The Department of Veterans Affairs has recently launched a new feature of its VEText application to maintain COVID-19 security and protect veterans from viral contact while using VA facilities.
A collaboration between the VA’s Office of Information and Technology and the Veterans Health Administration, the “I am Here” feature allows veterans to text VA care centers from the parking lot to give notice of their arrival. Once the care team has been notified, the veteran will then receive confirmation their text has been received as well as further instruction when it is time for their appointment.

Connecting veterans directly with clinical staff allows them to stay within their cars or outside the facility before having to enter the building itself, lowering the risk of COVID-19 exposure and protecting their health during the ongoing pandemic. The updated VEText application also includes appointment reminders, pre-entry COVID-19 screening registration, as well as support for unscheduled appointments.

The agency launched the app at 30 VA centers and intends to expand its usage more broadly across the U.S. — part of a broader push toward increasing the accessibility and convenience of remote health capacities.

The agency’s greater digital modernization program has been quickly reoriented toward sustaining VA services and helping both contain COVID-19 and better care for veterans during the COVID-19 pandemic. This has been a particularly complicated process in light of the VA’s Fourth Mission, or the essential role the VA takes on as the health system of record during times of national crisis.

VHA is also the largest consolidated health network in the U.S., with the COVID-19 crisis placing exceptional demands on a care system that already has considerable extant responsibilities. In light of the quantity of veterans who continue to seek care within the VHA network, the agency has prioritized ensuring their safety within its facilities — a project in which the VEText application slated to take a paramount role.

“I continue to be impressed by the speed with which VA teams have quickly developed creative solutions to help VA respond to the pandemic. These innovations are a testament to the ingenuity and commitment of the public servants who work at VA to support our Veterans through this unprecedented situation,” said VA CTO Charles Worthington, noting the essential role VEText will play within the agency’s broader focus on COVID-19 safety.