# Blind Veterans can now read decision letters

**Intro text:** The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) now offers accessibility to blind Veterans so they can independently read decision letters online.

**Appears in:** VA News, Top Stories, Technology

**Tags:** Accessibility, Mobile App, Office of Information and Technology

**Image:**

**Alt Text:** On the left is a decision letter via mail with a red eye icon half obstructed demonstrating blind Veterans unable to read the letter. On the right is a mobile phone screen depicting a decision letter with a speaker icon on it, alternately demonstrating audio accessibility of decision letters via VA’s mobile phone app.

For the first time ever, blind Veterans can now read their VA benefits decision letters inside the [VA Health and Benefits mobile app](https://mobile.va.gov/app/va-health-and-benefits). This new feature is part of VA’s move to improve its accessibility and enable Veterans to view their decision letters immediately, online, a significant improvement over previously waiting ten days to receive letters in the mail.

Claudia Baldwin is a blind Veteran who has benefited from this new accessibility change. She served in the United States Air Force for 5 ½ years and medically retired as a Staff Sergeant. For the past 15-plus years, she has worked on accessibility issues with VA and the Blind Veterans Association (BVA).

Baldwin said after the change took effect on May 9, 2023, "I don't know what you did, but you can read rating decisions now in the app. OMG, this is awesome! It was beautiful. I can now read it! One of the biggest things that Veterans get is their rating decision. No blind Veteran can read it. It's paper. It's a huge document sent to you, and someone has to read it to you. It's a very small percentage of Veterans who can't read it, so we don't have a loud enough voice and usually don't get included in accessing important programs or documentation since the information isn't accessible to blind Veterans."

Blind Veterans can now download a PDF file from the VA Health and Benefits mobile app or by using their web browser and then using a third-party app, such as VoiceOver on iOS, to listen to the content in the PDF file. This option is made possible by the VA's commitment to design accessibility of the VA Health and Benefits mobile app.

VA is committed to ensuring all Veterans have access to its services. Our VA Office of Information and Technology (OIT) team takes an "accessibility beyond compliance" approach, meaning accessibility is considered an integral part of the development process from the start rather than an afterthought.

The team conducted extensive feedback sessions on the experiences of blind and low-vision Veterans using the VA Health and Benefits mobile app. This research has helped the team identify ways to improve the app's accessibility currently, and the team is constantly working to improve the app's accessibility further. Assistive technology users accounted for 22 percent of sessions in 2022, and 23 percent so far in 2023.

By taking an accessibility-beyond-compliance approach, VA’s Section 508 Compliance team works across the Department to ensure VA products and services are accessible and usable by all Veterans with a wide range of disabilities. The team also provides resources to help VA employees and contractors comply with [Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act](https://www.access-board.gov/law/ra.html), including a toolkit, training program, and help desk.

These resources can help to ensure Veteran research and feedback sessions are conducted in an accessible way with all users. The team’s work is essential, and VA encourages Veteran participation in research and feedback on tools and services.

You can help VA deliver digital tools and products that are more accessible and user-friendly for the entire Veteran community. For more information on how to sign up for a research feedback session, please visit the [Veteran Usability Site](https://veteranusability.us/).

By VA Office of Information and Technology