



## Success Story

### CHALLENGE

Veterans did not have sufficient online access to submit claims.

### SOLUTION

The eBenefits web portal was developed to integrate the claims application for veterans and provide consistent user experience for third-party websites.

### RESULT

eBenefits is a cost-reducing component of shifting VA to paperless processing and decreasing call center traffic. It delivers people-centric services anywhere, anytime, on any device.

# Improving Service to Veterans with the eBenefits Portal

## BACKGROUND, GOALS, AND OVERVIEW OF SUCCESS

For more than five years, U.S. veterans and their families have experienced improved service for benefits processing, thanks largely to the groundbreaking work of ICF International and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). ICF's early work for the VA, beginning with an HTML-only information site for veterans, has now expanded into eBenefits. va.gov—a fully integrated service portal with both a veteran-facing component and a veteran service organization (VSO)-facing component.

ICF handled the architecture, design, and development of a modified agile environment within the VA's existing framework, facilitating open source web services and integration with back-end legacy systems. Among the benefits: improved veteran satisfaction, vastly expedited benefits processing, and a more than 40 percent reduction in the veterans claims backlog in the last 12 months.\*

\* Performance.gov reports that the claims backlog was reduced by 43 percent from March 2013 to March 2014.



**E-benefits has helped the VA reduce the benefits claims backlog by more than 40 percent from March 2013 to March 2014.**

2013

40%

2014

## **OVERCOMING AN INEFFICIENT SYSTEM**

Prior to the introduction of e-benefits in 2008, the system by which veterans submitted claims to receive benefits—for myriad needs such as healthcare and education—was cumbersome, time-consuming, and often abandoned altogether by veterans who did not have the resources or know-how at their disposal to fully complete and submit claims documentation to the VA.

The paper-based process required veterans to write or call the VA to request a claim form, which was then mailed to them. Manually completing the form often required multiple calls to VSOs, such as the VFW, in order to gather additional information as well as calls to doctor's offices or institutions of higher learning to gather necessary supplemental materials. All of this information then needed to be submitted by mail to the VA, which also processed all claims manually. Submitting claims often took at least one or two months, and processing the claims could take significantly longer.

## **HELPING VETERANS HELP THEMSELVES**


With the introduction of e-benefits, veterans are now able to download necessary claims forms and upload all needed evidence (such as doctor's notes) online. Integration with VSO back-end systems means that much of the additional information necessary to complete the claim forms—information that previously may have required multiple phone calls to various agencies—is often available on the site. This has drastically reduced the time veterans need to complete their claims. In fact, many can now be completed in as little as two days. This has also led to great improvements in the benefits claims backlog, which was reduced by more than 40 percent from March 2013 to the same time in 2014, moving toward the Secretary of Defense's strategic goal to eliminate the backlog by 2015.

## **HELPING VSOS HELP VETERANS**

In addition to the veteran-facing portal, ICF also began developing a VSO-facing portal in 2012, enabling the organizations that provide critical services to veterans to receive back-end access to information they need to provide timely, accurate data and support.

## **IMPLEMENTING ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY TOWARD BETTER SERVICE**

Through development of an enterprise architecture, technical analysis and design, and development of overall user experience for the portal, ICF has made e-benefits a reality through a highly advanced, customized site and a suite of technologies that make [ebenefits.va.gov](http://ebenefits.va.gov) the go-to site for veterans and VSOs across the United States.



**Modified agile environment.** Part of ICF's groundbreaking work for the VA includes working with the agency's established reporting mechanisms and back-end systems while keeping the industry push toward agile development as a goal to improve the overall portal experience. Although a true agile framework was not possible within the established architecture, ICF was able to develop a modified agile environment within the established VA framework. The result of this helps to drive customer experience, making rollouts of new functionality iterative and fast—something not possible with a waterfall development approach. With the modified agile environment, new user requirements can be turned into new functionality and implemented quickly to see results faster.

**Open source architecture for legacy system integration and improved user experience.** Another key part of the portal development and design is the commitment to open standards. With an architecture built on a nonproprietary platform, integration with back-end legacy systems is built in, making the system flexible and scalable and helping to improve user experience—both now and over time. Connecting to legacy systems provides the ability to develop compliant web services to improve site functionality and to build useful data connections across government agencies, hospitals, health providers, electronic health records, and more. In the future, veterans may even be able to access web services that will allow them to update their own health records. ICF uniquely provides this service

integration expertise and is a core driver for large government agencies looking to leverage the data in their legacy systems while unlocking proprietary vendor platforms.

**Regular updates for ongoing improvement.** These key development pillars of open source integration and a modified agile environment have enabled ICF to roll out regular updates for e-benefits, continually improving and upgrading its usability and functionality. New function sets can be rolled out as often as three months, keeping the site functionality fresh and moving quickly toward strategic goals set by the VA and by feedback from veterans and the VSOs that support them.

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## ICF's Digital Government Solutions

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Learn more about how ICF's Digital Government solutions can help your organization.  
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### About ICF International

ICF International (NASDAQ:ICFI) provides professional services and technology solutions that deliver beneficial impact in areas critical to the world's future. ICF is fluent in the language of change, whether driven by markets, technology, or policy. Since 1969, we have combined a passion for our work with deep industry expertise to tackle our clients' most important challenges. We partner with clients around the globe—advising, executing, innovating—to help them define and achieve success. Our more than 4,500 employees serve government and commercial clients from more than 60 offices worldwide. ICF's website is [www.icfi.com](http://www.icfi.com).