

# VOICES OF VISN 6

— Excellent Care – Earned by Veterans – Delivered Here —

## World War II Air Force Hero

★ RECALLS FIGHTING OVER GERMANY, OTHER COUNTRIES ★

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COVER STORY | By Alisa Adams | INTERN - SALEM VA MEDICAL CENTER PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Leo LaCasse was born on July 4, 1920. He was one of five children, all of whom were born on birthdays of former presidents.

At the age of 15, he joined the New Hampshire National Guard, which later became nationalized by the United States Army. Leo became a private in the Army Air Corps, where he was assigned to a recruiting command. There, he was promoted to corporal, then attained the rank of sergeant.

He traveled New England with his commanding officer, recruiting pilots from colleges and universities. He was so good at recruiting that his commanding officer filled out paperwork, and Leo was accepted to flight school without knowing he had applied.

The only problem Leo ran into was that he hadn't gone to college. The Army helped

**TOP PHOTO:** Captain Leo LaCasse in front of his B-17 Bomber

[STORY CONTINUES ON PAGE 2](#)

# VA's Improvements to Veteran Community Care Under **MISSION ACT** on Track for June 6 Implementation

As the one-year anniversary of President Trump's signing of the VA [Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks \(MISSION\) Act of 2018](#) approaches on June 6, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is making significant strides in implementing major improvements to community care for Veterans.

"The Veteran is at the center of everything we do," VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said. "Through the MISSION Act, Veterans will have more choices than ever in getting timely, high-quality care. Most important, Veterans will be able to decide what is important and best for them."

The MISSION Act will strengthen VA's health care system by improving both aspects of care delivery and empowering Veterans to find the balance in the system that is right for them,

A key aspect of the MISSION Act is the consolidation of VA's community care programs, which will make community care work better for Veterans and their families, providers and VA employees. When this transition is complete, the following will occur:

- Veterans will have more options for community care.
- Eligibility criteria for community care will be expanded, including new access standards.
- Scheduling appointments will be easier, and care coordination between VA and community providers will be better.
- Eligible Veterans will have access to a network of walk-in and urgent care facilities for minor injuries and illnesses.

"Transitioning to the new eligibility criteria for community care should be seamless for Veterans," Wilkie said. "Veterans will continue to talk to their care team or scheduler as they have been doing to get the care they need."

VA also has been working closely with

community providers to ensure Veterans have a positive experience when receiving community care. For example, VA has developed education and training materials to help community providers understand some of the unique challenges Veterans can face.

Going forward, community care will be easier to use, and Veterans will remain at the center of their VA health care decisions.

In addition to information VA has made available digitally, Veterans enrolled in VA health care can expect to receive a letter in the mail providing details on where to go for more information.

For more information about community care under the MISSION Act, visit <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/58621/new-eligibility-criteria-a-major-improvement-over-existing-rules/>.

# VA



## U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

## World War II Air Force hero recalls fighting over Germany, Other Countries CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

him by accelerating his college education. He graduated from flight school and became a B-17 Bomber captain.

In June 1943, he was assigned to the 8th Air Force, 548th Bomb Group in Suffolk, England, where he served under General Curtis Lemay. He flew 35 missions over Germany and other occupied countries, and survived three crash landings. One of his crash landings occurred in German-occupied France. He instructed his crew to head for the front line, surrender and to tell whomever interrogated them that he was going to Berlin.

Instead, he headed for Luxembourg, where he met up with the French Resistance. They helped him cross the Pyrenees Mountains, and Leo made his way to Portugal. In all, he spent four months avoiding Nazi capture.

When the war was over, he was sent to Berlin for debriefing, where he met and became friends with a German general. On their introduction, the general recognized Leo's name and revealed there had been 4,000 German troops looking for him following the crash landing in France.

Leo retired from the military as a Brigadier General. For his service he has received numerous medals, including the Silver Star Medal, Distinguished Flying Cross, Purple Heart, Legion of Merit Air Medal, Air Force Commendation Medal, Air Force Combat Medal, Joint Services Commendation Medal, World War II Victory Medal, European and Middle East Campaign Medal, Army Air Force Medal, Armed Forces Reserve Medal and the American Defense Medal.

Mr. LaCasse received the Legion of



**RIGHT-PHOTO:** Brigadier General Leo LaCasse receives the French Legion of Honor Medal

Honor Medal, France's highest honor, on June 5, 2016.

Leo retired as a Brigadier General and currently resides at Salem VA Medical Center's Community Living Center, located in Salem, Va. On July 4, he will celebrate his 99th birthday.



## Warriors Way Opens Its Doors to Veterans

By Josh Edson | DURHAM VA PUBLIC AFFAIRSCARE

Work on the new hospice expansion at the Durham VA Healthcare System (DVAHCS), is now complete. Dubbed “Warrior’s Way,” the new expansion gives the DVAHCS Community Living Center 10 additional beds with at least 20 additional staff to accommodate and care for Veterans entering the final stages of life.

“The VA both purchases hospice and palliative care from our community partners as well as provides these services in-house,” says DVAHCS Director Paul Crews. “With this new, dedicated inpatient hospice unit, our medical

center team can help patients face death with dignity and comfort.”

The new extension adds 1,400 square feet to the DVAHCS’s existing CLC facilities. It includes new offices, a kitchen and dining area for visiting family members, as well as a courtyard and state-of-the-art rooms. With several years in planning and construction, and with a \$10M price tag, the new hospice provides a new dimension to Veteran care, the ability to live out one’s last days in comfort and tranquility, all under the care of attentive and

**TOP PHOTO:** North Carolina Representative Mark Walker looks on as DVAHCS Director Paul Crews (center, left) and VISN 6 Director DeAnne Seekins (center) perform the opening ceremony for the new DVAHCS hospice extension.

carrying staff.

“This new hospice unit has a very personal meaning for me,” said Veterans Integrated Services Network (VISN) Six Director DeAnne Seekins at the hospice ribbon-cutting event. “[Our staff] cares, they embrace every single family and they let their loved ones go with dignity and respect.”

## VHA Patient Flow Coordination Collaborative



Members of Richmond VA Medical Center’s Patient Flow Coordination Team were recognized by VA’s Office of Systems Redesign & Improvement for completing a collaborative effort with dozens of teams from across the U.S. The purpose of the FY18 Patient Flow Coordination Collaborative was to optimize patient flow across the healthcare delivery system by providing an opportunity for training and application of improvement principles to the 36 teams. Richmond’s group focused on reducing length of stay in the Emergency Department for patients receiving point-of-care creatinine

testing, and reducing CT scanner wait times. This core team of four clinicians, along with a multidisciplinary team from the medical center, achieved this through the application of flow optimization principles for local process improvement. This initiative stemmed from the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) and their national improvement initiative model. Richmond’s Patient Flow Coordination Team worked collaboratively to help share strong practices and lessons learned. The event was very successful for the Richmond team, and we congratulate them on their achievement!

Richmond’s Patient Flow Coordination Team was recognized recently for work to help streamline patient flow at the medical center. Pictured from left are: Darryl Worrell, clinical transfer coordinator flow manager; Michelle Lewis, 4D clinical coordinator; Dr. Beau Hagler, hospitalist; and Arun Suri, emergency department clinical coordinator. (Photo: David Hodge, Public Affairs)



# Interdisciplinary Training IN BATTLEFIELD ACUPUNCTURE

By Jennifer Daly, Ph.D. | HAMPTON VAMC PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Thirty Hampton VA clinical staff completed a course in Battlefield Acupuncture (BFA) with Dr. David Drake (Richmond VA Medical Center) from the Integrative Health Coordinating Center (IHCC), a division of Whole Health and the Office of Patient-Centered Care and Cultural Transformation (OPCC&CT).

BFA is a single, limited ear acupuncture technique, developed as effective pain relief with minimal adverse effects. It is a rapid, safe, portable, accessible method for pain relief and is deployable in all medical environments. Although BFA is often associated with pain control, it may also be useful for PTSD, insomnia, anxiety, and depression. BFA can be effective as a stand-alone treatment or as an adjunctive treatment to other medical interventions.

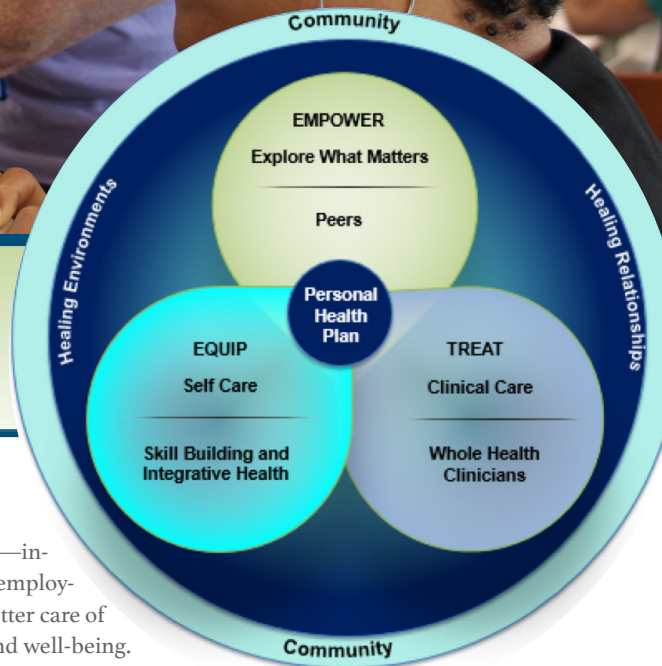
In July 2016, the President signed the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA, Public law 114-198). Section 923 of the law directs VA to develop a plan expanding complementary and integrative health (CIH) services for pain and mental health conditions. This directive is now an essential component of the VHA Whole Health model of VHA holistic, patient-centered care. BFA is a valuable complementary service within the Whole/Integrative Health system of care.

Whole/Integrative Health centers on the core concept that instead of starting with Veterans' problems, VHA must support Veterans as whole persons. This is an approach to healthcare that empowers and

equips people—including VHA employees—to take better care of their health and well-being. The Whole Health model of care integrates complementary, non-medical treatments such as yoga, Tai Chi, mindfulness, nutrition, and health coaching into Veterans' standard medical care. This approach aligns with the VHA Blueprint for Excellence which emphasizes "...health care that is personalized, proactive, and patient-driven, and engages and inspires Veterans to their highest possible level of health and well-being." BFA supports Veterans' whole health by offering effective relief for pain and other conditions with fewer risks, side effects, and costs for treatment. Employee whole health and well-being have also been identified as a priority across the VHA.

For more information about Hampton VA Medical Center's Whole/Integrative Health services, contact Dr. Jennifer Daly, [Jennifer.Daly3@va.gov](mailto:Jennifer.Daly3@va.gov).

**Photo Above:** Dr Gopal Badlani explains how the Aquabeam Robotic System works. (photo by Luke Thompson)



# Salisbury VA Urology Dept. Offers Robot-Controlled Treatment for Enlarged Prostate Symptoms

By Marlous Black | SALISBURY VAHCS PUBLIC AFFAIRS

The Salisbury VA Health Care System (HCS) announced new hope for North Carolina Veterans suffering from lower urinary tract symptoms of benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), which is a non-cancerous enlargement of the prostate.

The new treatment, Aquablation® therapy is performed using the Aquabeam® Robotic System, which uses a robot-controlled waterjet to remove the enlarged prostate tissue. It is the only FDA-cleared, minimally invasive treatment for BPH that combines real-time, multi-dimensional imaging with surgical robotics and a heat-free waterjet, for targeted, precise and safe removal of prostate tissue, with a reduced risk of sexual side effects.

Until recently, with current BPH treatment options, men have had to choose between significant symptom relief with a high risk of sexual side effects, or a lower risk of sexual complications with less symptomatic benefit. So, many men have avoided treatment

altogether.

Aquablation therapy eliminates the need for men to make the choice between symptom relief and risk.

Dr Gopal Badlani, Salisbury VAHCS Section chief of Urology and Professor of Urology at Wake Forest University was part of the two initial trials for device approval.

He said, “There are hundreds of veterans suffering from this condition in our area. The symptoms of an enlarged prostate can be frustrating and impact daily life, which is why we are so pleased by the results we are seeing from this promising new treatment.” Badlani continued, adding, “We believe this therapy may fundamentally transform the way we treat men, especially with large gland with BPH.”

Joseph Vaughn, director of the Salisbury VA Medical Center, offered, “I’m very excited and proud to offer this cutting-edge procedure and technology to our nation’s heroes. This is a great example of Dr. Badlani and the Urology



Photo Above: Dr Gopal Badlani explains how the Aquabeam Robotic System works. (Photo: Luke Thompson)

team making a positive impact in our Veteran’s daily life.”

BPH affects approximately half of men age 60 or older, and 90 percent of men beyond 85. In the United States, more than 12 million men are actively managed for their condition. Two million of them have failed medical management and are seeking alternative treatment options.

Salisbury Veterans suffering from BPH’s uncomfortable symptoms can get more information about Aquablation therapy by contacting the medical center’s Urology section or their primary care physician.

## Veterans’ Family, Caregiver and Survivor Advisory Committee Provides recommendations to VA Secretary

WASHINGTON — Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert Wilkie commended the Veterans’ Family, Caregiver and Survivor Federal Advisory Committee on March 27 for recommendations that will assist in the department meeting its commitment to improve the experiences of all those it serves.

The [committee](#), chaired by former U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Dole, a noted advocate for military caregivers, offered cross-cutting recommendations addressing several areas that affect Veterans’ families, caregivers and survivors.

The recommendations range from an effort to identify all federal programs available to Veterans and their families, caregivers and survivors, to increased coordination in resource distribution to those who require them most, as well as implementation of the expansion of caregiver stipends with more standardization.

“VA is not only listening to our Veterans, but more intentionally to the voices of their families, caregivers and survivors,” Wilkie said. “Thanks to the valuable work of this committee, we are understanding and taking action on their concerns and needs as we improve the delivery of care, benefits and services. The committee’s recommendations are vital to VA as we meet our customer service mission.”

VA’s 2018 accomplishments on behalf of Veterans, families, caregivers and survivors include the following:

- Establishment of the Center of Excellence for Veteran and Caregiver Research.
- Creation of the Veteran Family Community Engagement Directorate.
- Distribution of the specific “quick start guides” for caregivers and survivors as part of the national Welcome Kit.

The committee advises VA’s Secretary, through the Chief Veterans Experience Officer, on matters related to Veterans’ families, caregivers and survivors across all generations. A key element of the committee’s work is to engage Veteran family members, research experts and family service providers to better understand their needs and identify ways VA can provide them with a positive experience in their use of care, benefits and services.

Learn more about VA’s support to Veterans’ families, caregivers and survivors through the [VA Welcome Kit](#), which includes a “quick start guide” for caregivers.



## Asheville Leads in Improving Outcomes for Tinnitus

Charles George VAMC in Asheville is making significant impact in expanding Whole Health and well-being services to our veterans and measuring clinical outcomes of those interventions. Jenifer Beck, lead author, along with Dr. Elizabeth Lima and other VA employees were recently published in the *American Journal of Audiology*. This is a distinction worth noting, considering the challenges of conducting research in real settings and disseminating information in respectable peer-reviewed journals. Dr. Beck is an audiologist and coordinator of the Charles George VAMC Progressive Tinnitus Management program, and Dr. Lima is a psychologist serving in various clinics throughout the healthcare system.

Tinnitus is the #1 Service-Connected Disability in all VHA. Any of our veterans can be referred to the Progressive Tinnitus Management program. Congratulations Dr. Beck and Dr. Lima!

**PHOTO ON LEFT:** Dr. Jenifer Beck and Dr. Elizabeth Lima were published, along with other VA employees, in a recent edition of the "American Journal of Audiology."

## Meet Richmond's Newest Neurosurgeon

Story and photo by Keith Gottschalk | PITTSBURGH VAMC PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Meet Dr. Paul Koch, a neurosurgeon at Richmond's McGuire VA Medical Center who hails from Oberlin, Ohio.

"When this position came open last year, it was of great interest to me," said Koch. "I was offered a chance to have a mix of clinical work and start my own research laboratory. So, I have a 50-50 mix between surgery and research, which is unusual for surgeons."

Koch, who describes himself as a physician-scientist, said it's easier for the VA to offer such opportunities since the focus is on delivering healthcare to Veterans and not on profit.

Koch's main research interest is in how different groups of brain cells communicate with each other and how that communication falls apart after traumatic brain injury (TBI).

"So, the working idea in my lab is that it's a breakdown of communication between different groups of brain cells that leads to the chronic problems that patients have after TBI like epilepsy, sleep disturbances and other problems," said Koch. "What I want is to be able to understand the details on how that communication breaks down and how to tune the brain back in the right direction."

Perhaps the most interesting thing about Koch is the route he took to become a doctor. While an undergrad, Koch majored in German literature and wanted to be an opera director.

"I went to New York and studied opera direction for a semester at Julliard," said Koch. "I really don't know what it was; I just came to a conclusion that it was not for me – that my personality was not going to do well in that business."

That's where Koch's life and career took a big course change.

"So, I literally jumped ship and moved to Washington DC where I worked for three years at the National Institutes of Health working with many patients with schizophrenia, and that's where I got interested in medicine," said Koch.

From there, Koch went to the Cleveland Clinic Lerner College of Medicine, graduating in 2010. The next choice was his specialty.

"The other thing you have to figure out is whether you like the kind of problem solving found in surgery, using your hands in an operating room, and I did, so it was inevitable I would go into neurosurgery," said Koch.



Dr. Dr. Paul Koch, a neurosurgeon at Richmond VA Medical Center, holds a unique position in that he splits his time between performing brain surgery and leading research. Koch's research looks at how different groups of brain cells communicate with each other and how that communication falls apart after traumatic brain injury (TBI).

# Robotic Pet Companions Provide Comfort to Veterans

By Bonnie Sweeting | CGVAMC VOLUNTEER

After seeing a news story about the benefits of using robotic pets as therapy for dementia patients, Charles George VA Medical Center (CGVAMC) VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) called on its service organizations for help to purchase pets for its Community Living Center (CLC) residents. At the same time, Kristie King, RN and Chief Nurse of Geriatrics and Extended Care, was introduced to a furry robotic cat by Andy Harmon, one of her nurses. Mrs. King immediately placed a call to VAVS, and in no time, VAVS and Nursing formed the Charles George VA Medical Center (CGVAMC) Pet Therapy Team.

Robotic pets are a part of Hasbro's "Joy for All" companion pet line which was originally designed for children. However, for

dog has a palpable heartbeat and responds to one's voice with BARKBACK technology.

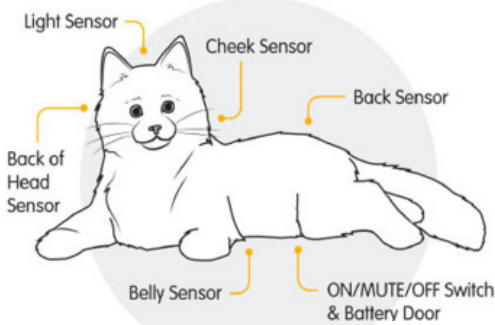
Along with nursing, VAVS identified ideal adoptive parents, and the first robotic pets were placed into loving homes the CGVAMC CLC this January. Within months, the pets had an undeniably positive effect on Veterans. Anecdotes and testimonials from caregivers came pouring in, with family and staff reporting the pets' uncanny ability to engage and delight. The robotic pets brought back warm and precious memories of former pets. They calmed, they soothed, and they enhanced relationships among patients, family, and staff. Most importantly, they improved the CLC residents' experience with in their environment.

In addition to providing comfort and decreasing agitation, when patients adopt the robotic pets, they are given the opportunity to carrying out activities of daily living (ADLs), which is a therapeutic activity that promotes wellness and healing for the whole patient—body, mind, and soul. When asked about the benefits of the robotic pets among CLC residents, Nurse Kristie King stated, "Companion pets reinforce and enhance our pledge to provide a safe, dignified, and caring environ-

ment for all of the Veterans in our care. They bring joy, peace, levity, and love to folks who may never go home from here."

Through the CGVAMC Pet Therapy Team, Veterans adopt their pet by visiting the Pet Adoption Center in the VAVS office on the fourth floor. Once a selection is made, the Veteran gets to take the pet "home." Through the generosity of our community partners the \$150.00 cost of the pet, carrier, and ID collar is covered, making the pets free for our Veterans.

To date, the CGVAMC Pet Therapy Team has placed 12 robotic pets— eight cats and four dogs, into loving homes. The program plans to provide pets to all qualifying patients in the CGVAMC CLC and community-based care facilities. In all, the pet therapy team has the capacity to reach nearly 300 Veterans through this innovative program.



**PHOTO BELOW:** Hasbro's Robotic Pet Cat is equipped with sensors which allow it to move in response to touch. When its cheek is stroked, it will nuzzle your hand. Pet the back of its head, and it purrs loudly. Keep petting, and it will roll over on its back, so you can stroke its soft belly. With continued petting, it drifts into a simulated slumber. The pet is also equipped with light sensors so it can fall asleep when lights are turned out in a room. Cats come in three colors and run on D batteries. Hasbro also manufactures robotic dogs which mimic tiny golden retrievers.





Visitors to the Fayetteville VA Medical Center on Ramsey Street could admire the T-shirts that were part of a campaign to raise awareness of military sexual trauma, sexual assault and sexual abuse.

# Clothesline Project Raises Awareness of Military Sexual Trauma

By Jeff Melvin | FAYETTEVILLE NC VACHCS PUBLIC AFFAIRS

On April 11, visitors to the Fayetteville VA Medical Center on Ramsey street admired T-shirts displayed from the MST Clothesline Project. These T-shirts are not for sale, but they serve as an awareness campaign for military sexual trauma, sexual assault and sexual abuse. They reflect the personal experiences of those who created the T-shirts – the survivors of

sexual trauma.

The Clothesline Project serves several purposes. First, the project allows survivors to speak up about experiences which they may have previously kept silent. Second, the project raises awareness and acts as an educational tool for those who come to view the Clothesline. Lastly, the project allows those who are still suffering in silence to understand that they are not alone.

“This year’s Clothesline Project continues to highlight VA’s national focus on recovery and commitment to military sexual trauma survivors”, said Dr. Yvonne McKeithen, Military Sexual Trauma Coordinator at the Fayetteville VA Medical Center.

Military sexual trauma (MST) is the term used by VA to refer to sexual assault or repeated, threatening sexual harassment experienced by a service member during active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training. Approximately one in five women and one in 100 men seen in VA medical facilities reported experiencing MST when screened by their VA

healthcare provider.

According to Dr. McKeithen, “The VA is strongly committed to the needs of all Veterans who have experienced sexual violence, because we know that trauma can affect a person’s physical and mental health, for many years following its occurrence,” Dr. McKeithen added. “Fortunately, people can recover from experiences of MST, and VA offers effective services to help Veterans with their recovery.”

“VA is strongly committed to ensuring that Veterans have access to the help they need to recover from MST,” McKeithen continued. “Treatment for physical and mental health conditions related to MST is available at every VA facility and is provided to Veterans free of charge. Veterans may be able to receive free MST-related care even if they are not eligible for other VA services. No documentation is required, and Veterans do not need to be service connected or be receiving VA disability compensation.”

To find out more information about the Fayetteville VA Medical Center’s MST Program contact coordinator, Dr. McKeithen at (910) 488-2120 x 7593 or visit <https://bit.ly/2H4SdPn>.



**PHOTO ON LEFT:** The 2019 Clothesline Project continues the VA’s emphasis on recovery for military sexual trauma survivors.



## VA ensures Veterans Have Same-Day Access To Emergency Mental Health Care

WASHINGTON — As part of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) efforts to provide the best mental health care access possible, VA is reminding Veterans that it offers all Veterans same-day access to emergency mental health care at any VA health care facility across the country.

"Providing same-day 24/7 access to mental health crisis intervention and support for Veterans, service members and their families is our top clinical priority," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "It's important that all Veterans, their family and friends know that help is easily available."

VA's Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention is the national leader in making high-quality mental health care and suicide prevention resources available to Veterans through a full

spectrum of outpatient, inpatient and telemental health services.

Additionally, VA has developed the [National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide](#), which reflects the department's vision for a coordinated effort to prevent suicide among all service members and Veterans. This strategy maintains VA's focus on high-risk individuals in health care settings, while also adopting a broad public health approach to suicide prevention.

VA has supported numerous Veterans and has the capacity to assist more. In fiscal year (FY) 2018, 1.7 million Veterans received Veterans Health Administration (VHA) mental health services. These patients received more than 84,000 psychiatric hospital stays, about 41,700 residential stays and more than 21 million outpatient encounters.

Nationally, in the first quarter of FY 2019, 90% of new patients completed an appointment in a mental health clinic within 30 days of scheduling an appointment, and 96.8% of established patients completed a mental health appointment within 30 days of the day they requested. For FY 2018, 48% of initial, in-person Primary Care — Mental Health Integration (PC-MHI) encounters were on the same day as the patient's PC encounter. During the first quarter of FY 2019, 51% of initial, in-person PC-MHI encounters were on the same day as the patient's PC encounter.

Veterans in crisis – or those concerned about one – should call the Veterans Crisis Line at 800-273-8255 and press 1, send a text message to 838255 or chat online at [VeteransCrisisLine.net](#).

## VA continues community suicide-prevention challenge

### Seven sites participate in second Mayor's Challenge policy academy

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) convened seven teams March 27-29 in Arlington, Virginia, for the Mayor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans and their Families.

With the goal of eliminating suicide by promoting a comprehensive public health approach that empowers communities to take action, the sites that participated in the mayor's challenge policy academy were: Clarksville, Tennessee; Kansas City, Missouri; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Mecklenburg County, North Carolina; Tulsa, Oklahoma; Reno/Truckee Meadows, Nevada; and Suffolk County, New York.

Suicide is a major public health concern that affects everyone. It is estimated 45,000 Americans, including 6,000 Veterans, die by suicide each year.

"The mayor's challenge provides a

roadmap for how communities can contribute to the national effort of preventing Veteran suicide," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "We are pleased to continue our partnership with SAMHSA, so we can provide suicide-prevention training and support to the communities where Veterans live, work and thrive."

At the policy academy, representatives from the sites developed strategic action plans to implement in their communities. The collaborative teams included community, municipal and military stakeholders, among others. VA and SAMHSA provided technical assistance to support local efforts, document outcomes and share strategies with other municipalities.

The Mayor's Challenge was , bringing together representatives of eight cities to develop local action plans to prevent Veteran suicide. Since then, the Mayor's Challenge program has expanded to a total of 24 cities. An inaugural Governor's Challenge that involved

seven state teams took place in February, replicating the effort on the state level. Participants in both programs form interagency teams to bolster Veteran suicide-prevention efforts in their communities.

To learn more about the efforts of VA's Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, visit [https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/mhc/policy-academy](#). For information on SAMHSA's suicide prevention efforts, visit [https://www.samhsa.gov/suicide-prevention](#).

Veterans who are in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, and those who know a Veteran in crisis, can contact the Veterans Crisis Line for confidential support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Call 800-273-8255 and press 1, send a text message to 838255 or chat online at [https://www.veteranscrisisline.net](#).

Reporters covering this issue are strongly encouraged to visit [https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/mhc/policy-academy](#) for important guidance on how to safely communicate about suicide.



# New Text Feature Available Through VA's Women Veterans Call Center

*Users may now text, call or chat to learn about resources*

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) added a text messaging feature to the [Women Veterans Call Center](#) on April 23, providing another convenient way for women to seek information about VA benefits, health care and available resources.

Women Veterans can now text 855-829-6636 to receive answers and guidance about VA services.

“We want to make it as easy as possible for women Veterans to get answers about eligibility requirements, benefits, services and more,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “By offering new methods of communication, such as texting, we can reach more women Veterans and support their health care needs more quickly.”

The Women Veterans Call Center is staffed by trained, compassionate female VA employees, who can provide and link callers to available resources, such as health care, benefits and cemetery information via phone, chat and now text. The new texting feature aligns this service with other VA call centers that provide information and assistance to Veterans who are in crisis, at risk for suicide and becoming homeless.

ing homeless.

VA works to meet the unique requirements of women, while offering privacy, dignity and sensitivity to gender-specific needs. Since April 2013, the call center has received nearly 83,000 inbound calls and has initiated almost 1.3 million outbound calls. As the number of women Veterans continues to grow, VA is expanding its outreach to ensure they receive enrollment and benefit information through means that are user-friendly and responsive.

Women are among the fastest-growing Veteran demographics, accounting for more than 30% of the increase in Veterans who served between 2014 and 2018. The number of women using VA health care services has tripled since 2000, growing from about 160,000 to over 500,000 today. This continued growth underscores VA's commitment to enhancing communication and outreach to the growing population of women Veterans.

For more information about the Women Veterans Call Center, visit [Women Veterans Health](#).



# TRUST HER TO FIND ANSWERS.

## The Women Veterans Call Center is your guide to VA.

**CALL OR TEXT**  
**1-855-829-6636**

**CHAT ONLINE**  
**[www.womenshealth.va.gov](http://www.womenshealth.va.gov)**

### HOURS OF OPERATION

Monday – Friday: 8:00 a.m. – 10:00 p.m. ET  
Saturday: 8:00 a.m. – 6:30 p.m. ET



MAY 16 - 17 **2019** HAMPTON, VA

# EMPOWERED



#LEADTHEWAY



Virginia Department of Veterans Services

# VIRGINIA WOMEN VETERANS SUMMIT

# VISN 6 Sites Of Care & VA Vet Centers

## MEDICAL CENTERS

### Asheville VAMC

1100 Tunnel Road  
Asheville, NC 28805  
828-298-7911 | 800-932-6408  
www.asheville.va.gov

### Durham VAMC

508 Fulton Street  
Durham, NC 27705  
919-286-0411 | 888-878-6890  
www.durham.va.gov

### Fayetteville VAMC

2300 Ramsey Street  
Fayetteville, NC 28301  
910-488-2120 | 800-771-6106  
www.fayettevillenc.va.gov

### Hampton VAMC

100 Emancipation Dr.  
Hampton, VA 23667  
757-722-9961 | 866-544-9961  
www.hampton.va.gov

### Richmond VAMC

1201 Broad Rock Blvd.  
Richmond, VA 23249  
804-675-5000 | 800-784-8381  
www.richmond.va.gov

### Salem VAMC

1970 Roanoke Blvd.  
Salem, VA 24153  
540-982-2463 | 888-982-2463  
www.salem.va.gov

### Salisbury VAMC

1601 Brenner Ave.  
Salisbury, NC 28144  
704-638-9000 | 800-469-8262  
www.salisbury.va.gov

## OUTPATIENT CLINICS

### Albemarle CBOC

1845 W City Drive  
Elizabeth City, NC 27909  
252-331-2191

### Brunswick County CBOC

18 Doctors Cl., Units 2 & 3  
Supply, NC 28462 | 910-754-6141

### Charlotte CBOC

8601 University East Drive  
Charlotte, NC 28213  
704-597-3500

### Charlotte HCC

3506 W. Tyvola Rd.  
Charlotte, NC 28208  
704-329-1300

### Charlottesville CBOC

590 Peter Jefferson Pkwy  
Charlottesville, VA 22911  
434-293-3890

### Chesapeake CBOC

1987 S. Military Highway  
Chesapeake, VA 23320  
757-722-9961

### Danville CBOC

705 Piney Forest Rd.  
Danville, VA 24540  
434-710-4210

### Emporia CBOC

1746 East Atlantic Street  
Emporia, VA 23847  
434-348-1500

### Fayetteville HCC

7300 So. Raeford Rd  
Fayetteville NC 28304  
910-488-2120 | 800-771-6106

### Fayetteville Rehabilitation Clinic

4101 Raeford Rd. Ste 100-B  
Fayetteville NC 28304  
910-908-2222

### Franklin CBOC

647 Wayah Street  
Franklin, NC 28734-3390  
828-369-1781

### Fredericksburg CBOC

130 Executive Center Pkwy  
Fredericksburg, VA 22401  
540-370-4468

### Fredericksburg at Southpoint CBOC

10401 Spotsylvania Ave, Ste 300  
Fredericksburg, VA 22408  
540-370-4468

### Goldsboro CBOC

2610 Hospital Road  
Goldsboro, NC 27909  
919-731-4809

### Greenville HCC

401 Moye Blvd.  
Greenville, NC 27834  
252-830-2149

### Hamlet CBOC

100 Jefferson Street  
Hamlet, NC 28345  
910-582-3536

### Hickory CBOC

2440 Century Place,  
SE Hickory, NC 28602  
828-431-5600

### Hillandale Rd. Annex

1824 Hillandale Road Durham  
North Carolina 27705  
919-383-6107

### Jacksonville CBOC

4006 Henderson Drive  
Jacksonville, NC 28546  
910-353-6406

### Jacksonville 2 VA Clinic

306 Brynn Marr Road  
Jacksonville, NC 28546  
910-353-6406

### Jacksonville 3 VA Clinic

4 Josh Court  
Jacksonville, NC 28546  
910-353-6406

### Kernersville HCC

1695 Kernersville Medical Pkwy  
Kernersville, NC 27284  
336-515-5000

### Lynchburg CBOC

1600 Lakeside Drive  
Lynchburg, VA 24501  
434-316-5000

### Morehead City CBOC

5420 U.S. 70  
Morehead City, NC 28557  
252-240-2349

### Raleigh CBOC

3305 Sungate Blvd.  
Raleigh, NC 27610  
919-212-0129

### Raleigh II Annex

3040 Hammond Business Place  
Raleigh, NC 27603  
919-899-6259

### Raleigh III CBOC

2600 Atlantic Ave, Ste 200  
Raleigh, NC 27604  
919-755-2620

### Robeson County CBOC

139 Three Hunts Drive  
Pembroke, NC 28372  
910-272-3220

### Rutherford County CBOC

374 Charlotte Road  
Rutherfordton, NC 28139  
828-288-2780

### Sanford CBOC

3112 Tramway  
Road Sanford, NC 27332  
919-775-6160

### Staunton CBOC

102 Lacy B. King Way  
Staunton, VA 24401  
540-886-5777

### Tazewell CBOC

141 Ben Bolt Ave.  
Tazewell, VA 24651  
276-988-8860

### Virginia Beach CBOC

244 Clearfield Avenue  
Virginia Beach, VA  
757-722-9961

### Wilmington HCC

1705 Gardner Rd.  
Wilmington, NC 28405  
910-343-5300

### Wytheville CBOC

165 Peppers Ferry Rd.  
Wytheville, VA 24382-2363  
276-223-5400

## DIALYSIS CENTERS

### VA Dialysis and Blind Rehabilitation Clinics at Brier Creek

8081 Arco Corporate Drive  
Raleigh, NC 27617  
919-286-5220

### VA Dialysis Clinic Fayetteville

2301 Robeson Street, Ste. 101  
Fayetteville, NC 28305, 910-483-9727

## VET CENTERS

### Charlotte Vet Center

2114 Ben Craig Dr.  
Charlotte, NC 28262  
704-549-8025

### Fayetteville Vet Center

2301 Robeson Street  
Fayetteville, NC 28305  
910-488-6252

### Greensboro Vet Center

3515 W Market Street, Suite 120  
Greensboro, NC 27403  
336-333-5366

### Greenville Vet Center

1021 W.H. Smith Blvd.  
Greenville, NC 27834  
252-355-7920

### Jacksonville, N.C. Vet Center

110-A Branchwood Drive  
Jacksonville, NC 28546  
910-577-1100

### Norfolk Vet Center

1711 Church Street  
Norfolk, VA 23504  
757-623-7584

### Raleigh Vet Center

8851 Ellistree Lane  
Raleigh, NC 27617  
(919) 361-6419

### Roanoke Vet Center

350 Albemarle Ave.  
SW Roanoke, VA 24016  
540-342-9726

### Virginia Beach Vet Center

324 Southport Circle, Suite 102  
Virginia Beach, VA 23452  
757-248-3665

## VISN 6 Newsletter

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Questions or comments about the newsletter, email [stephen.wilkins2@va.gov](mailto:stephen.wilkins2@va.gov) or call 919-956-5541

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