



## U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Public Law 115-336, "21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act"

December 2019 Report

Prepared for Congress per the requirements of section 3(b)(2) of Public Law 115-336.

# **21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act - Report to Congress on Modernizing Agency Websites and Digital Services**

As required by section 3(b)(2) of Public Law 115-336,<sup>1</sup> the 21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act (21st Century IDEA), this report includes a list of key websites and digital services operated by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs that have been prioritized and targeted for modernization.

## **21<sup>st</sup> Century IDEA Background**

The 21st Century IDEA requires each federal executive branch agency to provide a prioritized list of the agency's "most-viewed or ... otherwise important" public websites and digital services in compliance with section 3(a) of the law, and to provide an estimation of the cost and schedule to modernize those sites and services.

## **VA's Approach to Modernizing Digital Services**

In 2017, a survey of 3,400 Veterans and Service Members indicated that most users wanted to access all their military and Veteran benefits and services online, and that they expected to find this experience on VA.gov (VEO "VA Brand Survey," Online Survey, Sept 17-25., 2017). In order to align the VA's digital experience with our users' expectations and to meet the goals put forth by the 21st Century IDEA, VA has been focusing on digital modernization efforts guided by the following objectives:

1. Increase the use of VA's self-service tools
2. Enable faster access to care and more timely delivery of services
3. Improve the experience our users have when interacting with VA

The VA's Digital Modernization Strategy was developed with input from experts across VA and approved by senior leadership, and it focuses on an enterprise-wide approach to transforming and modernizing VA's digital experience:

1. Relaunch a customer-focused homepage on VA.gov organized around the primary actions users are trying to take when they visit VA. The homepage will be optimized for quickly connecting users with the tool or information they are seeking.
2. Create a login call to action on the VA.gov homepage that brings users to an integrated dashboard view of all their existing VA services from across VA administrations.
3. All existing users, regardless of which VA-approved login account they have, will be able

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<sup>1</sup> 132 Stat. 5025-5028.

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to use that login account to access VA's digital tools.

4. Upgrade all self-service tools so they can consistently fit within the re-launched VA.gov framework, and pointing users of all VA's digital platforms such as eBenefits and MyHealtheVet to these upgraded tools.
5. Use a single set of Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) to power every VA online service, and when appropriate expose these APIs to authorized 3<sup>rd</sup> parties to enable private sector innovation.

VA has made significant progress towards achieving this vision. Rather than deliver digital tools and content in stovepipes offered under competing brands with different logins, VA has worked to modernize and consolidate these tools into an enterprise-wide self-service platform accessible from a single place: VA.gov.

The new VA.gov product launched in November 2018 and it now serves as a single front door to VA. The global navigation allows users to sign in or search VA.gov, and just below that are the top tasks Veterans told us are the most important to them-and they represent over 80% of the tasks users visited VA.gov to accomplish. Users are now able to log in with new or existing VA accounts of their choice to get a personalized experience of existing VA services, regardless of which VA administration provides those services. Once a user is logged in, they can access an agency-wide user profile allowing them to view and update the information VA has about them.

## **VA's Current Digital Services and Modernization Progress**

VA's most-impactful digital services are listed below. As described above, VA is in the midst of a Digital Modernization effort in which all these services are being integrated and consolidated into the VA.gov platform.

- VA.gov: Provides a modern set of content and tools designed to quickly connect Veterans with the services and information they are seeking. VA.gov relaunched in November 2018 and VA is in the process of consolidating its digital experiences into the VA.gov platform, as well as streamlining legacy static content into the new VA.gov platform.
- MyHealtheVet: VA's patient portal. Allows enrolled patients to message their healthcare team, refill prescriptions, view appointments, and view medical records. Currently integrated with VA.gov via single sign on and via deep links, with further integration with VA.gov planned.
- eBenefits: VA's legacy benefits portal, allowing users to manage their non-healthcare benefits. Further integration and consolidation into VA.gov are underway.
- VA Online Appointment Scheduling application: Allows patients to request and book VA healthcare appointments. Currently in the process of being integrated into VA.gov

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Please see below for progress VA has made in modernizing these sites, as well as future plans for continuing improvements.

## **Completed Modernization Priorities**

### **VA.gov Homepage**

Relaunched VA.gov homepage with a new design that is 508-compliant and focused on quickly connecting Veterans to the most commonly needed transactions and information VA offers.

- o Design is based on findings from research conducted with over 5,000 Veterans, service members, caregivers, and family members.
- o Below the global navigation are the top tasks Veterans told us were most important to them-they represent over 80% of the tasks users come to VA to accomplish.
- o Since relaunch, the Customer Satisfaction Score for all VA.gov websites (including both modernized\_and legacy pages) rose from 52.9 to 57.6 (a 9% increase). The Customer Satisfaction Score among users who saw one of the newly modernized pages rose to 66.3 (a 25% increase).
- Continued efforts to consolidate information and services into a consistent format/design and location is moving forward.
  - o The Explore.va.gov website has been retired and all benefits related content now exists on VA.gov.
  - o The Vets.gov website has been retired, with its tools and content consolidated into the new VA.gov in November 2018.

### **Profile and Personalization**

Since VA has launched the user Profile, we have seen 684k profile updates (+479% over a one-year period).

- o For the first time ever, when a Veteran updates their contact information in their VA.gov Veteran Profile, this address change is promulgated throughout various VA systems in both the Health and Benefits Administrations.
- A logged-in user can access the benefits recommendation tool, where they can select benefits of interest in their Profile, giving VA the ability to surface benefit information to the Veteran at the any time.

### **Content and Tool Standardization**

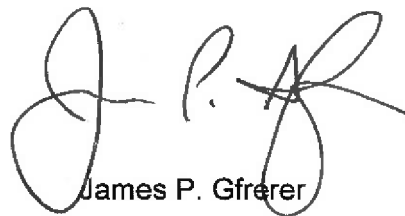
Launched Pre-Need burial form online, and this is the first time users can apply online. There was a 91% increase in applications over same period last year.

- Modernized the application for Disability Compensation and migrated this feature to VA.gov. As a result, use of this digital tool grew 27% year-over-year.
- The MISSION Act Landing Page serves as a single focal point to drive users to learn

are described below. This modernization funding requirement is not inclusive of the funds required to maintain existing digital capabilities but is instead focused on the effort to provide a modernized digital experience on VA.gov. The figures listed below are included to indicate the estimated level of effort and resources that are required to continue to modernize and consolidate VA's digital experiences onto the VA.gov platform throughout FY2020.

	<b>FY2020</b>
Digital Experience initiative (Development)	\$17.6M
Digital Experience initiative (Sustainment)	\$18.3M

Ongoing web development work will be required in out years, given the evolving requirement for a compelling digital experience. Development and sustainment funding will be required for the foreseeable future.



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