VA Mobile Health: What You Need to Know about Security and Privacy

VA Connected Care Discussion Series
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Disclaimer

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Learning Objectives

• Describing how VA’s suite of mobile apps handle data privacy and security.
• Addressing common questions and concerns regarding security and privacy using mobile apps.
• Explaining in plain language how apps handle data in the VA.
Additional Training Recommendations

This training is intended to support VA health care staff on understanding and discussing security and privacy issues of mobile health apps with their patients. This training does not cover other related ethical and legal issues related to security and privacy in mobile apps and other virtual care tools. These additional TMS trainings could provide supplemental information on security and privacy:

VA Talent Management System (TMS) 2.0 (online, on demand CEU trainings)
   VA Mobile Training – Security of apps on iOS (VA 3926744)
   Securing Mobile Devices in the Enterprise: Mobile Security (NFED 4500866)
   VA Privacy and HIPAA training (NFED 4201853)
   Basic Troubleshooting Techniques for Mobile Devices (VA 3936808)
   Integrating National Center for PTSD (NCPTSD) Mobile Apps into Veteran Mental Health Care (VA 40943)
Security and Privacy Issues
Policies, Guidelines & Federal Organizations

Ethics Codes and Standards for Licensed Clinicians
Security and Privacy Concerns are Barriers to Adoption of Mobile Health

- 32% “worried about security and privacy issues” (Physicians Practice, 2018)
- “Afraid of the potential security and privacy issues involved” was a common barrier cited by VA and DoD healthcare staff (Armstrong et al. 2018)
- Data privacy was top concern reported by patients regarding use of mobile health apps (Torous et al, 2018):
What VA Staff Need to Know

Core Competencies for Technology in Clinical Care

1. Evidence Base
2. Clinical Integration
3. Security and Privacy
4. Ethical Issues
5. Cultural Considerations

VA Mobile Health Apps

https://mobile.va.gov/appstore
Types of VA Mobile Apps and Understanding the Differences

VA Connected Apps

VA Self-Contained Apps
VA Self-Contained Apps

Data Security and Privacy:
• Private: Does not collect or require personal information
• Self-contained: Does not connect with VA’s electronic health record
• Control: You own the data and can delete the app anytime

Access and Content:
• Free & publicly available in the app marketplaces
• Section 508 compliant (accessible to those with disabilities)
• Evidence-informed content
• Tailored to Veterans & VA providers, but can be used by anyone
• In addition, all ‘self-contained’ apps:
  • Provide crisis resources
  • Allow progress-tracking
  • Provide health education & symptom management tools

Questions or comments: MobileMentalHealth@va.gov
Self-Care Apps

- Self-management tools, that can be used by anyone, whether in treatment or not.

Treatment Companion Apps

To be used in conjunction with evidence-based psychotherapies.
Video: Demonstrating an App: Security and Privacy
https://bcove.video/2TjsxB9
VA Connected Apps

Data Security and Privacy:

• Secure: requires log in using an approved VA credential
• Private: VA personal health data is encrypted during transmission and when on VA secure network following strict federal standards of security and privacy
• Control: Connects with VA’s network and allows patient to share data with health care team
• Apps for VA care teams are only available through VA’s secure network. Other security controls help ensure protection meets strict federal standards of security and privacy.

Access and Content:

• Access on https://www.mobile.va.gov/appstore
• Section 508 compliant (accessible to those with disabilities)
VA Connected Apps for Health Care Professionals

- Communicates with the VA network
- Data is encrypted

Airborne Hazards and...
Deployment-related exposures database for providers.
Web

Annie App for Clinicians
Clinicians, meet Annie. She can help you support Veterans.
Web

Image Viewing Solution
Now you see them! App to access diagnostic-grade images.
Web

Patient Viewer
App to help efficiently find patient EHR data on the go.
Web

REVAMP App for Clinici...
Tools to treat sleep apnea patients in their homes.
Web

Scheduling Manager
For VA staff who manage online appointment requests.
Web

Virtual Care Manager
Create, view, and join video visits.
Web
VA Connected Apps for Health Care Professionals

• Communicates with the VA network
• Data is encrypted

Additional Resources:

• Requires authentication to log-in: via PIV, PIV exemption or Vista login credentials for VA staff
• PIV Linkage Guide: [https://mobile.va.gov/sites/default/files/piv-linkage-process.pdf](https://mobile.va.gov/sites/default/files/piv-linkage-process.pdf)
• 2 minute tutorial on how to set up PIV-D [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DyA5YUBCCUQ&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DyA5YUBCCUQ&feature=youtu.be)
VA Connected Apps for Veterans

- Communicates with the VA network
- Data is encrypted

Airborne Hazards and...
Communicates deployment-related exposures information for Veterans.
Web

Annie App for Veterans
Meet Annie, she sends Veterans self-care messages.
Web

Ask a Pharmacist
All your VA pharmacies and trusted medication info here.
Web

MobileKidney
Track kidney health and learn about other disease topics.
Web

Pain Coach App for Vet...
Pain Coach offers helpful tools to track and manage pain.
Web

REVAMP App for Vet...
Pairs with your PAP machine to track sleep apnea at home.
Web

VA Health Chat
Easy, online access to chat with VA staff.
iOS Web Android

VA Online Scheduling
Schedule, request and track VA appointments with ease.
Web

VA Video Connect
Secure video visits with your VA care team from anywhere.
iOS Web Android

Rx Refill
Request, refill and track VA prescriptions with ease.
iOS Android

Coming Soon: My VA Images

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VA Connected Apps for Veterans

- Communicates with the VA network
- Data is encrypted

Additional Resources:

- Requires authentication to log-in (via My HealtheVet Premium login, DS login, or ID.me)
- Find out more at: https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/upgrading-your-myhealthevet-account-through-in-person-or-online-authentication
Being An Informed mHealth User
A Trusted Source
Permissions: What Are They?

• Some apps are designed to leverage specific hardware or software capabilities on your device.
• Common permissions include access to your device’s:
  • Calendar
  • Camera
  • Contacts
  • Photos
  • Music
Permissions: Knowing When To Grant Them

Before you grant permissions in an app, you should make sure that:

• The developer has clearly explained why they need these permissions
• You understand the request and it makes sense with respect to the purpose of the app
Android Permissions Example: PTSD Coach

Allow PTSD Coach to access photos, media, and files on your device?

DENY  ALLOW
iOS Permissions Example: Access Your Contacts

**Action you want to take in the app** (Add contact)

**How the app allows you to add contact to app**

For any crisis, including medical emergencies, go to your nearest emergency room or:

- Call 911
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: Call 1-800-273-8255
- Veterans Crisis Line-Text
- Veterans Crisis Line-Chat

Add Contact

- Pick from contact list
- Create new contact

Cancel

“PTSD Coach” Would Like to Access Your Contacts

PTSD Coach uses your contacts list to add contacts to your personal support list.

- Don’t Allow
- OK

Veterans Crisis Line-Chat

National Domestic Violence Hotline:

Call 1-800-799-7233

National Sexual Assault Hotline:
iOS Permissions Example: Send Notifications

Action you want to take in the app (Add reminders)

How the app allows you to add reminders

“PTSD Coach” Would Like to Send You Notifications

Notifications may include alerts, sounds, and icon badges. These can be configured in Settings.

Don’t Allow  Allow
iOS Permissions Example: Access Your Camera

Press down on an image to remove it from your slideshow.

"PTSD Coach" Would Like to Access the Camera
PTSD Coach uses your camera to personalize a relaxation tool with a photo you take.

Options: Don't Allow, OK

ADD PHOTOS

Camera

Photo Library

Cancel
iOS Permissions Example: Access Photos

How the app allows you to add photos...
iOS Permissions Example: Reviewing Settings
Where are these data stored?

For VA self-contained apps:
- Data are stored only on the mobile device
- Personally identifying data are not shared with the VA or any third-party vendors.

If users have enabled cloud backup for some/all apps, app data are backed up and sent to backup servers (e.g., iCloud for iOS)
For More Information: Privacy Policies

When you use a VA mobile app, no data that could be used to identify you is sent to VA or third parties. Any information that you enter into the app, such as names, phone numbers, addresses, images, or music, cannot be accessed, stored, or shared by VA.

VA mobile apps do collect anonymous information about how people use the app. It is only used to improve how well the app works. We can see what sections of the app people visit, for example. We often use this information to correct technical problems in the apps. This information cannot be linked to any personal information about you and will never be shared with a third party.

If you would like to turn off sending this anonymous usage information, go to the Settings menu, look for “Anonymous Usage Data,” and flip the switch to the “off” setting.

VA uses some software analysis tools to help identify and prevent app problems. VA mobile apps do not share personal or identifying information with any of the vendors of these tools.
Key Questions to Consider When Evaluating mHealth apps

• Who made the app?
• What data are collected?
• Where are data stored?
• Who has access to the data? How can the data be used?
• What are the alternative options to using a virtual care tool?
Good Privacy and Security Practices with Mobile Health
Mobile Health Security and Privacy Handout for Patients and Providers

Provides key information to patients and providers on the protection of mobile health data.

Can be used as a resource to frame discussions providers may have with patients interested in mobile health security.

How Can You Protect and Secure Health Information When Using a Mobile Device?

1. Use a password or other user authentication
2. Install and enable encryption
3. Install and activate remote wiping and/or remote disabling
4. Disable and do not install or use file sharing applications
5. Install and enable a firewall
6. Install and enable security software
7. Keep your security software up to date
8. Research mobile applications (apps) before downloading
9. Maintain physical control
10. Use adequate security to send or receive health information over public Wi-Fi networks
11. Delete all stored health information before discarding or reusing the mobile device

Password Protection

Phone App
Maintain Control

Install Remote Wiping and/or Remote Disabling
Public Wi-Fi

When you’re on the same network it’s possible to steal someone’s username and password or see what they’re doing...

- Turn off sharing
- Enable your firewall
- When in doubt, put phone in airplane mode
- Turn Wi-Fi off when not using it
Security and Privacy Resources

VA Mobile Health Provider Program
https://mobile.va.gov/providers/training

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – Mobile Devices
https://www.hhs.gov

Health IT.gov Mobile Device Privacy and Security
https://Healthit.gov/mobiledevices
https://www.healthit.gov/video/mobile-health-security-important

Overview of Federal Role in Mobile Health

Mobile devices roundtable: safeguarding health information
https://www.healthit.gov/policy-researchers-implementers/mobile-devices-roundtable-safeguarding-health-information

HIPAA Laws and Regulations Overview
https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/privacy/laws-regulations/index.html
Mobile Health Security is Important!

1. Securing Your Mobile Device is Important!
2. A Stolen Mobile Device
3. Can You Protect Patient Health Information When Using a Public Wi-Fi Network?
4. How Strong is Your Password?

Watch Other Videos

A Lost or Stolen Mobile Device
Mobile Health Security
Identifying Mobile Health Applications
Key Takeaways

• You have a responsibility to understand and discuss issues relating to security and privacy with patients
• For apps that don’t require user authentication, VA only has access to aggregated data
• For VA apps that connect to the health record, the VA does have access to this data, but it is protected by privacy laws and regulations
VA Mobile Resources and Training

VA Mobile Health
https://www.mobile.va.gov/appstore
https://mobile.va.gov/appstore/all

VA Mobile Mental Health App Resources
Tech into Care SharePoint site: https://tinyurl.com/Tech-Into-Care
Practice-Based Implementation (PBI) Network CE Lecture Series:
www.myvaapps.com/pbi-network-ce-lecture-series/
App overviews, demo videos, and download links: www.ptsd.va.gov/appvid/mobile

VA Annie
Clinician Training:
Every Wednesday at 1:00pm EST between now and May 20th. (email to be put on distribution list: VACOAnnieRT@va.gov )
Annie SharePoint site:
https://vaww.connectedhealth.va.gov/mhd/VAMR/Annie/_layouts/15/start.aspx
Annie app for Clinicians: https://mobile.va.gov/app/annie-app-clinicians
VA Connected Care Resources and Training

Office of Connected Care
Communication Toolkits:
https://vaww.connectedhealth.va.gov/Communications/SitePages/homepage.aspx

VA Connected Care Discussion Series
Monthly webinar series: https://mobile.va.gov/discussion-series

VA Connected Care Integrated Care Series
Webinar series on integrating virtual care tools:
(email to be put on distribution list: Sherron.Olliff@va.gov)

VA Connected Care Community of Practice
(email to be put on distribution list: Chimplementation@va.gov)

VA Telehealth Services
https://www.telehealth.va.gov
Telehealth Document Library:
https://vaww.infoshare.va.gov/sites/telehealth/docs/Forms/AllItems.aspx

My HealtheVet
https://myhealth.va.gov
Intranet: http://vaww.va.gov/MYHEALTHEVET/
Marketing and Promotion Toolkit:
http://vaww.va.gov/MYHEALTHEVET/promotion_communication.asp
Who do I call for help?

VA Mobile Solutions Help Desk
Veterans - 1-877-470-5947
VA care team - 1-844-482-6624
Monday to Friday: 7 a.m. – 7 p.m. CT
For technical questions, bugs, or suggestions for the “self-contained” or mobile mental health apps MobileMentalHealth@va.gov

National Telehealth Technology Help Desk
866-651-3180
Monday to Saturday: 7 a.m. - 10 p.m. CT

My HealtheVet Help Desk
877-327-0022
Monday to Friday: 7 a.m. – 7 p.m. CT
Questions?
Thank you!

VA Office of Connected Care
www.connectedcare.va.gov

VA National Center for PTSD
www.ptsd.va.gov
References


Health IT.gov Mobile Device Privacy and Security https://Healthit.gov/mobiledevices


Overview of Federal Role in Mobile health https://www.healthit.gov/policy-researchers-implementers/overview-federal-role-mobile-health


VA Mobile Health Provider Program https://mobile.va.gov/providers/training