

News from the VA

A news release from the US Department of Veterans Affairs announced two mobile device apps to help Veterans manage their health records. The first one I tried was iBlueButton which I installed from the Play Store on my Android tablet. The app was first designed for Apple, hence the name iBlueButton. The app is pretty easy to download, install and configure for my medical history. The app will get your information from MyMedicare, MyHealthVet and TRICARE. In the configuration process, you'll need to know your login information for each of the portals that you use. In my case, I have MyMedicare and MyHealthVet. Protection of your access is built into the app, both of them asked for independent verification through email and text message options. It only took about 5 minutes to get the app running. The application pulled data from Medicare and the VA and displayed the information in a very easy to read and use format. From the VA it found all of my past and present medications, medical conditions, vitals signs from recent doctor visits, immunizations with date and place, diagnostic tests, lab results, and my medical providers and pharmacies. The app can filter to show all records, past 12 months or past 6 months with a simple tap on those options. I give the app a 'thumbs up' for ease of use and completeness of information. The biggest value for the app is that you can have it on your phone and readily available in case of an emergency or at a doctor visit where they always ask for your current medication list.

The second application the VA announced is called MyLinks. While iBlueButton is an Android or Apple application and is very easy to use, MyLinks has the advantage of also being accessible via the Internet from a computer. MyLinks also will import data from non-government sites such as Sanford and Essentia. I created an account on MyLinks and imported my medical data from the VA and since I had used Sanford in the past, I was able to import my medical data from there also. The process took somewhat longer than the iBlueButton application but MyLinks appears to provide much more information. MyLinks also has more options for you to keep track of information. For instance, it has a COVID-19 Risk Assessment option and a option to track your health symptoms that I did not find in iBlueButton. MyLinks also has a calendar and a journal for personal record keeping. MyLinks also has an option to share medical records with edit and view only options, it even has a 24-hour view only option. I downloaded the Android app for MyLinks and it is similar.

Both applications appear to work as advertised and were able to import medical data from other providers. iBlueButton is easier to use and if you only have VA records, it is the one to use. One thing to remember is the fact that your medical information is now also being stored in another database, this one from a private developer. It is really important that the phone or tablet you install the app on has passcode protection.