



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

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

December 2023 Report

Prepared for the Office of Management and Budget and the public per the requirements of section 3(d) of Public Law 115-336.

Progress to Implement the 21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act 2023 Annual Report

Background

Section 3(d) of the [21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act \(21st Century IDEA\)](#) requires the head of each Federal executive branch agency to report annually (through 2023) to the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the public on the agency's progress to implement the requirements of the Act. The information below details our efforts to modernize our websites and digital services in 2023. This is the final report as required by the legislation.

VA's Digital Experience Strategy

Since 2018, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has focused on delivering a modern digital experience, turning its primary online property into a set of transactional tools built with and for those it serves. VA's 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 on VA's online services.

Efforts to Date

Modernization efforts at VA encompass a comprehensive overhaul aimed at enhancing accessibility, functionality, and user experience across various platforms and services. VA is one of the first high-impact service provider agencies to manage the application of United States Web Design System on its primary website across an enterprise of distributed teams. In this work, VA has developed and continues to maintain the VA.gov platform, which provides centralized tooling, backend connections, and governance for Veteran-facing digital experiences. Some of our accomplishments include:

- **Homepage Redesign** - The VA.gov homepage has undergone a significant redesign to improve the user experience and modernize its interface. The improvements aim to make navigation easier, enhance the discoverability of information, and ensure accessibility for all users, including those in rural or low-bandwidth areas.

Key updates include an elevated login funnel for easier access to self-service tools and a more prominent search feature to help Veterans find and complete tasks. The redesign incorporated extensive data and research findings, particularly around scroll depth and access patterns, to optimize the homepage layout. This includes an enhanced "Browse" function and a prominently featured VAntage Point blog spotlight, which increases engagement by highlighting fresh,

regularly updated content.

- **Vet Center Website Modernization** - Replaced and re-aligned these different web presences into one tested, veteran-facing experience that can: help Veterans understand what Vet Centers are and where they are located; provide information about the services a Vet Center provides; and ensure that field editors can keep the information most important to Veterans accurate and timely. In 2023, VA released digital experiences for 19 Vet Center Outstations, 83 mobile Vet Centers, and 454 Community Access Points.
- **VA Medical Center (VAMC) Webpage Custom Survey** - Built and launched a custom user survey using the VAMC website survey questions. Powered by vSignals, this survey is exclusively shown across all VAMC webpages on VA.gov and enables medical center staff to obtain specific information from their visitors about the online services provided.
- **Updating the MyVA Dashboard** – Implemented significant user experience (UX) and accessibility improvements as the result of an audit with users. Updates show all sections for all users on the dashboard, bringing consistency to how each section loads, handles errors, and shows previously conditional information, resulting in a page that is easier to interact with, manage and scale.
- **Streamlined Financial Hardship Waiver** - As part of the President's initiative to support Veterans experiencing financial hardship, VA simplified the process for claiming medical debt forgiveness by streamlining the request process and offering instant determination for Veterans who meet the criteria.
- **Enhanced Financial Status Report Update** - Veterans have increased autonomy in reviewing, editing, and deleting entries in crucial form sections, significantly enhancing flexibility and alignment with individual needs which is a departure from the previous end-of-form restrictions. This improvement incorporates mini summary pages, enabling veterans to easily manage and modify entries across the form while eliminating the earlier cumbersome list loop system.

Additionally, enhancements in the form allow veterans to efficiently input critical information, encompassing debt selection, dependent details, assets, household expenses, and more, streamlining the overall submission process for improved user experience and efficiency.

- **Beneficiary Travel** – Veterans and caregivers now get the topline eligibility and how to file information on the main VA.gov page with links to more targeted, supplemental content on how to file a claim, how to set up direct deposit, and mileage reimbursement rates (3 distinct Resources & Support pages). Veterans can now sign-in to the travel reimbursement system directly through VA.gov. The

Beneficiary Travel Self-Service System received significant updates, improving 508 compliance, and simplifying the overall workflow.

- The **10-10EZ Health Care Application** was updated to include an American Indian question and a save-form-in-progress feature, ensuring its accessibility and uniformity. It also witnessed increased submissions through the Short Form flow, meeting user needs efficiently.
- **Supporting Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act eligible Veterans with digital supplemental claims** – Provide claimants who have received an unfavorable decision and have new evidence with a quick, easy intuitive method to file a supplemental claim, while also supporting potentially PACT-eligible Veterans with a streamlined experience that explains the new legislation and makes resubmitting their claims simple and straightforward.
- **Digital Decision Letters** – Give Veterans the ability to view and download their disability claim decision letters online, from within the Claim Status Tool, allowing them to take follow-up actions like pursuing a disagreement pathway faster, and reducing the need for them to contact VA call centers to check the status of their mailed letter.
- **Automated Contention Classifications** – Developed a tool that maps contentions to classifications automatically. Some contentions no longer require manual classification by an adjudicator.

Login and Security

Currently, VA supports four credentials service providers, two of which are legacy government credentials with various customer experience and security issues. VA plans to eliminate support for these legacy credentials and focus on scaling two modern credentials – one of which is Login.gov. By eliminating use of legacy credentials, VA can improve the customer experience around login by supporting credentials that offer a best-in-class experience around security, UX, and availability across the federal government. Recent accomplishments include:

- **Integrated Login.gov into the VA.gov platform** – Users of VA.gov and the VA Health and Benefits mobile application can use Login.gov to sign in and access their personal business with VA.
- **Supported the creation of 1.2 million Login.gov accounts** – This accounts for 46% of all Login.gov accounts government wide.
- **In-person proofing usability testing and pilot planning** – The team has completed discovery and usability testing around what an in-person proofing flow at VA might look like. The actual in-person proofing pilot is in the late stages of planning.

Accessibility Update

VA.gov is a crucial platform for Veterans to access a wide range of services, benefits, and information. The site aims to cater to the needs of all Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors.

VA is committed to adhering to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) standards, encompassing versions 2.0, 2.1, and 2.2, to ensure that the website is designed and maintained in a manner that promotes inclusivity and accessibility for all users, including Veterans with diverse needs and disabilities. This commitment involves implementing guidelines related to perceivability, operability, understandable information, and robust content, thereby creating an online environment that aligns with the principles of accessibility outlined in the WCAG specifications.

Mobile Update

Veterans told us they wanted a single, fast, and intuitive place where they could complete common or recurring tasks across all of VA from anywhere and any device, including their mobile smartphones. The VA collaborated with Veterans to build the application and launched the flagship mobile application on both iOS and Android in 2021. Recent updates to the flagship mobile application include:

- **Claim Decision Letter in VA Mobile Application** – Veterans can view and download their claim decision letter digitally in the VA mobile app.
- **What’s New in the Mobile App** – A ‘What’s New’ interface allows Veterans to see new features immediately, drive adoption of features, and introduce Veterans to a richer feature set within their own experience.
- **Secure Messages in the Mobile App** – Identified several Veteran facing improvements in secure messages for mobile including updating content to better align with web, inclusion of conversation threading, tracking categories, and improving error handling.

Digitization of Forms and Services

VA strives to improve the user experience with a vision for eliminating the need for any user to ever repeat themselves in their interactions with VA to learn about, apply for, and manage the benefits and services they have earned in their military service. By systemizing our approach through the consistency provided by reusable design patterns and associated code, external users spend less time on forms re-keying known information. Forms can be continuously improved without the need for custom development costs, and decision-making applications can be launched more efficiently and managed and improved at scale, reducing sustainment costs.

The platform provides all applications on VA.gov with a shared form library, ensuring consistent user experiences and overall performance, as well as a shared backend connection to VA data systems called “vets-API.” In addition, a platform team built a

proof of concept of the proposed low-code/no-code form management solution, which demonstrated promising results in rapid prototyping capability, multi-language form servicing, and direct visual editing of forms.

New online experiences are available for the following forms:

- **Form 21-10210, Lay/Witness Statement** – Veterans use VA Form 21-10210 to submit a formal statement to support VA claims or the claim of another Veteran or eligible family member.
- **Form 21-4142 and Form 21-4142(a), Release Third Party Medical Records** – Veterans use VA Form 21-4142 to give VA permission to request medical records and information from non-VA sources in support of a benefit claim.
- **Form 21-0972, Alternate Signer** - VA Form 20-0972 permits an individual to sign on behalf of a Veteran or Claimant. The first iteration of this form allows both logged-in and logged-out users to submit a singular user submission. Additionally, the form's question set is digitized, and a PDF is sent to Central Mail for processing.
- **Form 21-0845, Authorization to Disclose Third Party Information** - VA Form 21-0845 is to submit a request from either the Veteran or Claimant to release their information to a third party.
- **Form 21P-0847, Request Claimant substitute upon Claimant's death (Pension)** - VA Form 21P-0847 allows claimants to request substitution for a claimant who passed away prior to VA processing a claim to completion.

Conclusion

The Department of Veterans Affairs remains committed to the implementation of the 21st Century IDEA and will continue to follow the policy guidance set forth in OMB's memorandum, M-23-22: Delivering a Digital-First Public Experience.

Kurt D. DelBene
Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology and Chief Information Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs