

BLUE WATER NAVY

Virtual Concept Testing Top Line Report



Introduction

Methodology

Key Findings

Recommendations



Introduction

- This top line research report highlights key findings from two virtual focus groups held on November 21.
- The first session had 5 Veteran participants, the second session had 9 Veteran participants.
- This report covers the methodology, Veteran demographics, key findings, and recommendations for action.

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Research Methods

- Source Veteran Participants
 - Worked with VSOs and DIS Veterans
- Correspond with Participants
 - 37 BWN Veterans reached out
- Share Draft Materials for Review
 - Sent to 24 Veterans
- Virtual Focus Groups
 - November 21 | Two Sessions

**Total Veteran
Responses:**

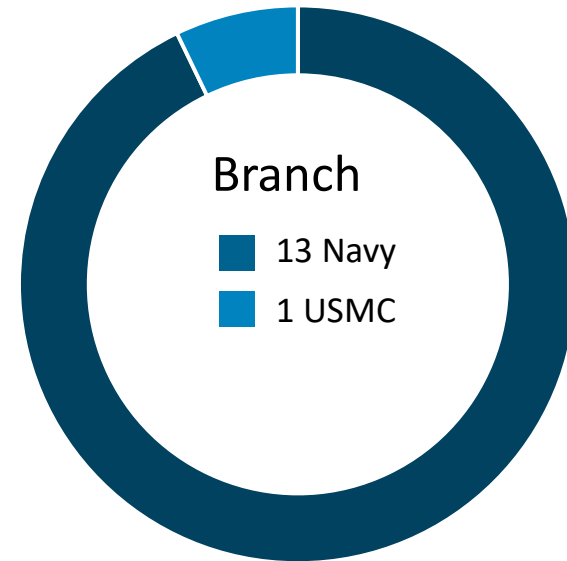
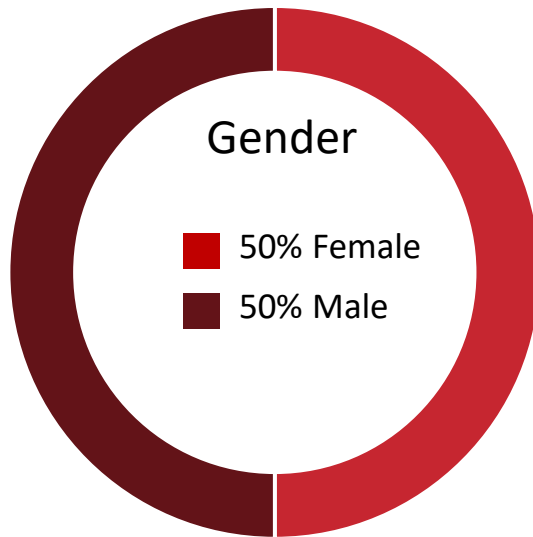
14

**Total Materials
Tested:**

5

Participant Demographics

Total Participants: **14**



All of the participants were Blue Water Navy Vietnam-era Veterans. This included several former nurses who were stationed offshore on hospital ships like the USS Sanctuary and the USS Repose.

Materials Tested

Each group received the following materials to review:

- Veterans 101 Deck
- Factsheet
- FAQs
- PSA Script (Radio and TV)
- Key Messages

Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act 2019

Law Extends Benefits for Eligible Veterans

Public Law 116-23 (Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act 2019)
 Public Law 116-23, Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act 2019 was signed into law on June 20, 2019 and takes effect January 1, 2020. The law extends a presumption of herbicide exposure to Blue Water Navy Veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam and the offshore waters. Blue Water Navy veterans, and certain dependents may be entitled to benefits if the veteran was exposed.

Under the law, certain Veterans, who served in the offshore waters of the Republic of Vietnam and Cambodia, or who had served in the former Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), may be entitled to disability compensation for conditions that are related to herbicide exposure. The law also provides benefits for children born with spina BMDs whose parent was a veteran with verified herbicide exposure in Thailand.

To be entitled to VA benefits, these Veterans must have served between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975, and have one or more of the conditions that are listed in section 1.209(a) of title 38, Code of Federal Regulations.

Conditions related to presumed herbicide exposure:

- Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS)
- Chloracne, or other acneform disease consistent with chloracne
- Chronic B-cell leukemia
- Diabetes mellitus, Type 2
- Ischemic heart disease
- Hodgkin lymphoma, formerly known as Hodgkin disease
- Non-Hodgkin lymphoma
- Multiple myeloma
- Parkinson disease
- Peripheral neuropathy, early onset
- Psoriasis, chronic form
- Prostate cancer
- Respiratory cancers (lung, bronchus, larynx or trachea)
- Soft tissue sarcoma other than chondrosarcoma

How do I file a claim for disability compensation or survivor benefits?

- Apply using the guidelines at <https://www.va.gov/ocompensation/benefits/compensation/04>
- For initial compensation claim, submit VA Form 21-526EZ, For medical DC claims, submit a VA Form 210-108EZ, For nonmedical DC claims, submit VA Form 20-2895-08
- VA accredited Veterans Service Organization representative, attorney, or claims agent file

What should be included when filing a claim?

- State on your application that you are filing for one of the conditions related to presumed herbicide exposure such as Agent Orange.
- Include any evidence you have of service in the offshore waters of the Republic of Vietnam during the required timeframe. Include the names of the vessels and the dates you served within 12 nautical miles of the Republic of Vietnam if you have that information.
- Provide medical or medical history information, if a veteran.

Key Messages on the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 (PL-116-23)

TOP LINE MESSAGING

- Effective January 1, 2020, VA will begin deciding claims for compensation under the provisions of the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 (PL 116-23).
- Blue Water Navy (BWN) Veterans are those who served offshore of the Republic of Vietnam between January 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975.
- BWN Veterans and their family members now may be eligible for disability compensation and other benefits for conditions that VA recognizes are caused by exposure to herbicide to include toxins such as Agent Orange among others.
- Veterans who served in or near the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) from September 1, 1967 to August 31, 1971 may be eligible.
- The bill provides for spina BMDs benefits to children of Veterans who are determined by VA in consultation with Department of Defense to have been exposed to an herbicide agent while serving in Thailand within prior to the bill was only for children of Veterans with service in Vietnam or the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).
- The Act also makes certain changes to the VA Agent Orange benefit.
- VA is dedicated to ensuring that all Veterans receive the benefits they have earned.
 - To that end, VA is working with Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) and many partner organizations to ensure Veterans are aware of changes and know how to file a claim if they believe they are eligible for disability compensation.
 - VA is also working to ensure the proper resources are available to meet the needs of eligible BWN Veterans and survivors who are filing for disability compensation and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC).
- If a Veteran believes they have a disability as a result of exposure to herbicide to include toxins such as Agent Orange in the areas stated during this time, they should contact VA either on the agent orange hotline at 1-800-749-8387, in person at a regional office, or contact their Veterans Service Organization (VSO) to learn more about eligibility and receive assistance in applying for benefits.
- As part of this effort, VA will conduct targeted outreach through direct mailings to Veterans and survivors who submitted compensation claims that were previously denied in the outreach letters. VA will provide any forms or other information necessary to reprocess these claims under the new law.

ELIGIBILITY

- You do not need to supply evidence of exposure to herbicides such as Agent Orange to be eligible.

BLUE WATER NAVY DRAFT

Briefing for Veterans, Survivors and their Family members

BWN – PSA Language
Radio and TV

Radio
30 Second Ad

Are you a Veteran who served offshore of the Republic of Vietnam between 1962 and 1975?

You may be entitled to additional VA benefits and services. Blue Water Navy Veterans and their family members may now qualify for compensation and survivor benefits for health conditions linked to herbicide exposure such as Agent Orange.

To learn more call 1-800-749-8387 or go to www.va.gov

Brought to you by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Blue Water Navy Frequently Asked Questions (As of 10/29/2019)

1. Q: What is the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019?

A: Public Law 116-23, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019, was signed into law on June 23, 2019. The law states that Veterans who served offshore of the Republic of Vietnam between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975, are presumed to have been exposed to herbicides such as Agent Orange and may be entitled to service connection for conditions related to that exposure.

To be eligible for presumption of service connection based on herbicide exposure, the Veterans must have served in the offshore waters of the Republic of Vietnam not more than 12-nautical miles seaward of a line commencing on the southwestern demarcation of the waters of Vietnam and Cambodia and intersecting at the following points:

Point	Geographic Name	Latitude North	Longitude East
1	At Hin Namon Island, Thi Chu Archipelago, Kien Giang Province	9°15.0'	104°27.0'
2	At Ha Da Island southeast of Binh Thuan Island, Binh Thuan Province	8°22.8'	104°42.4'
3	At La Lon Island, Con Dao Islet in Con Dao-Vang Tau Special Sector	8°37.8'	106°37.5'
4	At Bang Lai Islet, Con Dao Islet	8°38.9'	106°40.3'
5	At Bay Chah Islet, Con Dao Islet	8°39.7'	106°42.1'
6	At Hin Tai Islet (The Qui group of islands) Thuan Hai Province	8°58.0'	109°15.0'
7	At Ha Da Islet, Phu Khanh Province	12°39.0'	109°21.0'
8	At Dai Lanh point, Phu Khanh Province	12°51.8'	109°21.2'
9	At Ong Ca Islet, Phu Khanh Province	13°54.0'	109°21.0'
10	At Lu Son Islet, Phu Khanh Province	13°23.1'	109° 49.9'
11	At Con Co Island, Binh Tu Thuan Province	17°18.0'	107°28.8'

2. Q: What is the Presopio decision?

A: The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit rendered a decision on January 20, 2019 that ruled in favor of the Veterans in *Presopio v. Secretary of Veterans Affairs*. In the decision, the Court held that by the phrase "Republic of Vietnam" in the Agent Orange Act of 1991, Congress intended to extend presumption of herbicide exposure to Veterans who served within the 12-nautical mile territorial sea of the Republic of Vietnam. The Presopio decision was reproduced by Public Law 116-23, Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 which was signed into law on June 23, 2019.

Blue Water Navy Q&A for Response 1

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Instructions

We asked the following questions about each document:

- Is this information clear and easy to understand?
- Is anything confusing or unclear?
- Does it leave you feeling informed?
- Do you understand all the terminology?
- Is the information presented well?
- What improvements would you suggest?

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Findings Across All Documents

- The term DIC (Dependency and Indemnity Compensation) should be defined. Not everyone knows what it is.
- Clinical terms for the 14 health conditions are confusing.
- The term, “in or near the Korean DMZ”, is unclear. How close is near?
- Add a map to show a shaded area vs the longitudes and latitudes.
- Home Loan information seems out of place.

Fact Sheet

+ Positives

- Well put together.
- Concise and well organized.
- A nice summary.
- The Factsheet and the 101 Deck are what I would hand someone to explain all this.

— Negatives

- Those with sight issues may have a hard time reading the text.
- Some Veterans may not know what these health conditions are.
- Highlight more specifically what the benefits are for those eligible.
- Most references are websites, add phone numbers or a hotline. Older people like to call.
- Home Loan information seems out of place.
- DIC terminology.

Key Messages

+ Positives

- Very comprehensive.
- Words are not all jumbled up, understandable.
- Well organized.

— Negatives

- The way it's set up, someone could think the Home Loan info only pertains to BWN Veterans, not ALL Veterans.
- Takes a while to read.
- Too thorough.
- Add info on why it took so long for the Act to be passed.
- DIC Terminology



FAQs

+ Positives

- Very comprehensive.
- Words are not all jumbled up, understandable.
- Well organized.

— Negatives

- Need a map to show the areas. Show a shaded area in red.
- Latitudes and longitudes are meaningless to most people.
- Tell us how to find help applying.
- Explain the forms.
- How will families of Veterans who have died with an active claim be notified?
- Takes a while to read.
- DIC Terminology

Veteran's 101 Deck

+ Positives

- This is the most understandable document.
- It should be given to the Veterans first.
- This and the Factsheet are the most educational documents.
- Well organized and explained here.

— Negatives

- Mary would never have served on a combat ship back then. Make it a hospital ship, USS Sanctuary.
- Alice's husband (USCG) would not have been on that ship, find a cutter.
- Add a map to show the affected area.
- Explain in the beginning that TWO things will be discussed; Filing and Home Loans.
- Add slide breaks when Home Loans come up.
- Presentation is lengthy. Does it have to be 28 slides?
- Blue writing can be hard to read (p.5).

PSA – Radio and TV

+ Positives

- Really like the idea of using real Veterans. Adds credibility.
- Actors makes it feel fake and slick.
- As soon as I see “actor portrayal” in a commercial, I tune out.
- Clearly communicates the message.
- See if you can find people affected by this to be in it.
- Don’t use healthy, perfect-looking people.

— Negatives

- Add some military terminology and jargon where you can, “shipmate”, etc.
- TV ad wording, “to” used twice, change that.
- Make it clear that the law covers more than just Navy Veterans.

Communications Channels

We asked participants how they liked, or wished, VA would communicate with them:

- By Mail
 - Add a small flyer to payment envelopes of those who might be affected.

- Physical Signage – Send Posters to:
 - American Legion
 - VFW
 - Post Offices
 - Navy Nurse Corps
 - CCR Retirement Communities
 - Military Hospitals

- Educate Others – Send the 101 Deck/information to:
 - CCR Retirement Communities
 - Doctors who work with Veterans

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Key Recommendations

- Define “DIC” across all documents
- Update the 101 Deck to include;
 - A clear explanation of the two separate topics covered within the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019.
 - Page breaks to make it clear when shifting between topics.
 - Corrected details regarding the Mary and Alice personas.
 - Add a map to show the affected areas.
 - Darken color of some font to be easier to read.
- Update the Fact Sheet to include;
 - A phone number.
 - How to reach a VSO.
- Add a line to the FAQs and Key Messages to make it clear that the Home Loan changes affect ALL Veterans.
- PSA Considerations:
 - Search for 2-3 diverse BWN Veterans, across branches, to present the information.
 - Add in applicable military jargon.