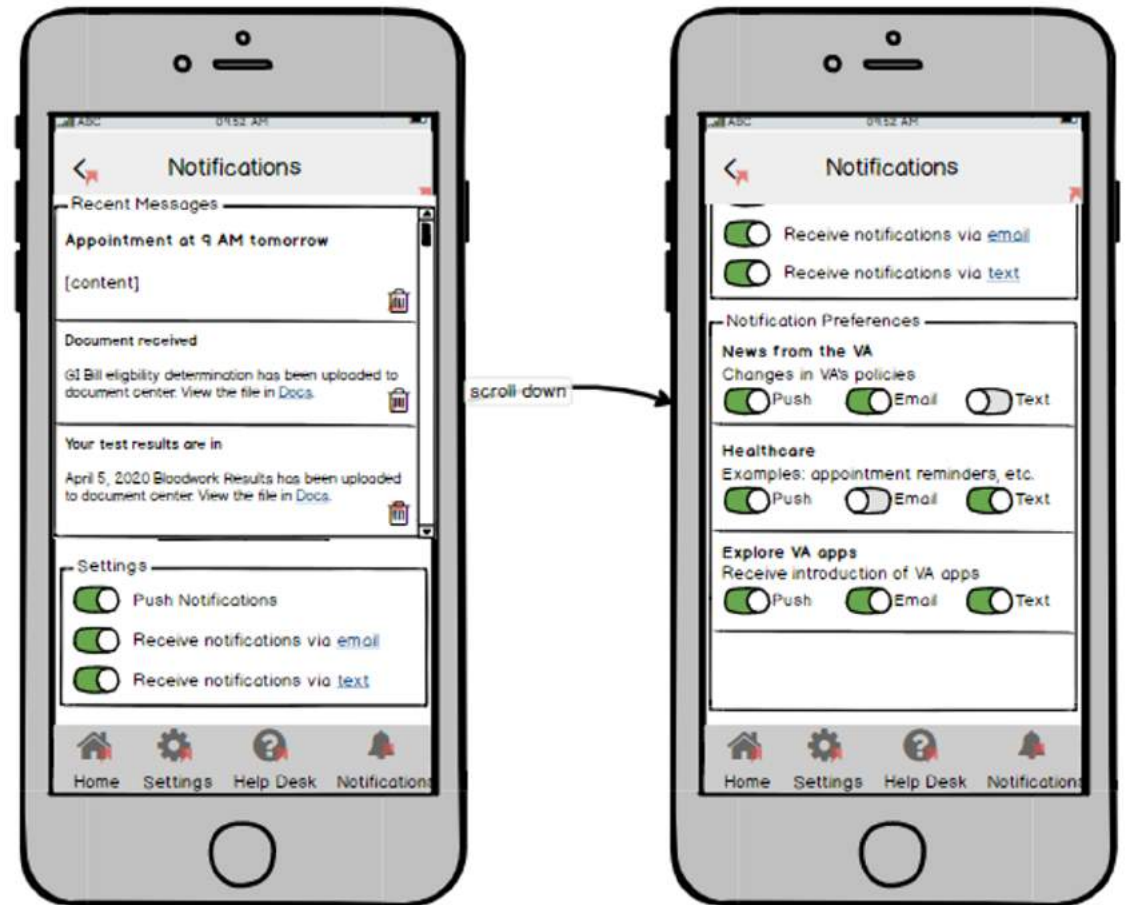


Customize and Control Communication

Setup one-tap Quick Actions



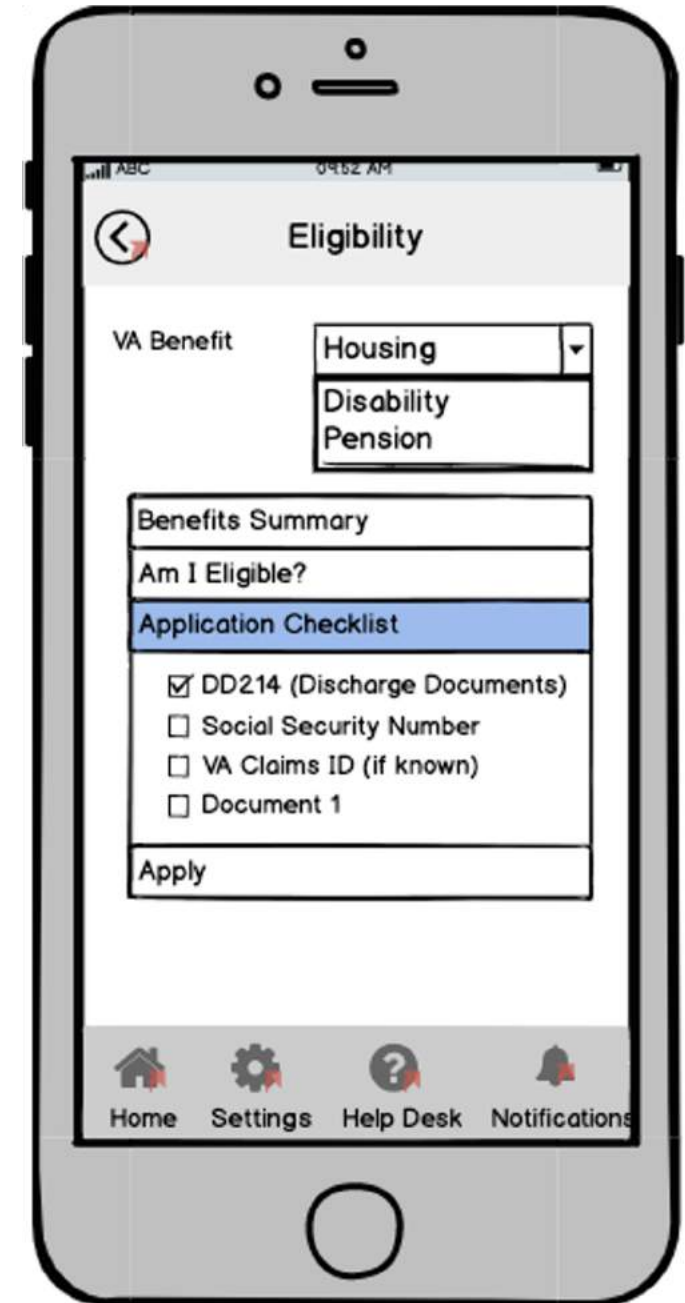
Set up notifications and reminders



Determine Eligibility

“For eligibility, I would probably use the app [instead of the website]- **everything’s right there** in one place.”

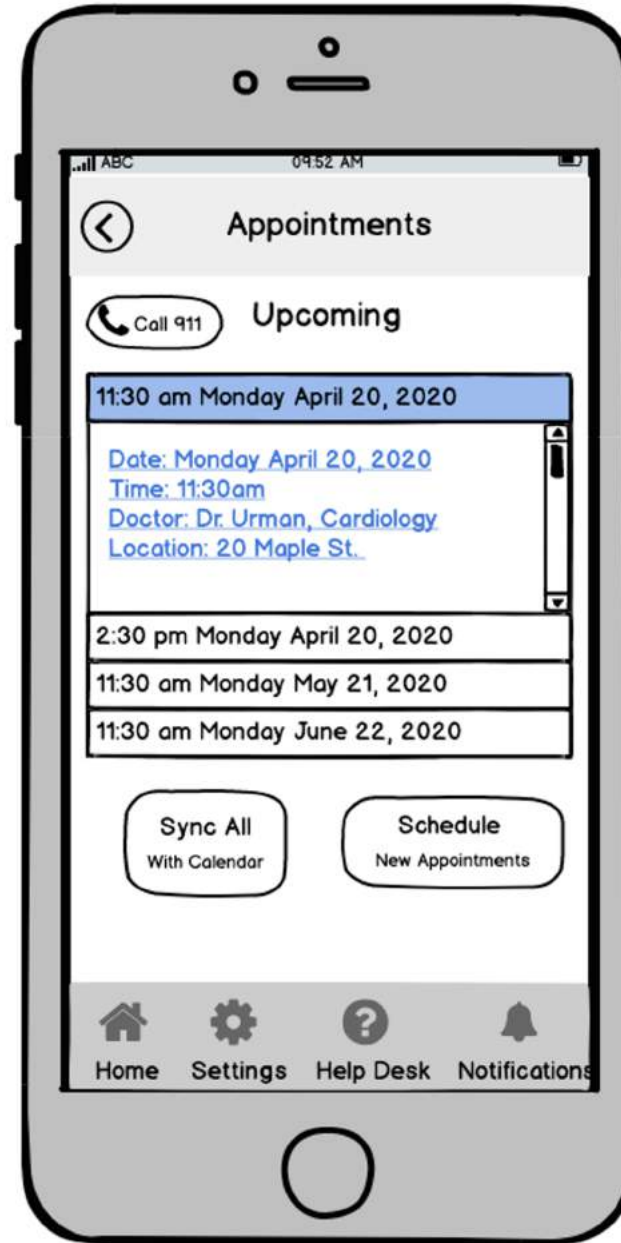
“I’m expecting that the website is going to have more information [...] I would assume that **the app is a condensed version**, whereas the website has everything that I need to know.”



Make Appointments

“Straightforward, self-explanatory... It was very easy. I didn't even have to think about it, it was automatic.”

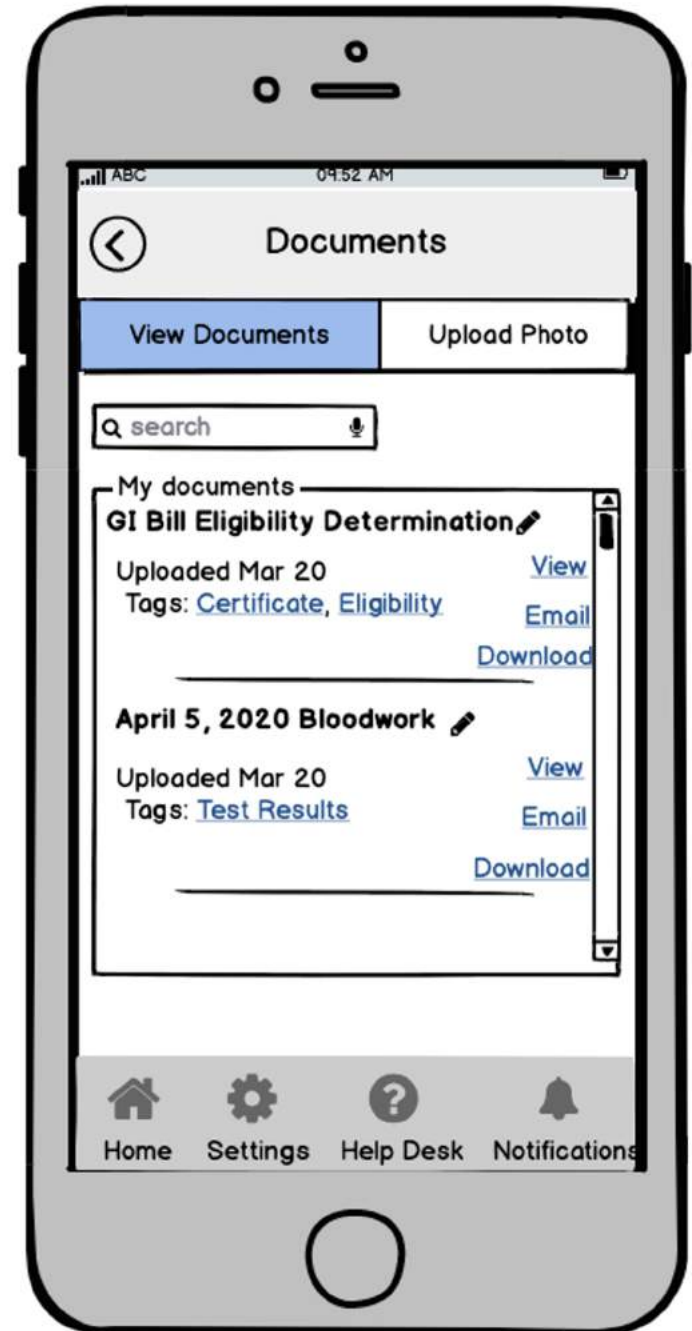
“I would say that was **very easy**.”



Manage Paperwork

“This is all **really important**. I think it is hard to explain unless you have had to deal with it. There’s a lot of times that **I need this stuff and it’s not easy to get.**”

“It’s good to be able to tag something as relevant to you ...so when you have to resubmit because the VA has denied the claim you **don't have to go through a box of papers.**”



CONCLUSION

04

Our Recommendation: A Streamlined Multifunctional App

A mobile app solution offers unique advantages

- Streamlined
- Simple to navigate
- Easy to use “on the go”
- Provides new functionality
- Personalized

But: *“Don’t make an app just for its own sake. Make sure it is reliable...”*

- Don’t add to fragmentation
- Make the learning curve as gentle as possible
- Make it comprehensive

Conclusion

Our user research confirmed that there is no “typical user,” and that Veterans’ needs and preferences are hugely varied. Still, we heard some common refrains with surprising frequency:

- Finding the right person at the VA can be complicated and time-consuming
- Navigation through existing channels is often confusing
- Vets would use an app - if it did what they wanted it to, and was easy to understand.

Recommendations

Almost all of the Veterans we talked to had challenges with the VA stemming from fragmented administration. These included:

- Having a hard time finding the right information
- Constantly filling out the same paperwork
- Not knowing what benefits exist or which ones they were eligible for

Recommendations (cont'd)

A VA app is one part of a broader effort to meet Veterans where they are.

Increased data sharing across silos would alleviate many of these challenges and allow the VA to learn a lot more about Veterans.

- This knowledge could enable the VA to do more targeted, proactive, and efficient service delivery.
- It would also allow the VA, and Veterans, to leverage the unique strengths of a native mobile app.



The screenshot displays a user testing session on a computer monitor. On the left, a mobile app interface is shown within a browser window. The app is titled "HomeScreen" and features a "Sendin Order Line" button in the top right corner. Below the title bar, there are two notification banners: "Appointment at 9 AM tomorrow" and "Check out UK Mental Health App". The main content area is divided into three sections: "Book Actions" with four buttons labeled "View", "Edit", "Reschedule", and "Add Action"; "Orders" with three buttons labeled "Flight", "Claims", and "Documents"; and "Notifications" with four buttons labeled "Reviews", "Notifications", "Messages", and "Care Team". At the bottom of the app is a navigation bar with icons for "Home", "Settings", "Help Desk", and "Notifications".

On the right side of the browser window, a task instruction box is visible. It is titled "Step 6 of 10" and contains the following text: "When trying to better understand your eligibility for additional benefits and services, how would you compare the experience of using an account, using the account?". Below the text are two buttons: "Back" and "Next Step". A red box highlights the time "10:04" in the top right corner of the browser window.

At the bottom of the browser window, a footer message reads: "User Testing Browser Records a screenshot of your screen" with a "View History" button and a "Close" link.

Parting Notes

Our research will have been successful if:

- It encourages conversations with Veterans as a routine part of policymaking and implementation.
- The VA can use our findings, insights, and suggestions to catalyze technological progress, building upon existing efforts.

THANK YOU

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Teaching Team: Nick Sinai, David Leftwich, Bobby Wang, Ariana Soto and Miro Bergam

CREDITS: This presentation template was created by **Slidesgo**, including icons by **Flaticon**, and infographics & images by **Freepik**