[VA DoD Veteran Link](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__mobile.va.gov_app_va-2Ddod-2Dveteran-2Dlink&d=DwMFAg&c=lDF7oMaPKXpkYvev9V-fVahWL0QWnGCCAfCDz1Bns_w&r=akLcU0zzbh1RgRkkXSpxLe0ZX2jRThKhOD_Sa9cqcGM&m=mGMRfL3TGFwymxFdlIQU1mD_5yxE1_vWN8lFKa0-z_U&s=BQN-sGCl0LKAQebKGYZ2PJRbzRwl3bbnLCPMMphNREw&e=) is a new social networking app just for Veterans and current service members. The app creates a secure, closed community where users can connect and feel comfortable talking about common interests and life circumstances – including any health concerns they may have.

**The Benefits of Shared Experiences**

Those who engage in the Veteran Link community start by creating a secure profile and sharing as much or as little personal information as they want. The profile then lets users search for other Veterans and service members with similar self-reported diagnoses, military backgrounds or interests. They can also join or create groups to talk about specific topics. There are already several health-related groups – including PTSD, diabetes, high blood pressure and more – to help users get started.

“You definitely want to fill out your profile. That will help you connect with other people,” Skinner explains. She says most of the service members and Veterans who live in her area are Army, and so she’s hoping VA DoD Veteran Link will help her connect with other Navy Veterans.

“It would be so cool to find people who were stationed in the same places where I was stationed. Maybe if they’re nearby and like motorcycles, too, we could meet up and go for a ride. Or, because I worked with fuels, maybe I could find someone (and see if) we’re experiencing the same things. Even just to be able to talk about it – it lets you know you’re not experiencing these things alone.”

The benefits of “shared experiences” is exactly why Dr. John Hixson, a neurologist at the San Francisco VA Medical Center and the VA clinical lead overseeing development of VA DoD Veteran Link, pursued this project.

**The Research Behind It All**

A number of years ago, Dr. Hixson [led a study](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=http-3A__n.neurology.org_content_85_2_129.short&d=DwMFAg&c=lDF7oMaPKXpkYvev9V-fVahWL0QWnGCCAfCDz1Bns_w&r=akLcU0zzbh1RgRkkXSpxLe0ZX2jRThKhOD_Sa9cqcGM&m=mGMRfL3TGFwymxFdlIQU1mD_5yxE1_vWN8lFKa0-z_U&s=zGnVrKMqB7S0x8mobMl9l0EgnyziOShL__6e2NVtTa0&e=) of nearly 100 Veterans with epilepsy who engaged in an online patient community. After six weeks, the results showed that the “internet-based psychosocial intervention” had increased this group’s “self-management and self-efficacy.” In plain language, the Veterans felt more confident in their ability to manage the symptoms of their condition on their own.

This and other research led Dr. Hixson to pursue the development of a closed social community for Veterans and service members. He envisioned a network where users could be comfortable sharing their health statuses with each other and one that would be safe from threats you commonly find in public-facing social networks, like people posing as someone they’re not. He also sees it as a way to break down geographical barriers for Veterans who may be isolated.

“I personally believe that the unique value of the Veteran experience is in their community,” Dr. John Hixson said. “We know a lot of Veterans come to VA because of the Veteran community, to share stories and socialize with peers. For rural or disabled Veterans or anyone who cannot easily travel, we have identified a need for and see the value in this type of technology.”

**How to Sign Up**

VA DoD Veteran Link is available through the [VA App Store](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__mobile.va.gov_app_va-2Ddod-2Dveteran-2Dlink&d=DwMFAg&c=lDF7oMaPKXpkYvev9V-fVahWL0QWnGCCAfCDz1Bns_w&r=akLcU0zzbh1RgRkkXSpxLe0ZX2jRThKhOD_Sa9cqcGM&m=mGMRfL3TGFwymxFdlIQU1mD_5yxE1_vWN8lFKa0-z_U&s=BQN-sGCl0LKAQebKGYZ2PJRbzRwl3bbnLCPMMphNREw&e=). Veterans can access it from internet-connected desktops, laptops and mobile devices.

To join and create a profile, users must have a My Health***e***Vet Premium Account, DS Logon Level 2 (Premium) Account or ID.me credentials. Learn more about these credentials by visiting [www.mobile.va.gov/login-information](http://www.mobile.va.gov/login-information).

[Visit the VA DoD Veteran Link page](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__mobile.va.gov_app_va-2Ddod-2Dveteran-2Dlink&d=DwMFAg&c=lDF7oMaPKXpkYvev9V-fVahWL0QWnGCCAfCDz1Bns_w&r=akLcU0zzbh1RgRkkXSpxLe0ZX2jRThKhOD_Sa9cqcGM&m=mGMRfL3TGFwymxFdlIQU1mD_5yxE1_vWN8lFKa0-z_U&s=BQN-sGCl0LKAQebKGYZ2PJRbzRwl3bbnLCPMMphNREw&e=) of the VA App Store to launch the app. Additional access information and user guides are available on the page.