

Department of Veterans Affairs



Customer Service Plan

10/24/11

Executive Summary

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) fulfills President Lincoln’s promise to care for all Veterans and his or her family. As required by Executive Order 13571, Streamlining Service Delivery and Improving Customer Service, VA developed this Customer Service Plan), which focuses on one technology-driven signature initiative that provides Veterans with their health information when they need it. This plan outlines steps to improve the service including projects to enhance the features and ways we plan on collecting customer feedback.

SIGNATURE INITIATIVE

Overview: The VA implemented a new initiative -- “Blue Button®” -- designed to enable Veterans to view and download their personal health information from their My HealthVet account. Veterans can do this when they are at home, at a medical center or anywhere that they have Internet access. The **Blue Button** is safe, secure and reliable. Veterans can download a file to a location that they choose. This file can also be used to help find therapies, treatments, and communities of care.

- **Timing:** On August 2, 2010 President Obama announced the “Blue Button®” capability that allows Veterans to download their personal health information from their My HealthVet account. Blue Button launched on August 30, 2010 and currently has over 330,000 unique Veteran users. Veterans can download portions of their Electronic Health Record using their account on MyHealthVet website.
- Other health organizations have implemented the Blue Button or plan to implement the Blue Button. These organizations include Aetna, Walgreens, Microsoft and Patients-Like-Me. In December 2011, the VA is launching a new feature of the Blue Button, which will allow Veterans to download their Military Occupation Specialty (MOS) data. This will be the first non-medical application of the Blue Button and will be featured on the National Resource Directory employment page and the VA’s VA for Vets website. Many websites will have a military skills translator, which will provide a list of civilian jobs matching the Veterans MOS data.

Blue Button results from collaboration between VA, Department of Defense, and Department of Health and Human Services to develop an online feature that would enable Veteran service members and Medicare beneficiaries to easily read, use, and share their personal health information with providers and others they trust. The ASCII text file format was selected for its ease of use by individuals, while allowing computers to easily “read” the information.

SERVICE 1: Blue Button Initiative

Department of Veterans Affairs

Overview: My HealthVet features enable Veterans to self-enter their personal health indicators (blood pressure, weight, heart rate), emergency contact information, test results, family health history, military health history, and other health related information. My

HealtheVet users who receive VA health care services can also refill their prescriptions and view their appointments, allergies, and laboratory results online.

The Blue Button feature allows Veterans to access and download their information into a very simple text file (or an enhanced PDF) that can be read, printed, or saved on any computer. The download can include all their data (see sample files: [all data](#)), or be broken out by [data class](#), or by [date range](#). Blue Button gives Veterans complete control of this information – without any special software – and enables Veterans to share this data with their health care providers, caregivers, or people they trust.

www.va.gov/open/videos/BlueButton.aspx

Key Customer Groups: Veterans who are receiving medications from VA can download their VA medication history. VA patients who have authenticated their identity in person may upgrade their My HealtheVet account privileges, which will include data from their VA Electronic Health Record.

Challenges: Veterans are used to pursuing their healthcare information using the legacy system and established processes. The key challenge with this initiative is our own communication to - and awareness within - the Veteran community.

Featured Actions:

Each year there are teams that provide quality assurance and quality control reports. Every quarter Blue Button receives a software upgrade. We are also doing the following:

- Creating new ways to authenticate personal identities on-line;
- Release more information to the medical record; and
- Creating a mobile application for Veterans.

SIGNATURE INITIATIVE

Overview: My HealtheVet allows Veterans to self-enter their personal health indicators (blood pressure, weight, heart rate), emergency contact information, test results, family health history, military health history, and other health related information. My HealtheVet users who receive VA health care services can also refill their prescriptions and view their appointments, allergies, and laboratory results online.

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Overview

In this section, describe one major initiative (“signature initiative”) that will use technology to improve the customer experience significantly.

Impact and Benefit

The “Blue Button” initiative provides Veterans with opportunity to obtain their personal records more efficiently and effectively. Data elements currently available for download include:

- Demographic Information;
 - Emergency Contact Information;
 - Health Care Providers;
 - Health Insurance;
 - Treatment Facilities;
 - Medical Conditions and Personal Medical History;
 - Medications, Herbals, and Supplements;
 - Allergies and Adverse Reactions;
 - Lab and Test Results;
 - Immunizations;
 - Vitals and Readings;
 - Family Health History (Self and Relatives);
 - Military Health History; and
 - Health Data (blood sugar, blood pressure, weight, etc.).
- Other health-related information the Veteran feels a doctor or hospital might need to know Veterans and their beneficiaries will be able to save their personal health record information in their individual computers or on a portable storage device.

Information taken from the Blue Button site can be downloaded into an electronic text formation that is similar to an organized report. *Veterans benefit when they can view, download, and safely share their health information online using Blue Button. Veterans are empowered to manage their health in a way that makes sense to them. Also:*

- *Veterans do not have to present themselves in person to receive some of the most important parts of their medical record, including lab results. This will reduce the number of hours and costs associated with visiting a VA medical facility.*
- *Veterans can reduce duplicative and costly procedures by having their most recent results to share with their care team. This should result in a time and cost savings for Veterans.*

Key Milestones and Timeline

- Blue Button was implemented on August 30, 2010 and currently has over 330,000 unique Veteran users. Veterans can download portions of their Electronic Health Record using

their account on MyHealtheVet website. Since then, we have had three successful releases of new and enhanced versions.

- Other health organizations have implemented the Blue Button or plan to implement the Blue Button. These organizations include Aetna, Walgreens, Microsoft and Patients-Like-Me. In December 2011, the VA is launching a new feature of the Blue Button, which will allow Veterans to download their Military Occupation Specialty (MOS) data. This will be the first non-medical application of the Blue Button and will be featured on the National Resource Directory employment page and the VA's *VA for Vets* Web site. Many Web sites will have a military skills translator, which will provide a list of civilian jobs matching the Veterans MOS data.

SERVICE #1: BLUE BUTTON INITIATIVE
Department of Veterans Affairs

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Key Customer Groups: Veterans who are receiving medical care from VA.

Challenges: Veterans are used to pursuing their healthcare information using the legacy system and established processes. The key challenge with this initiative resides in overall communication and awareness towards the Veteran community. Other challenges stem from converting Veterans from the traditional way of retrieving their personal health care records to the up-to-date method of online retrieval of health care records.

1. Increase Feedback from Customers

Veterans who use the VA Blue Button like it. VA asked a random sample of Veterans who used the My HealthVet website from October 2010 through April 2011 to tell us what they thought:

- *Of those who had used the Blue Button, a significant proportion reported having used it more than once (38%). When asked why they used it more than once, users reported activities such as “checking for updates to my records” and using it to “provide info to a private specialist and share info with my VA primary care doctor.”*
- *Of those who used Blue Button, 67% liked that they could have their personal health information in one place, 48% liked that the data was available electronically, and 20% valued being able to share a copy of their information with someone else. (Veterans could select more than one response.)*
- *Veterans who responded to the survey wanted more from their Blue Button. Nearly two-thirds (60%) asked that VA laboratory test results be made available, which we recently did.*

2. Adopt Best Practices for Improving Customer Experience

- *Blue Button users can View/Print their personal health information in the browser window and/or download as a text file or customize the download of their My HealtheVet data through a simple .txt file, an enhanced PDF or a .bluebutton file format.*
- *80% of users who had used the Blue Button said that they used it to view their personal health information, while 27% used it to download their information as a text file. Most who downloaded (70%) then saved the downloaded file to their computer, although 17% said that they stored the file on a CD, portable drive or other media.*

3. Set, Communicate, and Use Customer Service Metrics and Standards

- *More than 1.3 Million Registered Users including:*
 - *85% are Veterans; and*
 - *76% are VA Patients.*
- *More than 330,000 unique registered users have submitted download requests since the launch of the VA Blue Button on August 29, 2010.*
- *More than 580,617 Blue Button files have been downloaded.*
- *Since the PDF file format option was added in March 2011, more than 130,000 Blue Button PDF files have been downloaded.*
- *When asked about the usefulness of information currently available in the Blue Button, more than half (57%) said that the VA Medication History was most useful.*

4. Streamline Agency Processes to Reduce Costs and Accelerate Delivery

- *Of those who downloaded their data as a text file, 11% shared it with their spouse, child or other family member; 9% shared it with their VA health care provider; and 5% shared it with their non-VA health care provider (or plan to share it).*