

**Request for Approval under the “Generic Clearance for Improving
Customer Experience (OMB Circular A-11, Section 280
Implementation)” (OMB Control Number: 2900-0876)**

TITLE OF INFORMATION COLLECTION: Veterans Safety Survey

PURPOSE

The Veteran Safety Survey is designed to measure how safe Veterans feel when visiting outpatient facilities within the Veteran’s Health Administration (VHA). This survey was mandated by congress due to concerns about that some Veterans did not feel safe seeking care at VHA facilities.

Veterans experience data is collected by using an online transactional survey disseminated via an invitation email sent to randomly selected Veterans. The data collection occurs twice per week after clients have qualified for the survey. The questionnaire is brief and contains general Likert-scale (a scale of 1-5 from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) questions to assess their feeling of safety at the facility. After the survey has been distributed, recipients have two weeks to complete the survey and will receive a reminder email after one week.

DESCRIPTION OF RESPONDENTS:

The target population of this survey is all Veterans that have had a recent outpatient visit to a VHA facility. Since the security concerns of women are often different than men, this group will be oversampled for this survey. For each wave of the survey, the VEO will extract the population from the Corporate Data Warehouse (CDW) database that includes all visits within a VHA facilities.

TYPE OF COLLECTION: (Check one)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Customer Comment Card/Complaint Form | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Customer Satisfaction Survey |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Usability Testing (e.g., Website or Software | <input type="checkbox"/> Small Discussion Group |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Focus Group | <input type="checkbox"/> Other:_____ |

CERTIFICATION:

I certify the following to be true:

1. The collection is voluntary.
2. The collection is low-burden for respondents and low-cost for the Federal Government.
3. The collection is non-controversial and does not raise issues of concern to other federal agencies.
4. Personally identifiable information (PII) is collected only to the extent necessary and is not retained.

5. Information gathered is intended to be used for general service improvement and program management purposes.
6. The collection is targeted to the solicitation of opinions from respondents who have experience with the program or may have experience with the program in the future.
7. All or a subset of information may be released as part of A-11, Section 280 requirements on performance.gov. Additionally, summaries of the data may be released to the public in communications to Congress, the media and other releases disseminated by VEO, consistent with the Information Quality Act.

Name:

- Dan Ostrow, VSignals Implementation Lead, Veterans Experience Office, VA, (414) 690-8587

To assist review, please provide answers to the following question:

Personally Identifiable Information:

1. Will this survey use individualized links, through which VA can identify particular respondents even if they do not provide their name or other personally identifiable information on the survey? ☒ Yes ☐ No
2. Is personally identifiable information (PII) collected? ☐ Yes ☒ No
3. If Yes, will any information that is collected be included in records that are subject to the Privacy Act of 1974? ☐ Yes ☐ No [N/A]
4. If Yes, has an up-to-date System of Records Notice (SORN) been published? ☐ Yes ☐ No [N/A]

Gifts or Payments:

Is an incentive (e.g., money or reimbursement of expenses, token of appreciation) provided to participants? ☐ Yes ☒ No

BURDEN HOURS

Weekly Target Sample: 323 (from sample plan)

Annual Target Sample: 323 x 52 weeks = 16,796

Category of Respondent	No. of Respondents per year	Estimated Participation Time (X minutes =)	Burden (÷ 60 =)
Individuals or Households	57,331 annually	2	1,400 hours
Totals			

Please answer the following questions.

1. **Are you conducting a focus group, a survey that does not employ random sampling, user testing or any data collection method that does not employ statistical methods?**

Yes ____

No X

If Yes, please answer questions 1a-1c, 2 and 3.

If No, please answer or attach supporting documentation that answers questions 2-8.

- a. Please provide a description of how you plan to identify your potential group of respondents and how you will select them.

- b. How will you collect the information? (Check all that apply)

☐ Web-based or other forms of Social Media

☐ Telephone

☐ In-person

☐ Mail

☒ Other- E-mail-based surveys

- c. Will interviewers or facilitators be used? ☐ Yes ☒ No

2. Please provide an estimated annual cost to the Federal government to conduct this data collection: \$13,000

3. Please make sure that all instruments, instructions, and scripts are submitted with the request. This includes questionnaires, interviewer manuals (if using interviewers or facilitators), all response options for questions that require respondents to select a response from a group of options, invitations given to potential respondents, instructions for completing the data collection or additional follow-up requests for the data collection.

-Done

4. Describe (including a numerical estimate) the potential respondent universe and any sampling or other respondent selection methods to be used. Data on the number of entities (e.g., establishments, State and local government units, households, or persons) in the universe covered by the collection and in the corresponding sample are to be provided in tabular form for the universe as a whole and for each of the strata in the proposed sample. Indicate expected response rates for the collection as a whole. If the collection had been conducted previously, include the actual response rate achieved during the last collection.

- Please see Statistical Sample Plan in the Appendix.
5. Describe the procedures for the collection of information, including:
 - a. Statistical methodology for stratification and sample selection.
 - b. Estimation procedure.
 - c. Degree of accuracy needed for the purpose described in the justification.
 - d. Unusual problems requiring specialized sampling procedures.
 - e. Any use of periodic (less frequent than annual) data collection cycles to reduce burden.
 - Please see Statistical Sample Plan in the Appendix.
 6. Describe methods to maximize response rates and to deal with issues of nonresponse. The accuracy and reliability of information collected must be shown to be adequate for intended uses. For collections based on sampling, a special justification must be provided for any collection that will not yield "reliable" data that can be generalized to the universe studied.
 - Please see Statistical Sample Plan in the Appendix.
 7. Describe any tests of procedures or methods to be undertaken. Testing is encouraged as an effective means of refining collections of information to minimize burden and improve utility. Tests must be approved if they call for answers to identical questions from 10 or more respondents. A proposed test or set of tests may be submitted for approval separately or in combination with the main collection of information.
 - Please see Statistical Sample Plan in the Appendix.
 8. Provide the name and telephone number of individuals consulted on statistical aspects of the design and the name of the agency unit, contractors, grantees, or other person(s) who will actually collect or analyze the information for the agency.
 - Statistical Aspects:
 - Mark Andrews, Statistician, Veterans Experience Office, VA. (703) 483-5305
 - Collection and Analysis:
 - Evan Albert, Dir. of Measurement and Data Analytics, Veterans Experience Office, VA, (202) 875-9478
 - Dan Ostrow, VSignals Implementation Lead, Veterans Experience Office, VA, (414) 690-8587
 - Lelia Jackson, Director, Assault and Harassment Prevention Office, 202-461-5758



Veteran Safety Survey
Sampling Methodology Report

Prepared by
Veteran Experience Office

Version 1 June 2021

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Executive Summary

The Veteran Safety Survey is designed to measure how safe Veterans feel when visiting outpatient facilities within the Veteran's Health Administration (VHA). This survey was mandated by congress due to concerns about that some Veterans did not feel safe seeking care at VHA facilities.

The target population of this survey is all Veterans that have had a recent outpatient visit to a VHA facility. Since the security concerns of women are often different than men, this group will be oversampled for this survey. The purpose of this report is to document the survey methodology and sampling plan of the Veteran Safety Survey.

Veterans experience data is collected by using an online transactional survey disseminated via an invitation email sent to randomly selected Veterans. The data collection occurs twice per week after clients have qualified for the survey. The questionnaire is brief and contains general Likert-scale (a scale of 1-5 from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) questions to assess their feeling of safety at the facility. After the survey has been distributed, recipients have two weeks to complete the survey and will receive a reminder email after one week.

This report describes the methodology used to conduct the Veteran Safety Survey. Information about quality assurance protocols, as well as limitations of the survey methodology, is also included in this report.

Part I – Introduction

A. Background

Enterprise Measurement and Design (EMD) is the Analytics and Human Centered Design (HCD) division within the **Veterans Experience Office** (VEO). The EMD team is tasked with conducting transactional surveys of the Veteran population to measure their satisfaction with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) numerous benefit services. Thus, their mission is to empower Veterans by rapidly and discreetly collecting feedback on their interactions with such VA entities as NCA, VHA, and VBA. VEO surveys generally entail *probability* samples which only contact minimal numbers of Veterans necessary to obtain reliable estimates. This information is subsequently used by internal stakeholders to monitor, evaluate, and improve beneficiary processes. Veterans are always able to decline participation and have the ability to opt out of future invitations. A *quarantine* protocol is maintained to limit the number of times a Veteran may be contacted, in order to prevent survey fatigue, across all VEO surveys.

Surveys issued by VEO are generally brief in nature and present a low amount of burden to Veterans and this survey is very brief focusing solely on Veterans' feeling of safety. The opportunity to volunteer open-ended text responses is provided within this surveys. This open text has been demonstrated to yield enormous information. Machine learning tools are used for text classification, ranking by sentiment scores, and screening for homelessness, depression, etc. Modern survey theory is used to create sample designs which are representative, statistically sound, and in accordance with OMB guidelines on federal surveys.

The Veteran Experience Office (VEO) has been commissioned by VHA to measure the level of safety within outpatient facilities. Sampled Veterans will be contacted through an invitation email. A link will be enclosed so the survey may be completed using an online interface. The survey itself will consist of a handful of questions developed through a human-centered design process; focusing on the element of safety.

B. Basic Definitions

Coverage	The percentage of the population of interest that is included in the sampling frame.
Measurement Error	The difference between the response coded and the true value of the characteristic being studied for a respondent.
Non-Response	Failure of some respondents in the sample to provide responses in the survey.
Transaction	A <i>transaction</i> refers to the specific time a Veteran interacts with the VA that impacts the Veteran's journey and their perception of VA's effectiveness in caring for Veterans.
Response Rate	The ratio of participating persons to the number of contacted persons. This is one of the basic indicators of survey quality.
Sample	In statistics, a data sample is a set of data collected and/or selected from a statistical population by a defined procedure.
Sampling Error	Error due to taking a particular sample instead of measuring every unit in the population.
Sampling Frame	A list of units in the population from which a sample may be selected.
Reliability	The consistency or dependability of a measure. Also referred to as <i>standard error</i> .

C. Application to Veterans Affairs

This measurement may bring insights and value to all stakeholders at VA. Front-line VA leaders can resolve individual feedback from Veterans and take steps to improve how safe Veterans feel within outpatient facilities; meanwhile VA executives can receive real-time updates on systematic trends that allow them to make changes.

- 1) To collect continuous safety data from Veterans obtaining services from a VHA facility.
- 2) To help field staff and the national office identify opportunities that may improve the feeling of safety of Veterans
- 3) To better understand the reason that Veterans navigating the VHA feel safe or unsafe.

Part II – Methodology

A. Target Population and Frame

The target population of this survey is all Veterans that have had a recent outpatient visit to a VHA facility. For each wave of the survey, the VEO will extract the population from the Corporate Data Warehouse (CDW) database that includes all visits within a VHA facilities.

B. Sample Size Determination

For a given margin of error and confidence level, the sample size is calculated as below (Lohr, 1999). For population that is *large*, the equation below is used to yield a representative sample for proportions:

$$n_0 = \frac{Z_{\alpha/2}^2 pq}{e^2}$$

where

- $Z_{\alpha/2} = 1.95$, which is the critical Z score value under the normal distribution when using a 95% confidence level ($\alpha = 0.05$).
- p = the estimated proportion of an attribute that is present in the population, with $q=1-p$.
 - Note that pq attains its maximum when value $p=0.5$, and this is often used for a conservative sample size (i.e., large enough for any proportion).
- e = the level of precision achieved with the sample. Also referred to as the margin of error (MOE).

For a population that is relatively *small*, the finite population correction is used to yield a representative sample for proportions:

$$n = \frac{n_0}{1 + \frac{n_0}{N}}$$

Where

- n_0 = Representative sample for proportions when the population is large.
- N = Population size.

The margin of error surrounding the baseline proportion is calculated as:

$$\text{Margin of error} = z_{\alpha/2} \sqrt{\frac{N-n}{N-1}} \sqrt{\frac{p(1-p)}{n}}$$

Where

- $Z_{\alpha/2} = 1.95$, which is the critical Z score value under the normal distribution when using a 95% confidence level ($\alpha = 0.05$).
- N = Population size.
- n = Representative sample.
- p = the estimated proportion of an attribute that is present in the population, with $q=1-p$.

The sample was designed to achieve a monthly MOE of +/-1.5%—requiring a minimum effective sample size of 4,269. For this survey females, which only account for 9% of the VHA outpatient encounters, will be oversampled to achieve a monthly MOE of +/-3%—requiring a minimum sample size of 1,036. This disproportional sampling is estimated to reduce the efficiency of the combined sample by about 10%. Therefore, the total minimum sample is 4,744.

Table 2a provides details about the average monthly population and the minimum sample size needed to achieve the sample described below. Table 2b provides the weekly average population and the proposed targets that are rounded up to provide some room in case assumptions are off. Table 2b also estimates the sample rate for this survey and the sample rate of both VEO surveys that target the same population. It is anticipated that these sample rates are somewhat higher than they will be because the population estimates are based suppressed due to COVID-19.

Table 2a. Monthly Population and Minimum Sample Needs

Group	Average Monthly VHA Outpatient Visits	Average Monthly VHA Outpatient Visits and Valid Emails	Margin of Error (MOE)	Minimum Monthly Responses Needed	Estimated Response Rates	Minimum Monthly Sample Needed
Female	152,669	123,928	+/-2.9%	1,151	15%	7,674
Male	1,539,207	937,504	+/-1.6%	3,593	15%	23,954
Total	1,691,876	1,061,432	+/-1.5%	4,744	15%	31,628

Table 2b. Weekly Sample Targets and Sample Rate

Group	Average Monthly VHA Outpatient Visits and Valid Emails	Rounded Weekly Targets	Sample Rate	Average Weekly VEO Outpatient Survey	Total Sample from Same Population	Combined Sample Rate
Female	28,520	1,780	6.2%	1,955	3,735	13.1%
Male	215,754	5,550	2.6%	14,857	20,407	9.5%
Total	244,275	7,330	3.0%	16,812	24,142	9.9%

C. Stratification

Stratification is used to ensure that the sample matches the population, to the extent possible, across sub-populations. The sample is stratified by gender. The sample will also use implicit sampling to assure that the sample reflects the breakdown by facility and age group within each explicit stratum (gender).

D. Data Collection Methods

The Veteran Safety Surveys sample will be drawn twice weekly from a population files that is already generated for the VEO Outpatient Survey. The initial survey invites will be sent within 5 days from the Veterans visit to the facility. After 7 days a reminder invite will be sent and the survey will close 14 days after the initial invitation.

Table 3. Survey Mode

Mode of Data Collection	Recruitment Method	Recruitment Period
Online Survey	Email Recruitment	14 Days (Reminder after 7 Days)

E. Reporting

Researchers will be able to use the VSignals platform for interactive reporting and data visualization. The scores may be viewed by facility, specialty, age group, gender, and race/ethnicity in various charts for different perspective. They are also depicted within time series plots to investigate trends. Finally, filter options are available to assess

scores at varying time periods and within the context of other collected variable information.

Recruitment is continuous (twice weekly) but the results from several weeks may be combined into *Monthly* results for more precise estimates, which is the recommended reporting level. Monthly estimates may include minor distortions but allow analysts to review scores more quickly and within smaller time intervals. Weekly estimates are less reliable for small domains and should only be considered for aggregated populations. Quarterly estimates will have larger sample sizes, and therefore higher reliability. Initial scores will be delivered unweighted. Weights will be applied in real time on vSignals.

F. Quality Control

To ensure the prevention of errors and inconsistencies in the data and the analysis, quality control procedures will be instituted in several steps of the survey process. Records will undergo a cleaning during the population file creation. The quality control steps are as follows.

1. Records will be reviewed for missing sampling and weighting variable data. When records with missing data are discovered, they will be either excluded from the population file or put into separate strata upon discussion with subject matter experts.
2. Any duplicate records will be removed from the population file to both maintain the probabilities of selection and prevent the double sampling of the same veteran.
3. Invalid emails will be removed.

The survey sample loading and administration processes will have quality control measures built into them.

1. The extracted sample will be reviewed for representativeness. A secondary review will be applied to the final respondent sample.
2. The survey load process will be rigorously tested prior to the induction of the Survey to ensure that sampled customers is not inadvertently dropped or sent multiple emails.
3. The email delivery process is monitored to ensure that bounce-back records will not hold up the email delivery process.

The weighting and data management quality control checks are as follows:

1. The sum of the weighted respondents will be compared to the overall population count to confirm that the records are being properly weighted. When the sum does not match the population count, weighting classes will be collapsed to correct this issue.
2. The unequal weighting effect will be used to identify potential issues in the weighting process. Large unequal weighting effects indicate a problem with the weighting classes, such as a record receiving a large weight to compensate for nonresponse or coverage bias.

G. Sample Weighting, Coverage Bias, and Non-Response Bias

The stratification method outlined above will result in a disproportionate sample of female Veterans. Weighting should then be applied so that the sample more fully matched to the population.

A final respondent sample should closely resemble the true population, in terms of the demographic distributions (e.g. age groups). One problem that arises in the survey collection process is *nonresponse*, which is defined as failure of selected persons in the sample to provide responses. This occurs in various degrees to *all* surveys, but the resulting estimates can be distorted when some groups are actually more or less prone to complete the survey. In many applications, younger people are less likely to participate than older persons. Another problem is *under-coverage*, which is the event that certain groups of interest in the population are not even included in the sampling frame. They cannot participate because they cannot be contacted: those without an email address will be excluded from sample frame. These two phenomena may cause some groups to be over- or under-represented. In such cases, when the respondent population does not match the true population, conclusions drawn from the survey data may not be reliable and are said to be **biased**.

Survey practitioners recommend the use of sampling weighting to improve inference on the population. This will be introduced into the survey process as a tool that helps the respondent sample more closely represent the overall population. Weighting adjustments are commonly applied in surveys to correct for nonresponse bias and coverage bias. For example, in many surveys, differential response rates may be observed across age groups. In the event that some age groups are more represented in the final respondent sample, the weighting application will yield somewhat smaller weights for this age group. Conversely, age groups that are underrepresented will receive larger weights. This phenomenon is termed *non-response bias correction* for a single variable. Strictly speaking, we can never know how non-respondents would have really answered the question, but the aforementioned adjustment calibrates the sample to resemble the full population – from the perspective of demographics. This may result in a substantial correction in the resulting weighting survey estimates when compared to direct estimates in the presence of non-negligible sample error (non-response bias).

Because the email population will have different demographics than the overall population, the initial sample will be selected in a manner from the frame so that the final respondent sample resembles the overall population. Stratification may also adjust for non-response (occurring when certain subpopulations are less prone to participate). Targets will be established for every permutation of the following stratification variables. As such, population values will be collected and recorded by VEO for every data collection period.

Since 85% of older Americans utilize email (Choi & Dinitto, 2013), we can presume that a large share of veterans chose not to share their email address with the VA or are simply unaware of that option. It is assumed that the level of satisfaction is not directly related to their email status (Missing at Random). Since age and gender have been observed to be strong predictors of patient satisfaction in other VA surveys, the

stratification and weighting methodology outlined above will adequately compensate for any bias introduced by the incomplete frame of population.

weighting will utilize cell weights in real time. To make this possible, targets will be based on the previous month's population. With each query on the VSignals platform for each respondent by dividing the target for a cell by the number of respondents in the cell. The weighting scheme will include, where possible all the variables used for explicit stratification, However, cells will be collapsed if the proportion of the population is insufficient to reliably achieve a minimum of 3 completes per month. As a result, weights may be more comprehensive for larger population segments. For instance, in the VA, women are a smaller proportion of the populations. Therefore, woman will have more collapsed cells than men.

As part of the weighting validation process, the weights of persons in age and gender groups are summed and verified that they match the universe estimates (i.e., population totals). Additionally, we calculate the *unequal weighting effect*, or UWE (see Kish, 1992; Liu et al., 2002). This statistic is an indication of the amount of variation that may be expected due to the inclusion of weighting. The unequal weighting effect estimates the percent increase in the variance of the final estimate due to the presence of weights and is calculated as:

$$UWE = 1 + cv_{weights}^2 = 1 + \left(\frac{s}{\bar{w}}\right)^2$$

where

- **cv** = coefficient of variation for all weights w_{ij} .
- **s** = sample standard deviation of weights.
- **\bar{w}** = sample mean of weights, $\bar{w} = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{ij} w_{ij}$.

H. Quarantine Rules

VEO seeks to limit contact with Veterans as much as possible, and only as needed to achieve measurement goals. These rules are enacted to prevent excessive recruitment attempts upon Veterans. VEO also monitors veteran participation within other surveys, to ensure veterans do not experience survey fatigue. All VEO surveys offer options for respondents to opt out, and ensure they are no longer contacted for a specific survey. VEO also monitors Veteran participation within other surveys, to ensure Veterans do not experience survey *fatigue*. Finally, all VEO surveys offer options for respondents to opt out, and ensure they are no longer contacted for a specific survey.

Table 4. Quarantine Protocol

Quarantine Rule	Description	Elapsed Time
Repeated Sampling for Veteran Safety Survey	Number of days between receiving online survey, prior to receiving email invitation for a separate Vet Center Survey	30 Days

Other VEO Surveys	Number of days between receiving online survey and becoming eligible for another VEO survey	30 Days
Opt Outs	Persons indicating their wish to opt out of either phone or online survey will no longer be contacted.	N/A

Part III – Assumptions and Limitations

A. Coverage Bias

Since the VEO Veteran Safety Surveys are email only, there is a large population of patients that cannot be reached by the survey. Veterans that lack access to the internet or do not use email may have different levels of Trust and satisfaction with their service. However, the majority of Veterans that do not share their email addresses do so because they did not have an opportunity to provide the information, or they elected not to share their email address. As such, it is thought that Veterans in this latter category do not harbor any tangible differences to other Veterans who do share their information. In order to verify this, VEO plans to execute a coverage bias study to assess the amount of coverage bias due and derive adjustment factors in the presence of non-negligible bias.

Appendix: References

- Choi, N.G. & Dinitto, D.M. (2013). Internet Use Among Older Adults: Association with Health Needs, Psychological Capital, and Social Capital. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 15(5), e97
- Kalton, G., & Flores-Cervantes, I. (2003). Weighting Methods. *Journal of Official Statistics*, 19(2), 81-97.
- Kish, L. (1992). Weighting for unequal P. *Journal of Official Statistics*, 8(2), 183-200.
- Kolenikov, S. (2014). Calibrating Survey Data Using Iterative Proportional Fitting (Raking). *The Stata Journal*, 14(1): 22–59.
- Lohr, S. (1999). *Sampling: Design and Analysis* (Ed.). Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.
- Liu, J., Iannacchione, V., & Byron, M. (2002). Decomposing design effects for stratified sampling. *Proceedings of the American Statistical Association's Section on Survey Research Methods*.
- Wong, D.W.S. (1992) The Reliability of Using the Iterative Proportional Fitting Procedure. *The Professional Geographer*, 44 (3), 1992, pp. 340-348