



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) 2021 Plain Writing Act Compliance Report April 2021

I. Introduction

The Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) mission is to care for our Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors.

Every decision I make will be determined by a simple principle, that it increases Veterans' access to care and benefits and improves outcomes for them.

—Secretary McDonough

VA's Fiscal Years 2018–2024 Strategic Plan commits to ensuring Veterans are informed of and understand their benefits and can access the care and services they have earned. Our goal is to make it easy to understand VA by tailoring communications to better inform our diverse Veteran population according to their preferences and specific needs. We achieve this by simplifying our correspondence, using plain language to communicate with Veterans and testing this language to ensure it is easy for the intended audience (Veterans, families, caregivers and supporters) to understand. We also will tailor customer experience training for employees so they will better understand the diversity of our Veteran population.

For the second consecutive year, VA received a top grade from the Center for Plain Language in its annual Federal Report Card awarding VA an "A-" score in the category of "writing quality." This recognition highlights the efforts VA makes to communicate information clearly to our Veterans, their families and their caregivers.



II. Senior Agency Official for Plain Writing

- Carrie McVicker, Executive Secretary, Office of the Secretary
- Prevolia Harper, Deputy Executive Secretary, Office of the Secretary
- Vivian Drake, Staff Assistant, Plain Language Coordinator, Office of the Executive Secretary

VA Administrations and Staff Offices also provide continued support to the Plain Language efforts of VA.

III. Explain What Specific Types of Agency Communications You Have Released by Making Them Available in a Format That is Consistent With the Plain Writing Guidelines

In the face of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, VA is committed to ensuring continuity of mission critical and essential services, while playing a key leadership role in the Nation's overall response and recovery efforts. This commitment includes connecting with our customers and employees in creative and innovative ways such as leadership messages, our website, social media channels and involvement in the community. It is important to continue to ensure our information is accurate, easy to locate and accessible.

VA continues to implement frequent messaging on its public health and communication response to the COVID-19 pandemic to protect and care for Veterans, their families, health care providers and staff. An example of plain writing during the COVID-19 pandemic are:

- VA Health Care—COVID-19 Vaccines at VA at <https://www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/>
- VA Health Care Public Health—Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) at <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/n-coronavirus/>
- VA—*Coronavirus FAQs: What Veterans Need to know* at <https://www.va.gov/coronavirus-veteran-frequently-asked-questions>
- VA Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs News Releases—*Department of Veterans Affairs Announces Process for Charting the Course—Agency Plan on*



Returning to Pre-COVID-19 Operations at <https://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=5443>

- VA Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs—Charting the Course: Maintaining Continuous Services to Veterans and Resuming Normal, Pre-COVID-19 Operations at <https://www.va.gov/opa/docs/VA-Charting-the-Course-FINAL-05072020.pdf>

VA also has been at the forefront of understanding and improving customer experiences across the Federal government and has issued several types of communications in a format consistent with the Plain Writing Act. Great examples are:

- **VA—Your VA Welcome Kit** at <https://www.va.gov/welcome-kit/> simplifies applying for benefits and services.
- **VA Journey Maps** outline every engagement or touchpoint between Veterans, women Veterans and patients with VA, along with steps to improve those many interactions. In partnership with VA's Office of Human Resources and Administration/Operations, Security, and Preparedness, VA developed the government's first ever employee journey map. Examples include:
 - Veterans Experience Journey Map at <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/72161/journey-maps-plotting-moments-matter-Veterans-families/>
 - VA Employee Experience Journey Map at <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/82394/va-creates-governments-first-ever-employee-experience-journeymap/>
 - Women Veterans Journey Map at <https://www.va.gov/ve/docs/VeteranJourneyMapWomenVets.pdf>
 - VA Patient Experience Journey Map at <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/VA-Patient-Experience-Journey-Map.pdf>
- **VA Outreach Toolkits** for Veterans; Homeless Veterans; Mental Health—Community Provider; and several others help increase VA's partnerships and enhance VA's goal of improving the quality of life for Veterans. Examples include:
 - Suicide Prevention Communications Toolkit at <https://www.va.gov/ve/docs/toolkitSuicidePreventionCommunicationsBeThere.pdf>
 - Veteran Outreach Toolkit-Preventing Veteran Suicide Is Everyone's Business at <https://www.va.gov/ve/docs/outreachToolkitPreventingVeteranSuicidesEveryonesBusiness.pdf>
 - Homeless Veterans Outreach Toolkit at <https://www.va.gov/homeless/docs/toolkit/Event-in-a-Box-FactSheet.pdf>



- Rural Veterans Outreach Toolkit at https://www.ruralhealth.va.gov/docs/western-region/toolkit/Rural_Veteran_Outreach_Toolkit3_0.pdf

Veterans Health Administration (VHA)

Website

VHA Communications is collaborating with VA's Office of the Chief Technology Officer on an ongoing project to research, design and build new public-facing websites with new, plain-language content for 144 VA medical centers based on research with more than 350 Veteran website users.

In addition, we are creating a new national health services taxonomy—a clear and consistent way to organize and name VA health services that Veterans look for by using patient-friendly plain language names and descriptions. The word count on the pilot website for the project, VA Pittsburgh, was reduced from 350,000 to 46,000 using plain-language words and guidelines. See <https://www.va.gov/pittsburgh-health-care/>

VAntage Point Blog Posts

VHA Digital Media edited, coordinated and published a series of plain language VAntage Point blog posts written by Acting Under Secretary for Health. These posts, intended for Veterans and the public, were based on, and linked to public-facing informational/educational videos featuring the Acting Under Secretary for Health. The topics include:

- VA's COVID-10 response at <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/72834/dr-stone-va-executive-charge-va-veterans-covid-19/>
- How Veterans can model safe behavior during the pandemic at <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/73377/dr-stone-veterans-lead-way-social-distancing/>
- Information about the VA Burn Pit Registry at <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/84610/veterans-sign-va-burn-pit-registry/>
- Implications of the SAVE LIVES Act at <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/86884/every-veteran-spouse-caregiver-eligible-covid19-vaccine/>



COVID-19 Communications

VHA Communications created and implemented several plain language resources for COVID-19 communications with Veterans, spouses, caregivers and the public. These resources include:

- VA's Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) webpage: <https://www.va.gov/coronavirus>
- "You Asked, We Answered." A series of plain language Vantage Point blog posts answering Veterans' questions about COVID-19 vaccinations at <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/tag/you-asked-we-answered/>
- COVID response weekly infographic. A plain language infographic for Veterans and the public summarizing VA's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, updated weekly at https://www.va.gov/health/docs/VA_COVID_Response.pdf
- Vaccine mini-hub. A plain language web page for Veterans and the public summarizing the latest VA information on vaccines and vaccinations, updated as new information is available at <https://www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/>.
- Keep Me Informed: <https://www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/stay-informed>
- Chatbot: <https://www.va.gov/coronavirus-chatbot/>

VHA National Center for Ethics in Health Care

The VHA National Center for Ethics in Health Care distributed four new animated videos and resources supporting health care planning for Veterans to health care facility staff. The videos highlight different communication approaches and tools to support patients at any age or stage of health. Accompanying documents describe practical tips for distributing and using the videos to spark conversations with Veterans using a QR-code poster and business card-sized handouts.

- Ronin's story about reflecting on the importance of understanding his dad's health care preferences at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q7oaPe5gBVg>
- Adelita's story about considering her future medical and mental health preferences with her doctor and family at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJrAiGb-wBA>
- Terrell's story about identifying the person he wants to communicate his health care wishes in case he is ever unable to speak for himself at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rWThW3R7MBg>
- Suzanne's story about planning for life-sustaining treatment at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kO5Y1pVFdoM>



VHA Office of Academic Affiliations Efforts

- VA Educational Initiatives Brochure to recruit and retain physicians at https://www.va.gov/OAA/docs/OAA_Educational_Initiatives_Brochure508.pdf
- VA Trainee Satisfaction Survey regarding clinical training experience at the VA facility. Optimized and shortened for mobile devices. See <https://www.va.gov/oaa/surveys>
- 75th Anniversary of VA's Academic Mission and easy-to-read timelines and milestones at https://www.va.gov/OAA/75th_anniversary.asp
- 75th Anniversary – VA Partnerships Train Health Professional video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=J3-7gAsQ4mU>
- Resident Supervision Pocket Card at https://www.va.gov/oaa/pocketcard/Resident_Supervision_pocketcard.pdf
- Military Health History Pocket Card for Health Professions Trainees and Clinicians at <https://www.va.gov/OAA/archive/Military-Health-Card-for-print.pdf>
- VAntage Point blog on Army Veteran Awarded VA Medical School Scholarship at <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/82972/army-veteran-awarded-va-medical-school-scholarship/>
- LinkedIn live event on Psychology Careers at VA at <https://www.linkedin.com/video/live/urn:li:ugcPost:6770024513695424512/> and VAntage Point blog on same topic at <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/85628/85628/>
- C20 webcast on VA and Trainees Together: Securing the Future of Healthcare Through the Pandemic at https://playersbrightcove.net/2851863979001/rk9qkVDyf_default/index.html?videoid=62392599001
- VAntage Point blog on Navy Veteran medical student has new mission at <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/85610/navy-veteran-medical-student-new-mission/>

Office of Research and Development

The Office of Research and Development published several news briefs on Veteran's health issues at https://www.research.va.gov/in_brief.cfm to include:

- <https://www.research.va.gov/currents/0321-VA-clinical-trial-examines-treatment-early-stage-lung-cancer.cfm>
- <https://www.research.va.gov/currents/1220-Veteran-determined-to-help-win-this-war-against-COVID-19.cfm>
- <https://www.research.va.gov/currents/0121-Marine-Veteran-encourages-others-to-sign-up-for-registry.cfm>



- <https://www.research.va.gov/currents/1120-COVID-19-vaccine-trials-How-safe-is-it-to-participate.cfm>
- <https://www.research.va.gov/currents/1120-VA-scientist-experimenting-with-blood-sugar-to-power-prostheses-implantable-devices.cfm>
- <https://www.research.va.gov/pubs/infographs/Mental-health-of-frontline-workers.pdf>

Health Care Innovation and Learning

- VA Innovation Experience Virtual Event at <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/80206/vha-innovation-experience-register-now/>
- Four innovations changing and saving Veteran lives at <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/73770/innovations-saving-veteran-lives/>
- 10 things you can't miss at this year's virtual VHA Innovation Experience at <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/79864/10-things-cant-miss-vha-innovation-experience>
- Shark Tank Winners—VHA Shark Tank Competition spreads innovation further with 12 new Gold Status Practices at <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/68640/vha-shark-tank-competition-spreads-innovation-12-new-gold-status-practices/>

Podcasts

- Engaging and Supporting LGBTQ+ Veterans at https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=akZohmcTLWY&list=PL3AQ_JVoBEyz5IJT32kTzhqnc0bz4Xwex&index=4
- VHA Innovation Experience that showcases employee-developed and industry-sourced innovations and practices that inspire and inform lively discussion via the conference platform at https://www.youtube.com/playlist?app=desktop&list=PL3AQ_JVoBEyyqg7dQwU5eG3SvNxl5EuOA

National Center for Healthcare Advancement and Partnership

- Stellate Ganglion Block for PTSD Fact Sheet at https://www.va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/docs/SGBforPTSD_508.pdf
- Top 5 Reasons to Partner with VHA at <https://www.va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/docs/Top5ReasonsToPartnerWithVHA.pdf>
- Social workers from VHA's Office of Community Engagement share winter and holiday self-care tips at <https://www.va.gov//HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/updates/impact/12032020.asp>



- American Kidney Fund, a potential VHA partner, brings outreach, education, and support to Veterans at <https://www.va.gov/healthpartnerships/updates/akf/07232020.asp>
- Veteran who volunteers with seniors: 'It turns into a friendship' at <https://www.va.gov/healthpartnerships/updates/cncs/01282021.asp>
- Senior companion volunteer thinks of his Veteran clients like family, helps them around the home at <https://www.va.gov/healthpartnerships/updates/cncs/12112020.asp>
- Are you looking for a lung cancer "battle buddy"? VHA partner GO₂ Foundation for Lung Cancer can help at <https://www.va.gov/healthpartnerships/updates/go2/12112020.asp>
- It's Brain Injury Awareness Month—Learn how VA has the expertise to help Veterans with TBI at <https://www.va.gov/healthpartnerships/updates/cci/03152021.asp>
- VHA partnership assists Veterans diagnosed with Parkinson's disease at <https://www.va.gov/healthpartnerships/updates/pf/03292021.asp>
- New partnership will make VA even stronger in its fight against Veterans' lung diseases at <https://www.va.gov/healthpartnerships/updates/ala/12082020.asp>

Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation

Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation promoted Whole Health Month on Facebook and Twitter with scheduled articles. Examples of best plain language efforts and documents used to communicate with Veterans and their families, stakeholders, and the public focus on the proper audiences and is organized in a way that what is needed can be found easily. Information is conversational and uses bullets, headings and familiar words.

- VA Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry webpage at <https://veteran.mobilehealth.va.gov/AHBurnPitRegistry/#page/home>
- Environmental Health Registry Evaluations for Veterans Fact Sheet at https://www.publichealth.va.gov/docs/exposures/Registry_Factsheet.pdf
- Military Exposure and Your Health Newsletter at <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/docs/military-exposures/mey-2020-3.pdf>



Web Content and Featured Stories Written for Veterans and Shared on Multiple Platforms

- Live Whole Health Mobile App at https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/features/Live_Whole_Health_Mobile_App.asp
- Five Resources to help Veterans recharge this holiday season at <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/82112/five-resources-help-veterans-recharge-holiday-season>
- What is the Circle of Health? at [https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/features/What is the Circle of Health.asp](https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/features/What_is_the_Circle_of_Health.asp).
- VA Health Care Whole Life at <https://www.va.gov/WholeHealth/>

Geriatrics and Extended Care

The Geriatrics and Extended Care website (<https://www.va.gov/GRECC/index.asp>) was redesigned and expanded to include visuals and other plain language elements to guide readers, such as special focus on best practices and content for older adults (e.g., large font and limit to number of key points):

- Increased use of visuals on website, in printed handouts and in emails (e.g. monthly GOV.delivery bulletins).
- Use of plain language in email subject lines, such as Help for Older Veterans Who Want to Stay at Home.
- Website committee members have been trained on plain language (this group includes a Veteran with sight and hearing impairments).
- Plain language is a review item on the website Content Review Checklist. Each major section is reviewed once a year.
- Review over 30 examples at https://www.va.gov/GERIATRICS/pages/print_handouts.asp

Community Living Centers (CLC) (VA Nursing Homes) Family Communication Guide at https://www.va.gov/geriatrics/pages/va_community_living_centers.asp provides key tools for the front-line CLC staff to promote effective communication and engagement with Veterans and their family members during the COVID-19 pandemic. It incorporates helpful communication tips for staff, strategies to engage with families, template for consistent messaging to families regarding COVID-19 status updates and a handout to be provided to families on the impact of limited visitation during the pandemic.



Veterans Benefits Administration

- VA, in collaboration with the Department of Defense and Homeland Security, launched VA Solid Start to support Service members transitioning from service at <https://www.benefits.va.gov/transition/solid-start.asp>. VA Solid Start social media links are at Twitter and Facebook.
- VA Benefits and Services Participant Guide (Active Duty) at <https://benefits.va.gov/TRANSITION/docs/VA-Benefits-Participant-Guide.pdf#>
- VA Benefits and Services Participant Guide (Reserve Components) at <https://benefits.va.gov/TRANSITION/docs/VA-Benefits-Participant-Guide-National-Guard-Reserve.pdf#>
- Military Life Cycle Module Online Resource Guides at <https://benefits.va.gov/transition/military-life-cycle.asp>
- Transition and Economic Development webpages (linking homepage) at <https://benefits.va.gov/transition/index.asp>
- YouTube link describes the benefits of the Personalized Career Planning and Guidance program at <https://benefits.va.gov/TRANSITION/PCPG.asp>
- VBA's website provides an easy to understand chart on how to apply for VA benefits depending on the type of benefit a Veteran is seeking at <https://www.va.gov/BENEFITS/Applying.asp>

Board of Veterans' Appeals

The Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA) updated content on its website, <https://www.bva.va.gov/>, to include an easy to follow graphic for Veterans explaining choices if they do not agree with their initial claim decision.

BVA also provides a VA blog on how to get a virtual hearing with BVA at <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/85732/how-to-get-a-virtual-hearing-at-the-bva/>

National Cemetery Administration

Fact Sheets

- Eligibility for Pre-Need Burial Determination at https://www.cem.va.gov/docs/factsheets/Eligibility_for_Pre-Need_Burial_Determination.pdf
- Veterans Legacy Memorial at https://www.cem.va.gov/docs/factsheets/Veterans_Legacy_Memorial.pdf



- Domestic and Foreign Cemeteries for U.S. Citizens at [https://www.cem.va.gov/docs/factsheets/Domestic and Foreign Cemeteries for US Veterans.pdf](https://www.cem.va.gov/docs/factsheets/Domestic%20and%20Foreign%20Cemeteries%20for%20US%20Veterans.pdf)
- Cleaning Government-Furnished Headstones/Markers at [https://www.cem.va.gov/docs/factsheets/Cleaning Headstones Markers.pdf](https://www.cem.va.gov/docs/factsheets/Cleaning%20Headstones%20Markers.pdf)

Webpages

All National Cemetery Administration's webpages and pdf documents are tested for Section 508 accessibility.

- Main page at <https://www.cem.va.gov>
- About NCA at <https://www.cem.va.gov/about/index.asp>
- Types of Headstones Markers and Medallions Available at <https://www.cem.va.gov/cem/hmm/types.asp>

Social Media

- COVID Messaging Video at <https://www.facebook.com/182543300694/videos/633854263887556>
- Pre-Need Burial Eligibility Determination at- https://www.facebook.com/NatCemRiverside/posts/600495220836278?comment_id=605247647027702
- Twitter-Resuming Services at <https://twitter.com/VANatCemeteries/status/1273667851216396288>

IV. Inform Agency Staff of the Plain Writing Act Requirements

The Office of the Executive Secretary (EXECSEC) provides outstanding correspondence management and customer support to the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, and Chief of Staff to clearly articulate VA information to external and internal audiences in a consistent, timely manner and reflects positively on VA.

EXECSEC maintains the VA style and brand through the way we organize, present, express and articulate the fundamental concepts, ideas and policies that determine and inform stakeholder perception and understanding of VA's mission, accomplishments and needs.



EXECSEC supports plain writing by communicating with Administrations and Staff Offices, publishing the VA Executive Secretariat Style Guide and providing Action Officer training.

In 2020, EXECSEC revised the VA Executive Secretariat Style Guide to mirror the standards of a single style resource with VA-specific exceptions. The revised style guide is user friendly and includes templates for use by VA program offices. While the style guide relies heavily on Associated Press style, it includes the requirements of writing in Plain Language in the use of tone and voice. In addition, EXECSEC updated the style guide in January 2021 to include a section dedicated to templates that illustrates the required and acceptable formats for some of the more common documents produced at VA as well as a section on Frequently Asked Questions. EXECSEC launched the new VA Executive Secretariat Style Guide on its website and includes it in its Action Officer training.

EXECSEC held a meeting with Administrations and Staff Offices Plain Language Points of Contacts in February 2021 to communicate our continued commitment to using plain language principles and to hear from Barbra Kingsley, Ph.D., Chair, Center for Plain Language, to discuss some of the challenges in communicating and assessing effective performance levels in writing, comprehension and easy reading.

EXECSEC provides monthly Action Officer training for VA correspondence representatives, subject matter experts, leadership and new employees on VA format, writing and standards related to correspondence going to internal and external stakeholders. Action Officer training ensures employees fully understand the importance of writing to our audience and how to do it effectively.

The Action Officer training provides the training and tools needed by staff to provide a consistent quality product, reduce work returned and increase on-time rate for correspondence requiring the Secretary's signature. To continue training during the COVID-19 pandemic, EXECSEC moved the training to a virtual platform, which also allowed increasing audience size. Since May 2019, EXECSEC has provided 67 training sessions for approximately 1,780 employees.

V. Training

VHA's Employee Education System (EES) partners with VA/VHA program offices and Veterans Integrated Service Networks to provide quality workforce education and training. VHA continues to evaluate its courses to ensure high-quality training to all staff.



EES provides 12 active courses for plain language on its Talent Management System and other blended methods such as classroom, web based or audio conference. The most robust Plain Language training sessions are The Written Communications Learning Program Self-Assessment with 3,373 unique completions and The Formal Writing Using Plain Language with 3,346 unique completions. Other targeted or locally developed internal plain language training is provided within staff offices such as VHA Communications sponsored a special training session for public affairs officers and public communicators on the importance of health literacy and plain language in the context of the pandemic. Training objectives included:

- What health literacy is and why it is important.
- How plain language principles can support Veteran understanding and engagement in their health care.
- Identifying tools and resources that will help public affairs officers create and distribute health-literate educational materials and communications.

VHA Digital Media presented Special Skills for Health Communicators, an online digital media training course for VHA public affairs officers and public communicators at VA medical centers and program offices nationwide. Topics included:

- How to be health literate: As a VHA communicator, one of your roles is translating what subject matter experts are saying so most people can understand it. If you don't understand it—you can't translate it!
- How to translate technical and scientific material into plain English.
- Readability in the time of COVID-19: Creating clear and simple content for distracted and worried readers.

The Office of Information and Technology (OIT) audio conference focused on how OIT is championing a culture of accessibility, plain language and 508 compliance within our communications. Training provided tips and tools to help make a wide variety of written, visual and multimedia communication products compliant with the law, easy to read and understandable.

The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) Office of Engagement and Memorial Innovations provided NCA staff training on developing Facebook posts, on a quarterly basis using plain language as a factor in the development of all social media posts.



VI. Ongoing Compliance/Sustaining Change

The Secretary's prime directive is customer service where VA is putting Veterans, their families and caregivers at the center of every process. Making the Veterans' experience better is a significant milestone in the future focus at VA. The VA goal is that a Veteran receives an exceptional experience whenever they interact or visit with VA.

VA will communicate with Veterans and their families and seek their input early and consistently throughout their service and life journey to better understand what new services they need and learn what changes we must make to improve outcomes for Veterans. The Veterans journey map is an example of VA's improvements in how we will relate to, interact with and serve our Veterans and their families, caregivers and survivors. Additional information can be found on the Veterans Experience Office website at <https://www.va.gov/ve/engagement/resources.asp>.

VII. The Agency Plain Writing Websites

- The VA Plain Language website at http://www.va.gov/opa/Plain_Language.asp
- Contact Us page at http://www.va.gov/opa/Plain_Language.asp and email at VAPlainLanguage@va.gov
- Link from VA's homepage at <http://www.va.gov/>
- Link at bottom of the VA Open.gov page at <http://www.va.gov/open/>
- Links to compliance reports at http://www.va.gov/opa/Plain_Language.asp (2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016 reports are available).
- Links to OMB and PLAIN at http://www.va.gov/opa/Plain_Language.asp

VIII. Customer Satisfaction Evaluation after Experiencing Plain Writing Communications

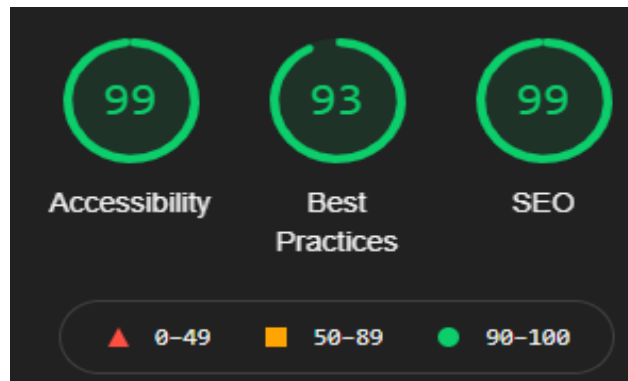
VA leverages its social media channels to communicate important information regarding health care and benefits to Veterans, caregivers and survivors in plain, easy to understand language to about 13 million stakeholders each week.



The VA Digital Modernization Strategy seeks to provide a single source of truth for all benefits-related content and tools, with a focus on plain language and accessibility, and consolidated within a single web property on VA.gov.

The website examples below show critical benefit pages and tools that are either new (Vaccine, Chatbot and Caregiver) or continuously maintained for accuracy and readability (how to file disability and health care eligibility). Note that the COVID-19 pandemic-related pages are available in English, Spanish and Tagalog to improve access.

- COVID vaccine page at <https://www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/>
- Coronavirus chatbot at <https://www.va.gov/coronavirus-chatbot/>
- Caregiver application at <https://www.va.gov/family-member-benefits/apply-for-caregiver-assistance-form-10-10cg/introduction>
- How to file a VA disability claim at <https://www.va.gov/disability/how-to-file-claim/>
- Eligibility for VA health care at <https://www.va.gov/health-care/eligibility/>



Website Improvements, Access and Searchability

VA's website, va.gov simplifies navigation for benefits, services and information.

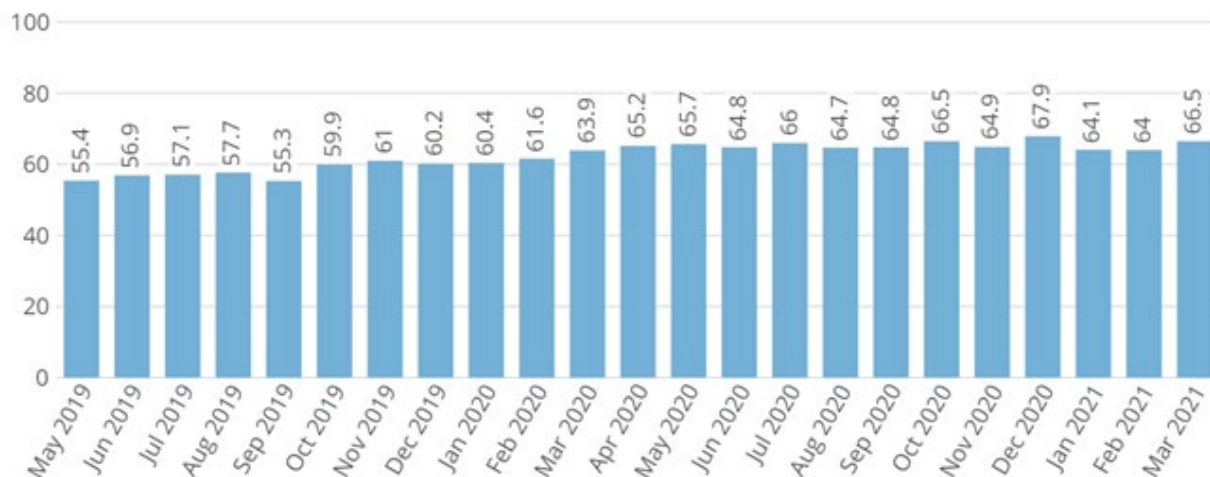
- The new "Form Search" on VA.gov provides an easy-to-use and accessible tool with a landing page describing the use of each form, and a link to the online "wizard" version of the form, if one exists (e.g., <https://www.va.gov/find-forms/?q=caregiver>).
- All pages on the modernized VA.gov are designed with accessibility in mind, and typically score 99 or 100 for accessibility and above 90 for Search Engine



Optimization on Google’s Lighthouse automated audit tool. As of April 2021, the Lighthouse report for the COVID-19 page is referenced above.

VA currently employs a user survey (through partner Foresee) to evaluate overall satisfaction with the tools and content on the agency’s primary website, VA.gov. Since the relaunch of VA.gov in November 2018, it has continuously risen, with a high of 67.9% in December 2020—a 38% increase over the low a year and a half earlier. As of March 2021, customer satisfaction sits at 66.5%, which has been the average for the past year.

The graph below shows monthly Customer Satisfaction scores on VA.gov for the past 2 years.



VA used feedback and best practices to establish a web content style guide located at <https://design.va.gov/content-style-guide/> to provide consistent delivery of information across the enterprise. For example, VA made improvements based on information provided by Veterans and other stakeholders through our Inquiry Routing and Information System to improve their VA web experience.

IX. Conclusion

There are also numerous intranet and internal strategic communications information and documents available for VA employees to use in their plain language communication campaigns to Veterans, spouses and caregivers, plus employees and other agency partners. Examples include the Veterans Health Administration’s COVID-



19 Vaccine Communication Toolkits and Office of Academic Affiliations Bulletin as well as Veterans Benefits Administrations' Fact Sheet website which includes a publications index and references.

VA continues to emphasize writing and sharing information clearly, concisely and informatively to help Veterans at all stages of their lives. This emphasis includes greater outreach to provide health care and economic relief to Veterans impacted by the pandemic as well as those most at risk of poor health, suicide and other issues, especially Veterans within historically underserved populations.