U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

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

December 2020 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, 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.

21st 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 Efforts to Date

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 placed a major focus on modernizing our digital experience. Our agency digital strategy has three primary goals: 1) increase the use of self-service tools, 2) enable faster access to care and more timely delivery of services, and 3) improve the customer experience and reliability of VA's online services. VA made significant progress on these goals throughout 2020, even as we made a major pivot to prioritize creating new digital experience capabilities to support VA's COVID-19 pandemic response beginning in March 2020.

COVID-19 Response Efforts

With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, millions of Veterans turned to VA's health care providers, benefits workers, and employees. VA's Office of Information and Technology (OIT) quickly surged resources to help VA adapt to the novel challenges the pandemic provided. Previous investments in cloud infrastructure, agile software delivery tools, and application performance monitoring allowed VA to adapt and expeditiously deliver new digital tools that ensured Veterans could receive quality care from the convenience of their homes during COVID-19. The cumulative impact of this work is best demonstrated by a simple statistic: the average digital customer satisfaction scores in FYQ3 and FYQ4 (April – September 2020) represent all time high scores for the Department. A few key tools and resources that were deployed include:

- **Telehealth Expansion**: VA rapidly scaled its telehealth services, growing the number of appointments offered from 3,200 to 17,500 peak concurrent conference capability as of the end of September 2020. OIT supported this expansion by adding on-premise

capacity to the telehealth solutions to stay ahead of demand, and stood up a cloud based environment in which to host the VA telehealth product.

- **VA.gov COVID-19 FAQ Page:** This page is composed of clear and effective Veteran-facing content written in plain language and outlines VA's response to the pandemic and the impact on VA services.
- **VEText:** During the pandemic, the VEText platform was leveraged to disseminate key information and actionable updates to an average of 8 million Veterans per campaign. Over the five (5) rounds of messages, the total opt-out rate was less than 1%, which is far lower than industry standards.
- **Coronavirus Chatbot:** The chatbot is an interactive question and answer format that provides guidance for when to seek medical assistance and answers common questions about COVID-19. The chatbot has supported about 300,000 users since launch
- **"I Am Here":** *This "I Am Here" feature enables 20,000+ Veterans a week to check in for their VA appointments from their phones and avoid crowded waiting rooms.*
- **COVID-19 Screening Tool:** The digital pre-entry screener allows Veterans, caregivers, and employees to answer questions on their mobile phones and reduces wait times, eases stress, and lowers exposure risk for staff and patients. Since its launch, this tool has been used nationwide over 5 million times.

VA.gov Product & Feature Launches

The new VA.gov launched in November 2018, and now serves as the single front door to VA. The new design features a 508-compliant and user focused home page, a new Veteran profile, and content & tool standardization. Over the course of the past year, the following products, features, and forms have been launched on VA.gov:

- **Direct Deposit for Comp & Pen:** Enable Veterans to add and update direct deposit information on VA.gov to improve security and usability. Incidences of online direct deposit fraud (via eBenefits/VA.gov) dropped by more than 95% from a peak of 600 in May 2019 to fewer than 20 per month since going live in March 2020.
- **Pittsburgh VAMC Facility Website Redesign:** The Pittsburgh VAMC Facility Website redesign is the first of the all-new, user-first redeisgn of VA medical center websites. It is a mobile-first user experience that gets users to all content and tools in just 1-2 clicks, comprehensive facility pages, new VHA health services taxonomy and new program pages.
- **Single Sign On and Universal Sign-In Page:** VA has multiple web properties requiring authentication, and VA offers 3 different identity credentials with different levels of security and authorization. To improve the user experience, a new sign-in page was created that establishes an single sign-on session if a user signs in with an identity verified account. A simple sign in page leads to an uninterrupted session when navigating among VA.gov, MyHealtheVet, eBenefits and other VA websites.
- **VA Online Scheduling:** Built a new Veteran-facing scheduling product on VA.gov that improves the user experience and supports multiple appointment providers (Cerner, VA, and community care), appointment types, and appointment scheduling flows all in one

digital experience. Since the tool's launch in March 2020, there have been 118,308 successful transactions.

- **Notifications Engine:** VA is expanding and scaling existing capabilities of the VEText program to a VA-wide tool to centralize our digital correspondence infrastructure. This will allow Veterans to select how VA communicates with them, and about what.
- **Performance Dashboard:** The VA.gov Performance Dashboard uses data to provide transparency into the Veteran-facing tools and services VA is providing online. The dashboard can be found here: https://www.va.gov/performance-dashboard/

Digitization of Forms

VA is working to identify high-impact VA forms for priority translation into a digital service or application and this prioritization is based on the effects to Veterans, funding, and number of applicants for health care, disability compensation, and education benefits. VA has or in the process of making the following forms into a digital service or an online application:

- Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers form
- Other Caregivers forms
- Prosthetic socks order form
- Hearing aid batteries and accessories order form
- Vocational rehabilitation and employment/Veteran Readiness & Employment form
- Add/remove dependents form

Forms that were modernized in 2020 include:

- **1010 CG:** The 10-10CG form is used to apply for the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. Historically, Veterans and their caregivers had to complete the application via paper forms and would either drop it off at an VAMC or mail it to Health Eligibility Center (HEC) to begin the application process. Information from the application was then manually entered into the Caregiver Support Program application system. With the launch of the online option, Veterans and their caregivers, can complete the application and directly submit it to the VA in less than 20 minutes. There have been over 30k successful submissions since its launch in October 2020.
- **Original Claims on Form 526:** Form 21-526EZ for Original Claims is used by Veterans when applying for their first ever VA disability compensation (pay) and related benefits claim. Original Claims annual volume is approximately 400k (roughly 30% of claim volume) and the new Disability Compensation Claim Tool features interactive questions to automatically populate the claims form, lets users review their responses before submitting the form online, and allows users to track their claim's application and progress.

Find a Form

While VA is working on digitizing these processes as much as possible, we know we must continue to make it easy for users to access "offline" channels as well. In order to make finding a VA form as easy as possible, we redesigned the landing page to be user-centered and features calls to action to drive traffic to top tasks and top online benefits application. It also

includes more contextual information on when and how to use the form, quick access, and links to the online version of the application when available.

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