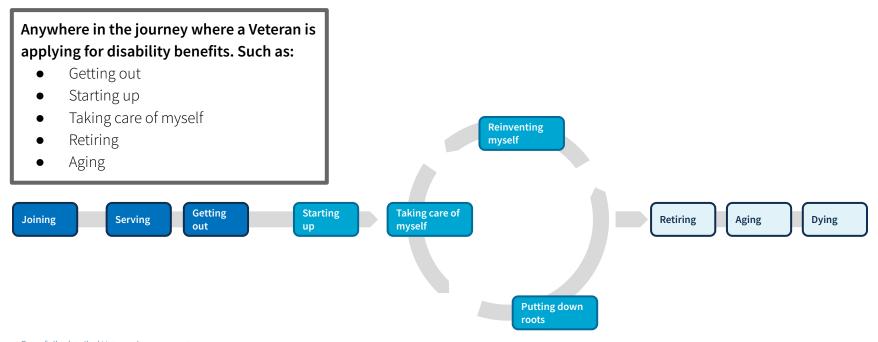
## Conditions Page Updates, Disability Benefits

7/1/2024 Contention Classification team



## How this research maps to the Veteran journey

Conditions page updates, disability benefits | 07/01/2024



For a fully detailed Veteran journey, go to

 $\underline{https://github.com/department-of-veterans-affairs/va.gov-team/blob/master/platform/design/va-product-journey-maps/Veteran%20Journey%20Map.pdf$ 

Serving and separation

Living civilian life

Retiring and aging



## FY 24 OCTO goals supported

Conditions page updates, disability benefits | 07/01/2024

**CSAT** for our web products have increased by 5 points.

Number of transactions processed using our products have increased by 25%.

All new products have a faster transaction time than those they replaced.

No transactions accepted by our products have a fatal error.

Supported

Our platforms hit the "elite" level (as defined by DORA) on Deployment Frequency, Lead Time for Changes, Change Failure Rate, and Time to Restore Service.

Not supported

Our platforms measure and improve the satisfaction of their internal users.

Our platforms power twice as many interactions compared to last vear.

Our team health survey indicates that more than 75% feel they are having a high impact on our mission.

Our team health survey indicates that less than 25% feel high stress.

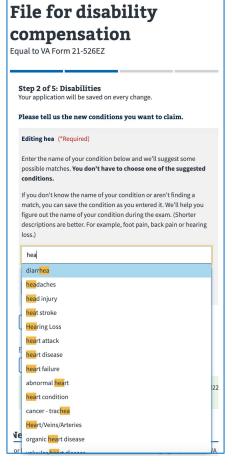
Our processes, tools and decisions are documented and easily accessible to all staff.



## **Background**

Conditions page updates, disability benefits | 07/01/2024

- On the 526EZ, disability benefits application,
   Step 2 out of 5 asks Veterans to submit the
   new conditions they want to claim
- On this screen a text input field with type-ahead (called the autosuggest component) leverages a suggested conditions list to present options to the user as they type



Screenshot of conditions page, 12/2023

## **Background - Conditions Page**

Conditions page updates, disability benefits | 07/01/2024

526EZ Step 2 of 5: Disabilities

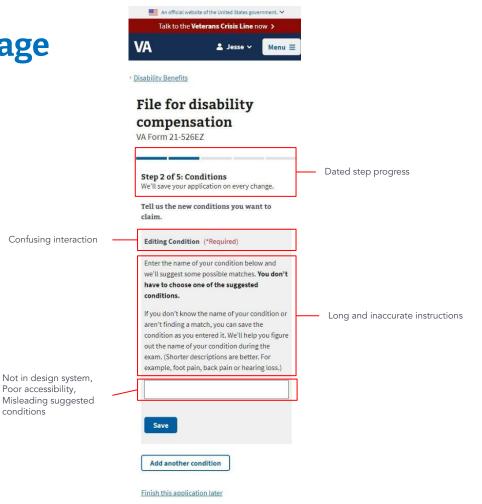
### Known Problems

- Complicated and long instructions
- Non-optimal suggested conditions
  - Body parts or systems
  - Not rateable conditions
  - **Duplicate conditions** 0
  - Included classifications (used for rating, not Veteran facing)
- Inefficient suggestions matching algorithm
- Combo-box with important usability and accessibility issues
  - ~50% of participants in previous round of usability testing did not understand that free-text condition entry is possible

Poor accessibility,

conditions

Difficult to review and analyze data



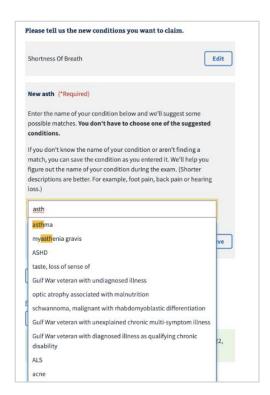
« Back

Continue »

## **Background - Launch overview**

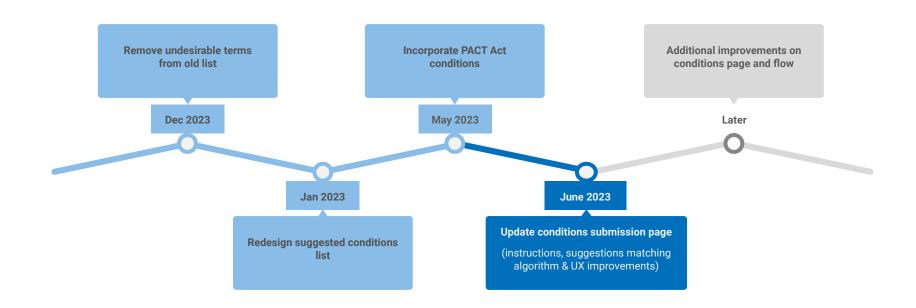
Conditions page updates, disability benefits | 07/01/2024

- Jan 2024
  - Enhanced the autosuggest component with an updated conditions list.
  - For detailed information, refer to:
    - 1/08 Veteran Digital User
       Experience Weekly Design Sync
    - 4/22 Benefits Portfolio Design Presentation
- June 2024
  - In this next iteration, we aim to improve the page by offering a more user-friendly interface, providing relevant suggestions for conditions, and enabling data monitoring



Screenshot of old suggested conditions list on va.gov

## **Timeline**





## Methodology

Conditions page updates, disability benefits | 07/01/2024

### Research Overview

- Timeline: April 8th 18th
- Method: Hour-long remote moderated usability sessions via Zoom
- Objective: Gather feedback on a Codepen prototype with two design variations: Owl and Fox

### Process

- Participants imagined it was their first time applying for disability benefits.
- Task: Navigate through the page for both designs.
- Participants used their conditions or provided mock scenarios.
- To minimize bias, the order of designs was alternated: half started with Owl, the other half Fox

### Mock scenarios tested

- Submitting conditions from the list
- Submitting conditions not on the list
- Describing symptoms



## Methodology

Conditions page updates, disability benefits | 07/01/2024

### Limitations

- Findings are based on observations and conversations with 7 Veterans.
  - Small sample size: Not representative of all Veterans.
- Participants speculated based on past experiences or hypothetical future claims.
  - Real-world behavior might differ.
- Research lacked representation from some underserved communities.
- Participants completed the page using two different designs.
  - Bias: Familiarity with the page and happy path from the first design could influence their experience with the second design.



## **Participant Demographics**

Conditions page updates, disability benefits | 07/01/2024

Findings may not include the perspectives of the following underserved Veteran groups:

- Rural
- Cognitive Disability
- Other than honorable discharge
- Immigrant
- Expat (living abroad)
- Identify as Asian or Native
- Identify as LGBTQ+
- User of assistive technology

We recommend studies with these underserved groups in the future.

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5	Age 55-64+	50.00%	Θ	3	1		1			1						N		N				
6	Cognitive Disability	50.00%	Θ	Θ	0																	
7	Mobile user	50.00%	Θ	1					1													
8	Rural	25.00%	Θ	Θ	0																	
9	No degree	25.00%	Θ	2	0						1	1	N				N	N				
10	Other than honorable	21.00%	Θ	Θ	0																	
11	Immigrant origin	17.00%	Θ	Θ	0																	
12	Women	10.00%	Θ	2	0		1		1					N	N		N		N			
13	Expat (living abroad)	0.40%	Θ	Θ	0																	
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15	Race		Based or	n VA's pre	oject	ed:	stat	istic	s													
16	Black	15.00%	Θ	2	0				1		1											
17	Hispanic	12.00%	Θ	Θ	0																	
18	Biracial	3.90%	Θ	2	0	1						1										
19	Asian	3.00%	Θ	Θ	0														N			
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### **Research Goals**

Conditions page updates, disability benefits | 07/01/2024

### **Research Goals**

- Evaluate the usability of the revised autosuggest component
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the explanatory content
- Assess overall confidence and satisfaction with the page



## **Prototypes highlights**

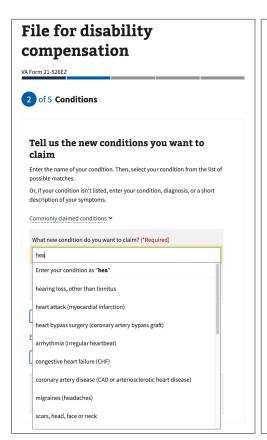
Conditions page updates, disability benefits | 07/01/2024

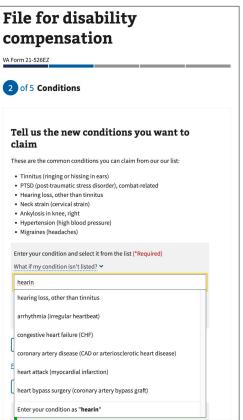
### **Instruction updates**

- Common Conditions List of seven common conditions included in the instructions.
- Clear guidance on what to do if your condition is not in the list.

### **Autosuggest component updates**

- Custom Search Algorithm: enhanced autosuggestions with a custom search algorithm.
- Free text submission via the first option, labeled
   "Enter your condition as..."
- Minimum height rules: displays up to 10 conditions before requiring scrolling.
  - Displays up to 20 conditions with scrolling.
- Algorithm threshold score to reduce the number of suggestions as more text is typed.





Owl Fox

## **Key findings**

- 1. All participants navigated the conditions page successfully, entering at least one condition by selecting from the list and entering free text. The process of adding a new condition was clear and straightforward for everyone, and participants expressed satisfaction with their overall experience.
- 2. The custom search algorithm performed well, accounting for user input and typos variations.
- 3. Users encountered other unexpected or confusing interactions in the combo box, requiring additional effort to understand the system. Despite this, they were able to enter their conditions successfully.
- 4. Participants found the process for submitting free-text conditions confusing and often missed the "Enter your condition as..." option initially.
- 5. Although only 3 out of 7 participants read the full instructions, all were able to use the component as intended, indicating that the instructions were not critical for successful interaction.
- 6. Participants had varying understandings of the purpose of the common conditions list. While most appreciated it as a reference or example, some misunderstood it, thinking it prescribed ratable conditions or limited the conditions they could enter.
- 7. Participants took different approaches to entering their condition due to their varied perceptions of what makes a "good" condition entry. Some participants hesitated to submit conditions that were not listed.



- All participants navigated the conditions page successfully, entering at least one condition by selecting from the list and entering free text. The process of adding a new condition was clear and straightforward for everyone, and participants expressed satisfaction with their overall experience
- When asked, "Please rate your experience with entering conditions on this page (can be for either prototypes or combined)," on a scale of 1 - "Very Bad" to 5 - "Very Good", the average score was 4.583
- Every participant was able to go through the flow of adding a condition using autosuggestions and free text.
- Every participant successfully edited a condition.

"I like it. Pretty easy to use. Pretty intuitive again with the search function, and they even giving you similar spelling results even though there were some things that it didn't recognize and I had to manually input 'em, the process was simple." - P3



## 2) The custom search algorithm performed well, accounting for user input and typos variations.

- The custom search algorithm we made for the conditions page worked well and users were able to find their condition, if it was in the list.
- The algorithm performed well for users who searched by body part first
- The difference in algorithm threshold between Owl and Fox did not matter to participants
- The search algorithm only works for a slight spelling variation.
- The search algorithm did not match against longer strings.

"I did like that I could put 'kidney' and [use] the inflammation part to narrow it down. Sometimes, if it's not the right word order, searches don't play nicely." - P3

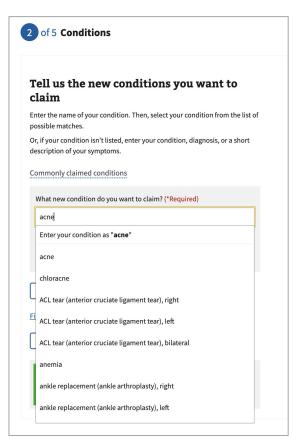
For details on the custom search algorithm we made, refer to: 4/22 Benefits Portfolio Design Presentation

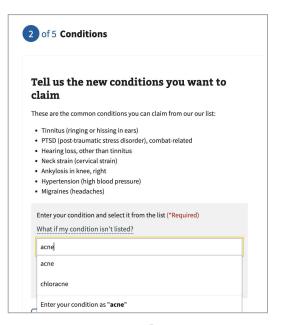


# 2) The custom search algorithm performed well, accounting for user input and typos variations.

### Recommendation

- Use Fox's (more restrictive)
   threshold to decrease the
   amount of scrolling and cognitive
   overload.
- Explore if the search algorithm can be refined to allow for more variation in user input.





Fox

# 3) Users encountered some unexpected or confusing behavior with the autosuggest component, requiring additional effort to understand the system. Despite this, they were able to enter their conditions successfully.

- Pressing Enter, Escape, clicking out, or pressing
   Save before making a selection cleared the input,
   causing confusion.
- When the Save button was visible and not covered by the dropdown, some participants tried to submit their free text by pressing Save instead of selecting "Enter your condition as," which cleared the input.
- In edit mode, some users edited their input and then pressed "Update," expecting it to submit their changes.

"I think I hit the escape key...I think that's what cleared it out...sometimes I use the escape key 'cause it, you know, it sort of, it's a way to escape from things, but that's what might've caused that thing to blank out." - P4



3) Users encountered some unexpected or confusing behavior with the autosuggest component, requiring additional effort to understand the system. Despite this, they were able to enter their conditions successfully.

### Recommendation

• Save user input or select the active state instead of clearing the input when using keyboard shortcuts or clicking out of the box.

## 4) Participants found the process for submitting free-text conditions confusing and often missed the "Enter your condition as..." option initially.

- Some participants mistakenly attempted to submit free text by pressing enter or clicking out of the text input, which cleared their submission
- Participants generally noticed the free-text option more prominently when the dropdown list was shortened, making the free-text option more evident.
- Only one participant said, without prompting, that they noticed the difference in free-text placement between Owl and Fox.

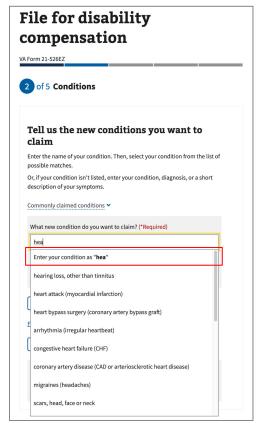
"Okay. So if I had just clicked on the box or, or just hit save instead of clicking 'enter your condition' as is, it wouldn't add it, I would have to choose that specific box." - P7

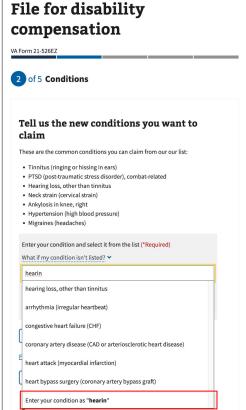


4) Participants found the process for submitting free-text conditions confusing and often missed the "Enter your condition as..." option initially.

### Recommendation

- Make it easier to submit a free-text submission
- "Enter my condition as..." should be the first option on the suggested list.
- Make this the active state by default.





Owl Fox

# 5) Although only 3 out of 7 participants read the full instructions, all were able to use the component as intended, indicating that the instructions were not critical for successful interaction.

- When asked, "Please rate how understandable this site's information is." on a scale of 1 - Difficult to understand to 5 - Easy to understand, the average score was 4.6
- On Fox, only two participants noticed the additional information component and only one clicked on it and read the instructions.
- On Owl, only three participants read the instructions on Owl.
- 2 participants did not read the instructions on either prototype.
- One participant described the instructions as "too much" and, despite reading them initially, later forgot their content.

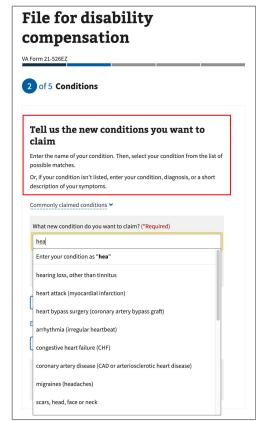
"I probably should have taken time to read this, but I think it was sort of somewhat intuitive when I listed something that didn't pop up that, that I could mess around here [to submit free-text]." - P4

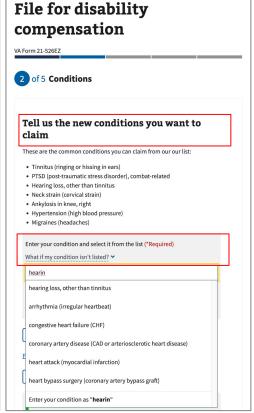


5) Although only 3 out of 7 participants read the full instructions, all were able to use the component as intended, indicating that the instructions were not critical for successful interaction.

### Recommendation

- Instructions were found to be unnecessary for sighted users to navigate the page successfully, but they can be beneficial for non-sighted users to set expectations.
- Include full instructions from Owl, but use headers to separate "What if my condition isn't listed" to improve readability





Owl Fox

## 6) Participants had varying understandings of the purpose of the common conditions list. While most appreciated it as a reference or example, some misunderstood it, thinking it prescribed ratable conditions or limited the conditions they could enter.

- Some participants believed these conditions would be easier to get rated or approved.
- Others understood that the list was designed for Veterans to borrow the wording
- Some participants used the list to understand the types of conditions expected in the application, or as a starting place for their application.
- In Owl, two participants thought items in the common conditions list were clickable or should be.
- A participant suggested that the common conditions should only serve as examples and not be clickable so that folks enter accurately what their issues are and not make it "too easy"

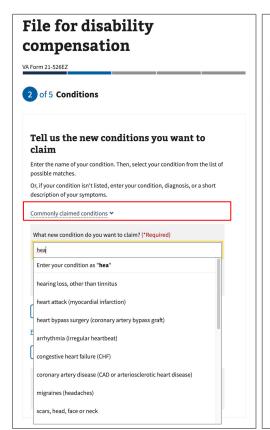
"I think it's a good idea to have the list. I think without the list it's a little more ambiguous, getting started." - P1

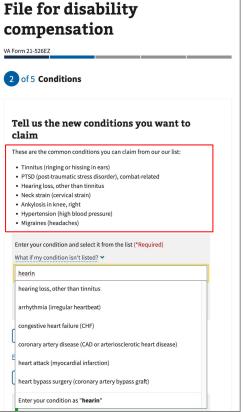


6) Participants had varying understandings of the purpose of the common conditions list. While most appreciated it as a reference or example, some misunderstood it, thinking it prescribed ratable conditions or limited the conditions they could enter.

### Recommendation

- Include common conditions in the instructions section
- Change the label to "examples of conditions" in order to not encourage applicants to think that the list of terms is more likely to get rated.





Owl Fox

# 7. Participants took different approaches to entering their condition due to their varied perceptions of what makes a "good" condition entry. Some participants hesitated to submit conditions that were not listed.

- Participants showed varying levels of trust in the process.
  - Some worried unlisted items might not be ratable.
  - Others believed the VA would verify and confirm free-text conditions.
- Participants displayed a range of behaviors during mock scenarios.
  - Some selected tangential or closest terms to their condition.
  - Others tried multiple variations before submitting free text.
- Most participants preferred selecting from the list.
- Confidence in submitting free-text conditions increased after reading the full instructions, usually after being prompted to do so

[If it's not in the list] I think it won't get counted. Yeah. The VA, they play a lot of games when it comes to that claim.
Things, damn, there gotta be dead in order for it to be approved and it better be in them records that you are claiming what you're claiming. But I would be discouraged [to submit something not in the list] - P5



7. Participants took different approaches to entering their condition due to their varied perceptions of what makes a "good" condition entry. Some participants hesitated to submit conditions that were not listed.

### Recommendation

- Explore ways to emphasize that it is acceptable to submit free-text conditions.
- Include and highlight the information from the "What if my condition isn't listed" additional information component
- Explore the downstream effects of what would happen if someone selected a condition from the list that's not their diagnosis
- Explore how the VA can assist Veterans in identifying and describing their conditions. This could involve providing more guidance and support directly on the page and implementing back-end solutions.



## Prioritized design changes for launch

Conditions page updates, disability benefits | 07/01/2024

### **Instructions**

- Use full instructions from Owl, reveal common conditions, and separate text using headers to improve readability (see screenshot below). Remove the use of additional information component
- Change the label "Common conditions" to "Examples of conditions" to avoid suggesting to applicants that the listed terms are more likely to be approved.

### **Autosuggest component**

- Change the minimum height before scrolling from 10 to 7, to improve readability
- Use custom search algorithm and threshold from Fox
- Explore if there are ways to account for more variations in typos or longer strings as identified above
- Allow free text to be submitted by using "enter," "tab," clicking out of the component, or selecting "Enter your condition as..."
- "Enter your condition as..." as first option and default active state

### Launch!

Conditions page updates, disability benefits | 07/01/2024

## On June 26th we launched our second iteration of the conditions page



#### Anneliese LaTempa 11:29 AM

The Contention Classification team is happy to announce another launch  $\mathscr{M}$  this week! We've deployed the new and improved Conditions page in the 526ez, which includes improved free-text functionality, a custom search algorithm, improved accessibility, and clearer instructions including examples. See the  $\overline{\mathbb{Z}}$  for before and after shots!

#### **Expected Outcomes**

- Improve Veterans' experience when entering conditions By improving the UX of the page we want Veterans to
  easily complete the conditions submission form and to feel confident in their conditions entries, addressing
  challenges observed in previous releases:
- Increase structured data By providing improved search functionality, Veterans will be more likely to select conditions from the list. This will increase structured data, enabling downstream automations (like the classification service)
- Improved accuracy Clearer suggestions with improved search functionality will help ensure Veterans are selecting actionable conditions that align with their input.

Thank you to the 526 teams for your support, in addition to our friends at CAIA, and our OCTO enabling team. Special thanks in particular to @Christine Cereca, @Jamie Klenetsky Fay, and @Tanner Heffner. for your contributions - we couldn't have gotten this far without you!

cc @Jen Bertsch @Sam Wiley @Lesley Ropp

Launch announcement



Disability Benefits

### File for disability compensation

VA Form 21-526EZ

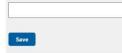
### Step 2 of 5: Conditions We'll save your application on every change.

Tell us the new conditions you want to claim.

Editing Condition (\*Required)

Enter the name of your condition below and we'll suggest some possible matches. You don't have to choose one of the suggested conditions.

If you don't know the name of your condition or aren't finding a match, you can save the condition as you entered it. We'll help you figure out the name of your condition during the exam. (Shorter descriptions are better. For example, foot pain, back pain or hearing loss.)



Add another condition

Finish this application later



Continue »

Conditions page pre-June 26th, 2024



← Disability Benefits

### File for disability compensation

VA Form 21-526EZ



### Tell us the new conditions you want to claim

Enter the name of your condition. Then, select your condition from the list of possible matches.

#### What if my condition isn't listed?

You can claim a condition that isn't listed. Enter your condition, diagnosis, or short description of you symptoms.



#### **Examples of conditions**

- · Tinnitus (ringing or hissing in ears)
- PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), combat-
- · Hearing loss, other than tinnitus
- Neck strain (cervical strain)
- Ankylosis in knee, right
- Hypertension (high blood pressure)
- Migraines (headaches)

#### Your new conditions

Enter your conditio	n (*Requir	ed)	
Save			

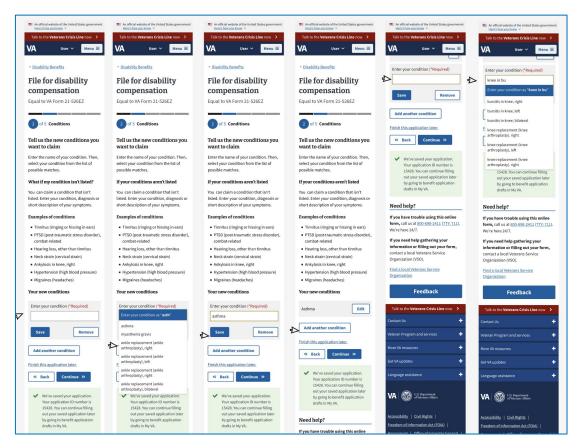
Add another condition

Finish this application later



Conditions page current state as of June 27th, 2024

### Demo



## **Next Steps**

- Address remaining accessibility issues
  - Including updating the multiple responses pattern across the 526EZ
- Conduct usability testing with assistive technology users
- Monitor autosuggestion vs. free-text coverage
- Analyze CorpDB data



## Reference

- Research report
- Research plan
- Codepen prototypes

